# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

**SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 367**

# HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

**SESSION 2000-01**

COMPRISING PERIOD
23 April—3 May 2001

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# THE
# PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
## OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

**SIXTH SERIES** **VOLUME 367**

**NINTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2000–01**


# House of Commons

*Monday 23 April 2001*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

**PRAYERS**

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

**DEFENCE**

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

**Macedonia**

1. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): If he will make a statement on military action in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. [156926]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon):** The Government support Macedonia's right to defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty, including with proportionate and appropriate military action. We are giving a range of non-lethal military equipment to the Macedonian Government to assist them. We have a small number of troops based in Macedonia, providing logistics support for UK forces in Kosovo, and a defence adviser working with the Macedonian Ministry of Defence. In Kosovo, UK troops are providing reinforcements to the Multi-National Brigade (East) region in an area that includes the Macedonian border.

**Mr. Dalyell:** Is the Macedonian Ministry of Defence, as opposed to the Macedonian Government, being co-operative?

**Mr. Hoon:** Yes.

**Procurement Policies**

2. **Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): If he will make a statement on his Department's procurement policies. [156927]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie):** The essence of our procurement policy is to secure the best equipment capability at the best value for money, through competition and prime contracting where viable. Our Smart acquisition programme is enhancing the efficiency of our acquisition process by streamlining the organisation, introducing new techniques and commercial best practice, building a closer and more constructive relationship with industry and improving the training and development of our acquisition personnel.

**Mr. St. Aubyn:** The Government have just finished paying between £30 million and £60 million to refit 1,100 CVR(T) tanks with diesel engines under a non-competitive contract. Were the Government aware before that contract was granted that those new engines would not operate in an A1 climate, such as that in the middle east; or was that key drawback of the new engines only discovered after the contract was awarded?

**Dr. Moonie:** That matter has been referred to before in the House and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the single-source procurement strategy was adopted because Alvis Vehicles Ltd. is the design authority for CVR(T)

and has certain proprietary intellectual property rights over the vehicle. On the hon. Gentleman's specific question, I understand that there are no particular problems that cannot be managed in theatre.

**Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): The Minister will be aware that the Secretary of State recently visited the Clyde submarine base at Faslane, where he talked to the unions about future procurement and work practice policies. He will also be aware that there is a combined trade union response document on securing work for the future. He knows that the work force are committed and loyal. Can he give us a progress report on the discussions between the Secretary of State and the work force and on the options regarding the combined trade union response on the future work practice at the Clyde submarine base?

**Dr. Moonie:** We are well aware of the high quality work that has been carried out for us for many years at Faslane. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the unions held constructive meetings during his visit, and I can assure my hon. Friend that their submission is receiving the most careful consideration.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell** (North-East Fife): Can the Minister confirm that confidentiality is a very important component of effective procurement and that effective procurement could easily be compromised if, for example, listening devices were present in the Ministry of Defence? Can he confirm, as the Secretary of State implied yesterday, that some 30 such devices have been discovered? Can he say who is believed to have been responsible for their being placed in MOD buildings; estimate how long they have been in position; and tell the House whether it is true that they only came to light when the current refurbishment of the main building began? What additional precautions have been taken to ensure that future procurement is not prejudiced in any way?

**Dr. Moonie:** I have always thought that one should not believe everything that one reads in the Sunday press, and this story is a very good example of that principle. I am very sorry to have to dampen some of the feverish speculation that has occurred, but the media reports of bugging devices being found in MOD buildings appear to have been derived largely from a misunderstanding involving an information security exhibition that was held for MOD staff in the main building in March. The exhibition, which was designed to improve staff security awareness, included a stand demonstrating the types of listening device that are readily available in high street shops and which could, potentially, be planted in MOD establishments to obtain information illegally. As I am sure all hon. Members are aware, the MOD protects itself against that threat by maintaining the capability to detect such devices should they be planted in our establishments at home or overseas. Clearly, I cannot comment in detail on the reports, but I can confirm that they are inaccurate and that no breach of security has occurred.

**Mr. Barry Jones** (Alyn and Deeside): Does my hon. Friend still intend to procure 25 A400M heavy-lift military Airbus aircraft? Has he seen the speculation that Britain's A400Ms would only fly in conjunction with French and German A400Ms? Would he care to comment on that speculation?

**Dr. Moonie:** I am quite sure that the speculation does not come from my right hon. Friend but, once again, it is an indication of the inaccuracy of reporting in the newspapers. The aircraft are not due to fly for another 10 years, but I can confirm that it is still our intention to order the fleet.

**Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): Will the Minister confirm that the only way to ensure value for money in the procurement of the type 45 destroyer programme is to be certain that more than one firm will be capable of building the ships? How can he defend the constant prevarication over whether the contract for at least one of the ships will be awarded to Vosper Thornycroft? The uncertainty over that matter is putting the jobs of my constituents who work for Vosper Thornycroft gravely at risk.

**Dr. Moonie:** I am happy to confirm that it is still our intention to purchase one of the ships in the manner described. Our policy on the procurement of the type 45 has not changed.

## Type 45 Destroyer

3. **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): When the first type 45 destroyer will enter service with the Royal Navy. [156929]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie):** As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence stated in the House on 11 July last year, we remain committed to an in-service date of 2007 for the first type 45 destroyer.

**Mr. Chope:** The Minister said, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), that the procurement strategy had not changed. In that case, why have the Government not rejected out of hand the unsolicited bid from BAE Systems and why do they not confirm that the original strategy—which would give Vosper Thornycroft on the south coast of England an equal share in the programme—still stands? Would it not be a very good way of celebrating St. George's day to place faith in a great English warship builder that has exported more than 300 warships in the past 10 years?

**Dr. Moonie:** It is British yards that we are in favour of—not just English ones. I repeat what I said before: the policy has not changed. Of course, it is incumbent on us to give careful consideration to proposals that would ostensibly save a great deal of money, and we would be in dereliction of our duty if we did not do that. However, I can confirm that things are progressing well and that the initial stages of the programme are on time.

**John Robertson** (Glasgow, Anniesland): I thank my hon. Friend for that statement, but will he bring forward the orders to help the workers on the Clyde and to ensure

that they receive a fair share of the work? Perhaps he could also remind Conservative Members that the ships are British, not English.

**Dr. Moonie:** The programme is progressing as fast as it can. There have been no delays, information is being shared and the design is progressing. There is nothing more that I can say other than to add that the ships will be brought into service as quickly as possible.

**Mr. Quentin Davies** (Grantham and Stamford): Is it not quite clear that the Government's agenda on this matter is to try to pull the wool over the eyes of everyone concerned and to keep it there until after the election? The Government signed a contract with BAE Systems in December for the first three of class and that was supposed to provide for the second of class to be built by Vosper Thornycroft. No such contract has been awarded or has even been offered to Vosper Thornycroft and, as my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) just said, the Government have markedly not responded to the BAE Systems pre-emptive offer to build all 12 of class, which would be thoroughly inconsistent with everything that the Government have said about their strategy for this matter. Is it not quite clear that the Government have very bad news in store either for the workers of the Clyde or for the workers of the Southampton and Portsmouth areas and that they are simply determined to hold that news back until after the election?

**Dr. Moonie:** I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but there is no truth in any of the allegations that he has made.

## Foot and Mouth

4. **Mr. Bill Olner** (Nuneaton): If he will make a statement on the role of the armed forces in tackling the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [156930]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon):** May I, first, take this opportunity to pay tribute to the men and women of the armed forces, to the staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the state veterinary service and other Government Departments and to the many volunteers who are working so hard to combat this disease?

The armed forces have responded speedily and effectively to various requests from MAFF for assistance. Their mission is to provide logistical and organisational support, and thereby contribute to the eradication of the disease and to the return to normality in the countryside. Military personnel have supplemented MAFF regional staff in the co-ordination and best use of contractor teams and other Government assets involved in disposing of carcases. They have also provided direct support to MAFF at other stages of the reporting, identification, culling and disposal chain and in the disinfection of premises.

**Mr. Olner:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I also pay tribute to the armed forces for the work that they have been seen to have done on the ground. Given that the current outbreak is far tougher to deal with than the one that took place in 1967—that is due in part to the vastly increased number of sheep movements across the country—are there any further roles that the armed forces can play, particularly in the vexed question of the disposal of carcases?

**Mr. Hoon:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, in particular for his observations on the comparison between the current outbreak and that in 1967. We estimate that as many as 2 million movements of sheep might have been made before this outbreak was detected, which has presented considerable difficulties in tracking down the disease and in dealing with it. I am also grateful for his comments on the role of the armed forces, which continue to provide support to MAFF. Indeed, I anticipate that a further deployment of logistic troops will be made to Devon to deal with the backlog of carcases in that county.

**Mr. Dafydd Wigley** (Caernarfon): The Secretary of State may be aware that a case of foot and mouth confirmed yesterday arose because the infection was carried on a person's clothing. Will he give an assurance that every step is taken to ensure that no infection is carried by the clothing of members of the armed forces who deal with foot and mouth infected animals?

**Mr. Hoon:** Certainly the armed forces that are involved in combating the disease ensure that their organisation, behaviour and individual activities do not contribute to the spread of foot and mouth. Indeed, we severely restricted training by the armed forces to ensure that they did not use land that might cause them to spread the disease.

**Mr. Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter): I welcome what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said about extra armed service personnel coming to Devon to add to the excellent work that they are doing from the Ministry's offices in Exeter. However, is he aware that their job is being severely hampered by the desperate shortage of disposal sites in our county—*[Interruption.]* Yes, Devon sunshine. Had hon. Members come to Devon, they would have the same tan.

Will my right hon. Friend ensure that there are more disposal sites? What discussions has he had with other Departments and, crucially, the Environment Agency about finding more sites to deal with the desperate backlog of carcase disposal?

**Mr. Hoon:** Extra logistical support is being deployed to Devon and part of its effort is urgently to address the problem of disposal sites. Work is under way on a mass burial site at Ashmore, but completion is some days away. It is crucial that we clear the backlog of carcases in Devon.

**Mr. Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I join the Secretary of State in congratulating the armed forces on their fantastic work? The way in which they have dealt with the problem since they were called in, and the focus that they have given to the disposal and to the need to speed up the processes, is something on which they should be congratulated.

An issue arises directly from the fact that the armed forces have been so successful. Last week on, I think, 19 April, we discovered from *The Guardian* and other papers that Brigadier Malcolm Wood, who is responsible in Whitehall for co-ordinating the role of the armed forces, said:

"I don't think any of us doubt that we should have been called in earlier".

When I was looking over the 1968 recommendations, the previous report made the situation crystal clear. It said:

"but military assistance . . . should be accepted as early in the outbreak as possible . . . the earlier the military can be called in, the better."

Perhaps the Secretary of State will take this opportunity to tell us why it took nearly a month from the original outbreak for the armed forces to be deployed.

**Mr. Hoon:** I have studied carefully the account of the 1967 outbreak and have told the House that the circumstances then were different, not least because of the considerable number of animal movements across the country before this outbreak was detected. The hon. Gentleman is not right to suggest that it took a month before members of the armed forces were involved in dealing with the outbreak. They advised and assisted early on. He continues to pursue his argument because he confuses the presence of the armed forces behind the scenes, in which they gave advice on logistics, with their public participation, which became necessary when the scale of the outbreak became known. Since then, members of the armed forces have been involved in extensive work to combat the disease, which they will continue to carry out.

## Compensation

5. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): How much his Department has paid in compensation to ex-service men in each of the past five years. [156931]

7. **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): How many compensation claims are outstanding against his Department. [156933]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie):** The Ministry of Defence claims database does not distinguish between claims from former and serving members of the armed forces. The total amount of compensation paid to serving and former service personnel in each of the past five years was £20.5 million in 1996–97, £30.2 million in 1997–98, £37.4 million in 1998–99, £40.9 million in 1999–2000 and £47.9 million in 2000–01. The last figure is provisional and subject to final validation.

There are 8,570 claims outstanding against the Ministry of Defence. Of those, 2,092 are third party motor claims, 1,981 are service personnel employer's liability and 1,451 are civilian employer's liability. A total of 2,341 of those outstanding claims are from serving and former service personnel.

**Miss McIntosh:** I am grateful for those figures, which prove that there is a culture of political correctness and a creeping tendency towards compensation claims in the armed forces, placing officers and those who serve under them in an extremely difficult position. Does the Minister agree that the legal liability under which the MOD will pay compensation has increased under this Government since we signed up to the European convention on human rights, and that it would increase yet again if we agreed to join an international criminal court?

**Dr. Moonie:** What I can confirm is that the number of outstanding complaints has remained relatively constant over the past four years, which would suggest that what the hon. Lady asserts is not the case. The major change came about in 1987, when we accepted full liability for compensation issues. Clearly, court decisions on human rights will have some effect on numbers as rights are established or not. Overall, however, we expect the number of outstanding claims to decrease over time as the time scales for case management introduced by the 1999 civil justice reforms take effect.

**Mr. Boswell:** In light of my hon. Friend's comments, will the Minister not acknowledge that the numbers are going up and that there is a prevailing climate of litigiousness and political correctness? It is essential that Ministers give no signal whatever that it is open season for compensation claims. Will he assure the House that risks will be properly and professionally managed, that claims will be handled tightly but not unfairly and that, wherever possible, losses will be mitigated through effective rehabilitation?

**Dr. Moonie:** I have already said that the number of outstanding claims has remained constant over the past four years, so that deals with the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. With regard to rights, I do not see anything wrong in serving members of the armed forces, male or female, having the same rights as any other citizen in this society. We manage our claims very carefully. Where there is clearly a liability to pay compensation, we do so, and where there is not, we defend our position vigorously.

**Mr. Paul Keetch** (Hereford): May I ask about compensation claims arising from active service, particularly in relation to Sierra Leone? Ten members of 1 and 2 Para returned from Sierra Leone with malaria and had not been given tablets before they left, but the Ministry of Defence is giving compensation to only one of them. Why are the Government expecting the other nine to go through the courts to get their compensation? Will the 100-plus other troops who have come back from Sierra Leone with that debilitating disease be given compensation?

**Dr. Moonie:** The answer to the second question is no. The answer to the other is that 17 claims were made against us. We feel that we clearly have liability in one case because the person was not treated until after four or five days in theatre. In all the other cases, treatment was started prior to deployment, despite what has been said to the contrary, and we will not be paying compensation.

## Army Manpower

6. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): When the Army will reach its full manning strength. [156932]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Spellar):** The Army remains firmly committed to achieving full manning by 2005. Although the current

strength figures pose a very significant challenge to achieving that target, work is in hand across a wide range of initiatives.

**Mr. Bercow:** That was a risible response. With the Army 8,000 under strength and the extremely worrying slippage in the target date for full manning highlighted by the Select Committee on Defence, which concluded that insufficient energy and imagination were being applied to the task, why can the Minister not see that what he needs to do is tell the House whether he agrees with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in rejecting full manning? If the Minister is not big enough to stand up to the Chief Secretary, why does he not make way for my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key), who certainly is?

**Mr. Spellar:** I do not think that I should trade sizeist comments with the hon. Gentleman. Boomerangs are probably not the best choice of weapon that he could make in that respect.

The hon. Gentleman should accept that part of the reason for the gap between trained strength and liability is that we raised the level of liability: in the strategic defence review, we considered what the post-cold war requirement was, rather than stick to the previous figures. There was a gap of 7,736 in 1992, under the previous Administration, and when we came into power the gap was 5,597. His criticism of the Army recruitment teams is misplaced—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) must let the Minister answer.

**Mr. Spellar:** It is heroic to have achieved the current recruitment numbers in the face of the lowest unemployment for 25 years and the 1 million extra jobs owed to excellent management of the economy by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. That does not mean that we are complacent. As I said, there are a number of initiatives under way, many of which are bearing fruit. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) should recognise that recruiting in the face of full employment is always more difficult than in the conditions of unemployment that the Conservative Government left us.

**Mr. Russell Brown** (Dumfries): Does my hon. Friend agree that the range of measures introduced since 1997, including the service families taskforce and the recent announcement on service accommodation, will go a long way towards making life in the armed forces more attractive to recruits? Do they not clearly demonstrate the Government's commitment to overcoming the very difficult conditions for recruitment seen under the previous Government—

**Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): Oh, so it is our fault is it?

**Mr. Brown:** There is no doubt that we have taken major strides forward while Conservatives have merely thrown bricks and barracked.

**Mr. Spellar:** I thank my hon. Friend for that. He is right, not so much about recruitment, although such measures have an impact in that respect, as about retention of experienced and trained members of the forces.

The hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) asks whether it was the Conservatives' fault. The answer is yes, it was, to a significant extent. The Conservatives mismanaged the adjustment at the end of the cold war and considerably overshot the number of troops they forced out of the armed forces. The best advert for the armed forces is someone who goes back home and says what a good time he is having and what a worthwhile job he is undertaking as a member of those forces. The worst possible adverts were people who had thought that they had a career in the armed forces, but were made compulsorily redundant under the previous Government. The previous Administration sent a clear message that the Army was no longer recruiting, and it has been the subject of a major and successful effort by our recruitment teams to turn around that message and make it clear that we are open for recruitment and open for business.

**Mr. Martin Bell** (Tatton): Is the Minister aware that some infantry regiments are spending up to £40,000 of privately raised money on their recruitment? Should not that be the Government's responsibility and not theirs?

**Mr. Spellar:** We are spending considerable sums on recruitment. Individual regiments rightly and proudly undertake a lot of their own recruitment work, as they want to ensure that their personnel are as well recruited as possible. That is a traditional activity. We need to read across from the successes of some regiments in order to learn the lessons and to spread them to other regiments. A significant amount of work is being done to spread best practice in that regard.

**Mr. Robert Key** (Salisbury): Neither the Minister nor my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) need be sensitive about size. I am sure that we could arrange for the signing of a compact against sizeism in the forthcoming election. The problem with his figures is that they do not add up. Nobody doubts the success and determination of the adjutant-general's department in respect of recruitment and retention; indeed, they are beyond doubt. The problem is not that the Ministry of Defence lacks commitment, but that the Treasury lacks it. We have heard that there is a shortfall of 8,000 troops, and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that it would cost £1.3 billion pounds to fill it. At the same time, however, the defence budget continues to fall as a percentage of gross domestic product. That is the problem. Will the Minister commit himself, and say that there will be no further reductions in county regiments, old regiments afoot, the Lancers or the Royal Tank Regiment? Will there be no further cuts?

**Mr. Spellar:** The hon. Gentleman is weightier than his arguments. The situation is limited by the ability to recruit. We have had success in that respect, although there have been some retention difficulties. The measures that I outlined just now, and which we have announced previously, have improved matters, but circumstances are extremely difficult, as high employment—we have the lowest unemployment for 25 years—is a major challenge to recruiting. Our people are rising to that challenge, however, and all who meet the standard are being recruited into the armed forces. That is welcome and that effort is being properly funded. If he goes out into the

streets of Salisbury to urge more youngsters to join the armed forces, as I hope that he will, they will be recruited and properly funded.

## Territorial Army

8. **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): By how many the Territorial Army is under strength; and if he will make a statement. [156934]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie):** The latest available official figures show that the Territorial Army is under strength by 520 personnel.

**Mr. Waterson:** May I inform the Minister that, like many other hon. Members, I visited my excellent local TA signals unit in Eastbourne during the recent TA open day? Does he agree that the morale of the extremely committed men and women in the TA is potentially undermined by the fact that the Government have cut the TA during the current Parliament, but are requiring ever greater service from serving TA members, to a level that has never been required in the past?

**Dr. Moonie:** I am glad that the hon. Gentleman enjoyed visiting his local TA unit. I enjoyed a similar visit a couple of weeks ago. The current TA bears little relation to that of 10 years ago. It is a far leaner organisation and is far better fitted to the tasks that we want it to perform than it was when it had the rather inappropriate structure which we were bequeathed. I am confident that the organisation will continue to go from strength to strength, especially as we have just started a recruitment campaign to encourage people to join it.

**Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): When I met the commanding officer of the Royal Monmouthshire Engineers last week, he did not tell me that his regiment was under strength. However, he informed me that certain members of the regiment had volunteered individually to help in dealing with the foot and mouth crisis, and that the local information centre for the crisis, which was set up by the Welsh Assembly, had been housed at the regimental headquarters in Monmouth. Will my hon. Friend join me in commending the work of the regiment in supporting our farmers at this time?

**Dr. Moonie:** Yes, I certainly shall. We are grateful for the role that reservists play in joining up with units for a period of service, especially with regard to the work that they are doing on foot and mouth. Currently, almost 500 volunteer and regular reservists are called out on operational duties. I can only say how much we appreciate their efforts on our behalf.

## European Security and Defence Policy

9. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): What recent discussions he has had with his French and German counterparts on the proposed European rapid reaction force. [156935]

10. **Mr. Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire): If he will make a statement on the European security and defence policy. [156936]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon):** I regularly meet my French and German counterparts to discuss a range of defence matters. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary attended the European Union Defence Ministers' informal meeting in Brussels on 6 April. European security and defence policy was discussed on that occasion.

Our efforts are focused on delivering the headline goal to improve the military capabilities available to the European Union and NATO. Nations identified initial contributions to that goal last November. We are now engaged in the detailed analysis of the required improvements and the action needed to effect them.

**Mr. Robathan:** Did the Under-Secretary tell the Secretary of State that it was revealed at the meeting in Brussels that the German Government, who have a deficit of £1 billion in their defence budget, would be unable to fulfil their commitment to provide 18,000 troops to the European defence force? Would the Secretary of State like to comment on the remarks of the French Chief of General Staff who said that NATO and the European defence force would be entirely separate? The Secretary of State has denied that; nevertheless, it is the case. Furthermore, the American Secretary of State—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I think that the Secretary of State has got the drift.

**Mr. Hoon:** If the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) stands in any forthcoming elections to the Bundestag, he will be able to ask the German Defence Minister those questions. However, I have already dealt with the other matter fully. The hon. Gentleman knows that we are committed to improving European military capabilities.

**Mr. Paterson:** The Secretary of State says that he has dealt with the question fully. What does he say to General Gustav Hagglund, who is in charge of the rapid reaction force, and who claimed that we were considering not a subsidiary of NATO but an independent body? What about the comments at the weekend of a German defence spokesman, who said that the proposed European air transport command would "operate independently from NATO"? Can the Secretary of State spin his way out of that?

**Mr. Hoon:** Another Member of Parliament seems anxious to join the Bundestag. As to the highly speculative accounts in certain newspapers, which are fuelled by the shadow Secretary of State, I stress that members of the RAF will remain firmly under British control.

**Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): On the question of deployment, does my right hon. Friend agree that any premature referendum in Montenegro could destabilise

the whole region? If conflict spilled into Montenegro, who would be deployed as peacekeepers: NATO or the rapid reaction force?

**Mr. Hoon:** Montenegro's relations with the former republic of Yugoslavia are a matter for Montenegro, not the British Secretary of State for Defence. Arrangements for KFOR to be deployed in Kosovo have already been made. They will continue unless and until its presence is no longer required.

**Sir Peter Tapsell** (Louth and Horncastle): While I have no present plans to stand for election to the United States Congress, may I ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he has noted that a series of influential, experienced and pro-British American statesmen have said that the European rapid reaction force poses a serious threat to the future of NATO and to the American commitment to the defence of Europe?

**Mr. Hoon:** The hon. Gentleman would have to hold US citizenship for 20 years before he could stand for Congress. I am sure that he has time for that. If he were elected, he would find a range of opinions there, as in any democratic country. There are some who are critical of improvements in European capabilities; however, in my experience, there are more who support the efforts of European nations to be more responsible for their security and thus less dependent on the United States taxpayer.

**Mr. Iain Duncan Smith** (Chingford and Woodford Green): When listening to the Secretary of State, I am led to wonder whether he has not already sought election to the Bundestag. We never get an answer to a straight question. When the remarks of any Government are quoted, the Secretary of State simply says, "Well, that's their opinion". They are also the opinions to which he signed up.

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman could comment on the proposals from the Germans and others for the joint transport command, reported in various newspapers. When questions on that point were put to the Ministry of Defence over the weekend and today, the Secretary of State's spokesman—or probably the Secretary of State himself, as he does not much like quotes being attributed to him—said that he was unaware of such proposals. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether he is unaware of such proposals or not?

**Mr. Hoon:** The hon. Gentleman's kneejerk prejudices on European questions are well known. I have already made it clear in relation to those reports that the RAF and its equipment will remain firmly under British control. That is an answer to his question, and if it is the answer that he was seeking, perhaps he will accept it. The proposals that have been made over a long period for improving the co-ordination of European forces—not simply of air forces but of navies and of armed forces on the ground—have been well known to anyone who has followed this debate closely. I assume, given the hon. Gentleman's objections to this kind of co-operation, that if he had been Defence Secretary in either 1914 or 1939, he would have refused to allow British forces to co-operate alongside their then European allies.

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** The Secretary of State is again attempting to use smooth words with nothing behind them. The reality is that he knows about this matter only too well. His spokesman told the newspapers yesterday that he was unaware of any such proposals, but the right hon. Gentleman knows very well that Rudolf Scharping has been proposing this for some time: right back into 1999, at which time the right hon. Gentleman was fully aware of it.

Will the Secretary of State tell us what is different about the situation now? He knows that these are proposals not just for co-operation but for a unified force, in exactly the same way as the Euro army proposals are. The Secretary of State should face up to what he has committed this country to, and admit now that the Government begin to deny, they deny more, then they sign the documents and pretend that they have not signed them: what a falsehood they put on us.

**Mr. Hoon:** I mentioned 1914 and 1939. Perhaps I should bring the hon. Gentleman more up to date. There was co-ordination and co-operation among air forces in the bombing campaign over Serbia, which was conducted effectively by a combined allied operation. That has been the history of aerial warfare throughout the past century. I am very surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not recognise that it is in the interests of all European armed forces to be able to work more effectively together, and that he does not accept that—I say this for the third time today—the RAF, its personnel and its equipment will remain under British control.

## Defence Contracts (North-East)

12. **Mr. Jim Cousins** (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): How many civilian jobs in the north-east of England he has *(a)* created and *(b)* safeguarded by the awarding of defence contracts since the completion of the defence review. [156938]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie):** Approximately 350,000 jobs are dependent on defence expenditure and equipment exports. More than 60,000 new contracts are placed each year and the Ministry of Defence does not record the number of jobs created or safeguarded as a result of each individual procurement decision. As my hon. Friend will know, in March of this year the Ministry of Defence confirmed a contract worth £250 million with Vickers Defence Systems for the supply of 66 specialist Challenger-based engineer tanks. That will help to sustain all 500 jobs at its Newcastle plant and up to another 1,000 jobs among UK sub-contractors.

**Mr. Cousins:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on his efforts. I also congratulate the Minister for Defence Procurement on her unfailing helpfulness and courtesy to north-east Members of Parliament when they pursue these issues. However, my hon. Friend will be aware of the very difficult situation facing shipbuilding workers in the north-east, which is part of the fallout resulting from the difficulties of the Cammell Laird group. Is he also

aware that, whereas one in 10 members of the military forces in the United Kingdom is recruited from the north-east, only one in 200 of civilian MOD employees is located there? Is my hon. Friend giving his attention to these matters, and will he offer any prospects for assistance?

**Dr. Moonie:** I am well aware that areas such as the north-west and north-east, which supply the largest percentage of our recruits in England, suffer when it comes to the deployment of Ministry of Defence jobs. It is our policy where possible to devolve jobs away from the south-east to other regions, and I assure my hon. Friend that I will do all that I can to ensure that that happens.

We are also well aware of the problems that Cammell Laird is experiencing. We support the receiver's aim for RFA Argus to be completed at Birkenhead, and have agreed on a system whereby that can be done. We are also in discussions with the receiver on the best options for the company's contract for work on RFA Fort George, which is due to arrive at the yard on the other side—rather than the north-east—on 7 May. It is, however, too early to speculate on the outcome.

I assure my hon. Friend that we are doing all we can to support our colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry, and their efforts to find a solution to the problems of Cammell Laird.

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough): What the Minister did not say about Cammell Laird is that the company had hoped for a considerable amount of work in connection with ro-ro ferries—work that the Government have placed in Germany. Is that not a betrayal of hundreds of workers in the north-west and north-east of England?

**Dr. Moonie:** As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the contract for the ro-ro ferries encompasses their management and service over their lifetime, as well as their construction, which represents a very small part of the total value of the contract. It has been let to Weir, the British company that will control it.

We spent a great deal of time and effort on the contract. As the hon. Gentleman is well aware, the yards are not subsidised. We sought best value for money throughout, and we believe that as a consequence we achieved the best solution.

## Sierra Leone

13. **Mr. Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): If he will make a statement on the contributions of British forces to security and training in Sierra Leone. [156939]

17. **Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): If he will make a statement on the armed forces' deployment in Sierra Leone. [156944]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Spellar):** British troops are in Sierra Leone to assist the democratically elected Government to establish effective and accountable armed forces. We have between 550 and 600 troops on the ground in Sierra Leone at any time. They constitute the United Kingdom's contribution to the international military advisory and training team, soldiers providing the short-term training teams, and a brigade headquarters. The short-term training team commitment has recently been taken on by 2 Battalion The Light Infantry, which succeeds 2 Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles. As I announced in January, we will continue to provide the training teams at least until September this year.

In January we deployed a field surgical team to cover the gap in medical facilities caused by the roulement of the UN medical facilities.

**Mr. Gapes:** Will my hon. Friend send a message of support from the House to our soldiers and other personnel, whom I have seen doing an excellent job in Sierra Leone?

How is progress being made towards the establishment of the international military advisory training team with the Canadians and others? What proposals have the Government for the strengthening of the Sierra Leone Government's control over its territory, enabling that Government to take more and more territory away from the Revolutionary United Front and the appalling activities of those terrorist thugs?

**Mr. Spellar:** I thank my hon. Friend for his comments about the excellent job being done. It is a great advantage that a number of Members from all parts of the House have been able to visit Sierra Leone, and to see that work being undertaken. It has also given considerable encouragement to the troops.

A number of countries are already participating in the IMATT, and, again, excellent work is being undertaken for the training of the Sierra Leone army. We have been strengthening the headquarters of UNAMSIL—the United Nations mission to Sierra Leone—so that it, and the Sierra Leone army, can establish normality in the country.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** How many United Kingdom forces personnel, including our special forces—police, security and intelligence services—have been killed during their deployment in Sierra Leone, or as a consequence of that deployment?

**Mr. Spellar:** According to my recollection, one member of the Paratroop Regiment was killed in an extremely successful operation to rescue some of our forces—an operation that was widely remarked on not just in the House, but across the world.

**Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): The Minister said that the short-term training commitment would last until at least September this year. When does he expect the Sierra Leone Government to be able to achieve normality in that country, which I presume means the defeat of the RUF? Will he confirm that it is only then that our troops will be able to come home?

**Mr. Spellar:** Our forces are there primarily in the training role. Obviously, it will be a matter of assessing the capability of the Sierra Leonean Army and, as the hon. Gentleman rightly identifies, success on the ground. It is a little difficult to predict a time scale on that.

### Defence Policy Priorities

15. **Mrs. Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): What representations he has received on his amendments to defence policy priorities since the strategic defence review; and if he will make a statement. [156942]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon):** There have been no fundamental changes in the Government's defence policy priorities since the strategic defence review was published in July 1998. However, the Government recognise the need to adapt to a changing world. That is why, for example, we recently updated our strategic analysis and published the results in two publications: "Defence Policy 2001" and "The Future Strategic Context for Defence."

I have had discussions concerning the strategic defence review and our defence policy priorities with a wide range of people and received and responded to many representations on those defence policies.

**Mrs. Gilroy:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Given its significant potential contribution, what steps have the Government taken to develop their policy of multinational defence co-operation? In particular, does my right hon. Friend see any further scope for the development of co-operation between the Royal Navy and the navies of allied countries?

**Mr. Hoon:** Clearly, there is strong potential for further effective co-operation between the Royal Navy and the navies of other countries. We could, for example, build on the success of the French ship attachments to the United Kingdom and Royal Navy involvement in French exercises—building on work set out by the last Conservative Secretary of State for Defence. We can improve the interoperability of our Navy further through joint exercises. Opportunities are provided by membership of the five powers defence arrangement for regular joint exercises and training with Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore. We are also seeking to develop closer co-operation on amphibious issues with France, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands.

**Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): Will the Secretary of State confirm that one of the SDR priorities was to recruit all three services up to strength and to provide 3,000 extra men for the Army? Will he further confirm that every category of regular personnel except naval officers lost numbers during the previous fiscal year; that premature voluntary release is at a 10-year high; that medical downgrading is at almost its historic peacetime high; that the addresses of over a third of the regular reserve have been lost; that officer recruiting for the Territorial Army has collapsed; and that the royal naval reserve is also losing numbers fast? It is time that the Secretary of State thought again a little about his personnel policy options.

**Mr. Hoon:** What I can confirm is that the Government remain committed to the force levels set out in the strategic defence review, but that, in a strong economy, we recognise that retention is an issue with which we have to deal. We are putting considerable administrative effort into improving retention levels. Notwithstanding the strong economy, recruitment is proceeding satisfactorily and many young people see the armed forces as an attractive way of life, particularly given the activities in which the armed forces are currently engaged. There is a matching up between the advertisements and the reality of life in service.

### Female Soldiers

19. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What recent assessment he has made of the fighting capabilities of female soldiers. [156946]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon):** A review of the employment of women in the armed forces is currently in progress. I expect to receive advice on its conclusions later this year.

**Mr. Swayne:** What steps is the Secretary of State taking to ensure that the criteria against which female soldiers will be measured are not watered down, to the detriment of our operational capabilities?

**Mr. Hoon:** The review that is being conducted is extremely thorough. It comprises a wide-ranging review of scientific literature. There is an attitude survey, a field trial looking at team dynamics and assessments from each of the three services, but I emphasise that operational effectiveness will be the deciding question. We will not allow any decision to be taken that in any way compromises the operational effectiveness, the combat effectiveness, of our armed forces.

### Army Manpower

20. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): If he will make a statement on Army manpower. [156947]

**The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Spellar):** As at 1 March 2001, whole Army strength stood at 100,199, a shortfall against the currently assessed post-strategic defence review requirement of around 8,000. The Army remains firmly committed to achieving full manning by 2005 and work is in hand across a very wide range of initiatives.

**Mr. Brady:** The Secretary of State said a few moments ago that recruitment to the Army was progressing satisfactorily. Does the Minister understand that the real problem is retention within the Army? Is not the failure of this Government to make the Army and the other services an attractive career the real reason why the Defence Committee says that it will be 2008 before the target is reached?

**Mr. Spellar:** It is rather unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman prepared his question before hearing the earlier replies, which made it clear that retention had improved considerably, not least because of the considerable measures that we have undertaken to improve the quality of service life. Much of that was needed to address the significant problems that had built up in the 18 years of Conservative Government, not least the question of accommodation. Equally, we must recognise that recruitment and retention are taking place against a background of a strong economy, in which unemployment is at its lowest level for 25 years, there are 1 million extra jobs and a considerable number

of youngsters are going into tertiary education. The recruitment teams for the Army and other services are performing a magnificent job in bringing youngsters into the armed forces, but they are not complacent, and additional work is being undertaken to improve recruitment at all levels. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, along with his colleagues, will be going to local schools to urge youngsters seriously to consider the armed forces as a good career prospect.

## Russia

21. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What discussions he has had with the US Administration about threats posed to western security by Russia. [156948]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon):** I have had discussions with the US Administration on a wide range of defence items, including threats to western security. The 1999 NATO strategic concept made clear that Russia was not currently regarded as a threat and that

"a strong, stable and enduring partnership between NATO and Russia is essential to achieve lasting stability in the Euro-Atlantic area".

**Dr. Cable:** Does the Secretary of State share the increasingly sceptical and hostile attitude of the Bush Administration to Russia on proliferation, espionage and other matters, or does he feel that there is an opportunity to strengthen our relations with Russia under the common European Union framework?

**Mr. Hoon:** I have made it clear that, under the framework of NATO, we support NATO's 1999 conclusion that efforts should be made to secure a strong, stable and enduring partnership between NATO and Russia.

## European Security and Defence Policy

28. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What representations he has received concerning the European security and defence policy. [156955]

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon):** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) and for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson).

**Dr. Lewis:** I am delighted that the Secretary of State has referred me to his earlier answers, because that enables me to point out how inadequate they were. Is it not a fact that senior American politicians, the Finnish general in charge of the European rapid reaction force and the French Chief of the Defence Staff—who has not, incidentally, modified or retracted anything he said, despite the earlier predictions by the Secretary of State—have made it perfectly clear that the ERRF is to operate outside, not inside, the NATO structure? Will he now stop his waffle about the need to co-operate with our European allies—which we all support, within NATO—and set our doubts at rest? Is not what is being proposed the building of something outside NATO which will undermine NATO—something of which our American allies are becoming increasingly aware?

**Mr. Hoon:** We have now had experience of two American Administrations, and both have made it clear that they support efforts by European nations to improve their military capabilities because by doing so they contribute to the success of NATO. We have made it clear that we regard the development of any improved European capabilities as a contribution to NATO.

## Rural Taskforce

3.30 pm

**Mr. Archie Norman** (Tunbridge Wells) (*by private notice*): To ask the Minister for the Environment if he will make a statement on the work of the rural taskforce with regard to the foot and mouth crisis.

**The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher):** It became clear, soon after the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease began, that the disease and the restrictions that were introduced to control its spread would have implications for the rural economy that went well beyond the agricultural sector. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister therefore asked me to set up the rural taskforce with a remit to consider the implications of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease for the rural economy, both immediately and in the longer term, and to report to him on appropriate measures.

The taskforce includes all the Government Departments involved, the devolved Administrations and experienced members from the private and voluntary sectors, including the rural business and tourism sectors, farmers and representatives of rural communities. It first met on 14 March. There have been four further meetings so far, and the next meeting will take place on Wednesday. I am extremely grateful for the hard work and dedication that the members of the taskforce have put in and for the practical common sense that they have shown in discussing the issues.

The taskforce's work covers both short-term measures to alleviate the hardship that so many people and businesses are facing and measures to aid the speediest possible return to normality. I shall remind the House of measures that have already been announced, starting with the measures to assist businesses to weather the immediate problems.

First, I have announced a number of measures to provide relief from business rates. They include increased Government funding, from 75 per cent. to 95 per cent., to enable local authorities to offer hardship rate relief to businesses in rural areas, targeted at businesses below £12,000 rateable value, and offering reductions of up to £1,290 over a three-month period. A further measure is the deferment, by three months, of the deadline for business rate appeals in rural areas.

Rural businesses will also be helped by the Government's legislation to extend mandatory 50 per cent. rate relief to all food shops in small rural settlements, and that legislation will also provide a transitional, five-year, 50 per cent. mandatory rate relief for new enterprises on former agricultural land. At the same time, recent regulations have extended 50 per cent. rate relief to sole village pubs and garages with a rateable value of less than £9,000. We have also arranged that when a rural local authority agrees to defer payments my Department will in turn defer the payments that the authority is due to make to the national rate pool. The Valuation Office will consider applications from businesses for a reduction in their rateable value to take account of the impact of foot and mouth disease.

Secondly, the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise will take a sympathetic approach to requests for deferral or extended time to pay for tax and national insurance contributions, especially for rural businesses in agriculture, transport and tourism, and related retail businesses. Thirdly, the major banks have made it clear that they will, on a case-by-case basis, consider mechanisms such as extended lines of credit, capital repayment holidays and other measures. Fourthly, we have extended the types of business that can apply for loans up to £250,000 under the small firms loan guarantee scheme.

Fifthly, I announced a further £15 million for regional development agencies to help rural businesses in the worst hit areas. Sixthly, to help those who have lost work because of foot and mouth, the Benefits Agency has announced that it will provide quick assessment of applications for jobseeker's allowance from such applicants, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has announced a skills boost package to ease the impact of foot and mouth disease on jobs.

Finally, the Government have pledged to match public donations to rural charities, to help to address cases of severe hardship and to provide support for organisations responding to rural stress. The scheme is being administered by the Countryside Agency and will apply to personal donations, including the generous donations of the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Westminster.

Everyone agrees, I think, that the key to recovering from the serious economic effects of the disease is to get back to normality as quickly as possible. That is why the taskforce has put a lot of effort into ensuring that the message that most of the country can be safely visited is widely understood. Its work has led to a number of advertisements under the auspices of both the Government and other key organisations, to explain the position to the general public and encourage people to go and enjoy the many facilities that are open.

The Countryside Agency will also make available grants of £3.8 million to help local authorities to open their footpaths. Further advertising by tourism organisations is being promoted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced additional support of £6 million for the English Tourism Council and the British Tourist Authority to get the message across that Britain is open for business.

That all adds up to a total package for immediate practical help for the rural economy of more than £200 million, but that is not the end of the story: there is a great deal more to do, especially in considering longer-term measures to help to get the rural economy moving when the disease has been dealt with. I look forward to further meetings of the taskforce to advance that important work.

**Mr. Norman:** We welcome the Minister's response. Let me remind the House of the chronology of the crisis. The first outbreak of foot and mouth was reported on 20 February, and it took nearly four weeks to form the rural taskforce. The rate relief measures to which the Minister referred were announced a month after the outbreak, and the loan guarantee scheme for affected businesses was announced on 6 April.

When the Minister last made a statement to the House, about a month ago, on the measures to be taken, he described them as a preliminary package. We welcomed them, as far as they went, at that stage, but it is now clear that the impact of foot and mouth on rural businesses is

*[Mr. Norman]*

at least as severe as we all feared at that time. It is reported that, over Easter, there was a 70 per cent. drop in bookings in the Yorkshire dales; a 40 per cent. fall in rural Cumbria; and a 35 per cent. decline in business in rural Devon.

Although the number of reported cases of infection has now reduced, the crisis is far from over for business. Indeed, it is reported that since Easter the level of bookings in most rural tourism areas has declined still further. The British Hospitality Association estimates that the total loss from overseas visitors alone will be £3 billion, with a further £2 billion from domestic tourism.

Some businesses are already on the point of closure. Indeed, some have closed, including small abattoirs, such as Lamberhurst abattoir in Kent. If ever there was an emergency in a business sector, it is now. If ever there was a need for a generous, speedy and decisive Government response, it is now. For those businesses, the acid test of the Government's response is whether cash is hitting the bank account, as we said a month ago. It is not whether there are high-profile ministerial visits, but whether those businesses are being enabled to survive the crisis. The question, therefore, is whether the Government's response today, which contained no new proposals and no new money, is generous and long lasting.

The Minister says that the rural taskforce has met four times in about six weeks. Will he tell us when it last met and reassure us that it will continue to meet throughout the duration of the crisis? Will he reassure us that he will continue to come to the House to report on the progress that it has achieved and the extent to which the £200 million package to which he referred has been dispensed to small businesses? While he is about it, will he confirm his previous, very helpful, statement that there will be a formal public inquiry into the crisis? What will the terms of reference be, and when do the Government plan to announce the details of the inquiry?

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the rate relief package. He will be aware that many rural businesses consider the Government's arrangements woefully inadequate, on two counts. First, the rateable value ceiling of £12,000 excludes many—if not, in some areas, most—rural businesses. It seems to many businesses miserly compared with the £50,000 limit in Scotland and Wales. The difference between those two limits is, for many, inexplicable. In the south lakeland area alone, it is reported that a quarter to a third of all businesses, and a half of all tourism businesses, are ineligible for the scheme. Indeed, quite small hotels and bed-and-breakfast businesses will not qualify under the £12,000 limit.

Secondly, is the right hon. Gentleman aware that many district councils are unable to afford the remaining 5 per cent. of rate relief? Indeed, the costs of administration and other costs imposed on them by the foot and mouth crisis mean that large increases in council tax are already looming in those areas. Will the right hon. Gentleman consider, as we have proposed, introducing rate relief of 100 per cent. and providing extra support for those councils worst affected, or does he believe that council taxpayers should bear the cost of the crisis for years to come?

On the loan guarantee scheme, is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the absolute fury expressed by many small businesses at the 8.75 per cent. interest rate to be charged? That seems extortionate in the light of the fact that many can borrow more cheaply than that through their own bank account or overdraft. How much money has been extended through the scheme and how many businesses, if any, have benefited specifically, or is the scheme a smokescreen for the fact that the Government are unable to offer any realistic long-term support? Will the Minister discuss with the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), the possibility of bringing into force the interest-free scheme that we proposed some four weeks ago?

The third area of support is marketing support for tourism. Can the right hon. Gentleman explain the reasons for the Government's parsimonious approach to support for tourism? If ever there was a time to promote Britain abroad generously, on a long-lasting basis, it is now. Yet the English Tourism Council has been granted only an extra £4 million, compared, we understand, with an extra £5 million being spent in Scotland. The British Tourist Authority put in a bid for £20 million in support but has received only £2 million. If ever there was a time to take decisive action to market Britain, it is now. We have proposed giving a £10 million grant to the English Tourism Council and doubling the BTA's budget. Can the Minister say whether he is prepared to consider those proposals or why the Government have made such an ungenerous response?

The environmental effects of burning carcases have been much reported in the media. We welcome the Minister's recognition this morning on the "Today" programme that there is no risk-free option for disposal, and we share that view. Does he accept, however, that the widespread concern across the country has resulted from a lack of reassurance to date? Does he accept that if the Environment Agency had been more forthcoming in identifying sites for burial, and if the Government had been quicker in introducing more on-site farm burial—as we recommended and as was recommended following the inquiry into the 1967 outbreak—the problem would not have been as great as it has been?

The Minister last made a statement to the House on 20 March, and we hope that this will not be the last time we hear from him. Does he agree that what he then called a preliminary package should indeed have been so? That statement should have been the first of a series of bold announcements to tackle the crisis decisively and communicate action effectively.

Since then, however, we have had a flurry of high-profile ministerial visits and an awful lot of public relations, but very little money for most businesses. For businesses suffering under the threat of bankruptcy and deeply worried about the future, the Government's response has been parsimonious to the point of penny-pinching, confused in communication and ineffective in delivery.

**Mr. Meacher:** The hon. Gentleman asked a number of questions of varying relevance. I shall try to deal with each of them.

The hon. Gentleman twice made derogatory references to ministerial visits. The visits that I and a great many Ministers have made have been extremely well received,

and I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not think it beneficial for Ministers to get into the countryside to see things for themselves and talk with whoever wants to talk to them about the situation. Perhaps he would prefer just to sit here in Westminster.

We announced our proposals on rate relief within days of the formation of the rural taskforce. Those measures were announced extremely quickly, and other measures have followed ever since.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned figures suggesting that bookings for Easter were down. In some cases they were, but the Easter summary produced by the English Tourism Council estimates that business reached 70 to 80 per cent. of last year's levels. In Cumbria, attractions fared pretty well.

**Mr. David Maclean** (Penrith and The Border): Oh!

**Mr. Meacher:** Even in Cumbria, 50 per cent. of attractions reported an increase in visitors. Resorts, coastal towns and cities have generally done well or very well, as have day-out attractions. The hon. Gentleman's Jeremiah picture went fairly wide of the mark.

The hon. Gentleman was anxious to say that the amount of money made available by the Government was small. As I said in my statement, it amounts to more than £200 million, and I do not think that that sum is as small as he suggested. It has been well received, and we are considering further measures.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the rural taskforce will continue to meet under my chairmanship until foot and mouth disease has been overcome, election or no election. I hope that he is content with that.

With regard to the public inquiry about which I have spoken, I should make it clear that I was honestly saying what I believe will be the case. It is, of course, a matter for the Prime Minister to announce the terms of reference, in his own time, and I am sure that he will do so.

On the £12,000 rateable value threshold and the 5 per cent. payment by rural authorities, the hon. Gentleman asked a genuine question, as opposed to some of the political points that he made. We are aware of complaints that that is insufficient. We have asked the Local Government Association to provide the evidence to justify those allegations. We asked some time ago—

**Mr. Maclean** *rose—*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The right hon. Gentleman seeks to catch my eye, but his chances will diminish if he keeps interrupting the Minister.

**Mr. Meacher:** We requested the Local Government Association, some time ago, to give us the information by the end of today—we shall make a decision on that basis.

The hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) asked how many firms have used the small firms local guarantee scheme. The Small Business Service has received more than 400 inquiries relating to foot and mouth disease compared with a normal inquiry rate of 40 a day. More than 700 applications for information had been received about a week ago—the number is certainly more now.

With regard to the £6 million boost for tourism, perhaps the best way to answer is to quote the comments of Edwin Griffin of Meeting Planners International from the United States. After visiting this country at the invitation of the British Tourist Authority, he said:

"Our media has distorted the true picture—a disservice to the public by not properly informing them. It was good to see the unaffected farm life in comparison to those TV reports. I will be telling my 20,000 members to investigate for themselves what Britain can offer."

I think that money was extremely well spent.

Lastly, on the question of pyres, I made it clear this morning that the Government's first priority is—and remains—to maximise the use of rendering, of incineration in properly controlled industrial plant and of burial in registered landfill sites. I am very interested to note that the preference of the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells is for on-site farm burial. Let me tell him that the place where 160,000 carcases are not yet disposed of is Devon, so his solution is totally unworkable because of the high levels of the water table there. Our proposals are the only practical option.

**Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours** (Workington): I welcome my right hon. Friend's opening remarks; his words will be read by many people in my constituency. Despite two good days at Easter, the tourism industry in the west of the Lake district is really in crisis. We had stage 1 a month ago—my right hon. Friend referred to it. May we have stage 2—not compensation, but financial support, highly targeted, to help people who really are suffering?

I witnessed the work of the taskforce last Thursday—the proceedings were excellent. Will my right hon. Friend arrange for the taskforce to take evidence not only from local authorities and organisations identified with local authorities, but from some of the grass-roots organisations that have sprung up in these areas to represent the people who are in trouble, such as Cumbria crisis alliance in my constituency? That organisation has done some good work on small measures—inexpensive but targeted—that could be introduced and would change the fortunes of people who are in financial difficulty. Will my right hon. Friend put his weight behind the right of such organisations to give evidence to his taskforce?

**Mr. Meacher:** I am happy to support those measures. Looking at the evidence over Easter, we are aware that bookings and takings for many small rural businesses were much better than many had feared, but they were certainly still down. In Keswick, Ambleside and other places in my hon. Friend's constituency, takings were relatively good, but I accept that there are areas with really severe problems. I repeat that we are looking at further measures for giving practical, selected and targeted advice to help them.

I am also happy to agree that the evidence feeding into the regional development agencies comes not only from bodies such as those my hon. Friend mentioned, but from some of the smaller bodies, such as the Cumbria crisis alliance. I was impressed by the quality of the evidence that I received from many of the bodies that I visited on that day and I intend to return before long.

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): On the matter of footpaths and bridleways, can the right hon.

*[Mr. David Heath]*

Gentleman confirm that the animal health authorities' powers to close footpaths lapsed on 16 March and that some authorities are concerned that, if they reopen those footpaths, they will not be able to close them again if circumstances require that to happen?

On the publicity campaign, assuming that it did not cost £6 million to bring the group of American tour operators to Britain—a worthwhile objective in itself—will the right hon. Gentleman tell us to what extent there has been a properly targeted marketing exercise, overseas and in this country, to encourage people to visit our rural areas again?

Has the right hon. Gentleman a conception of how broadly defined are the businesses affected by the foot and mouth disease crisis? Is he aware that they go well beyond those businesses that are directly affected by agriculture or tourism? In my constituency, I visited a garden centre, where takings are down by 80 per cent; a mower supplier, where takings are down by 60 to 70 per cent; and a marquee supplier, which is now laying off staff. Many such businesses are not in towns of fewer than 3,000 people and hence do not qualify as being in rural areas. Is he aware of the disappointment at the patchiness of the response from the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the banks, despite the encouraging statements made by him and others? Will he consider the approach taken by the utilities to those businesses?

On hardship relief and rates relief, will the right hon. Gentleman tell us how long the current measures will last? Why was no assessment made of how many businesses would be encompassed by a £12,000 ceiling on rateable value, or a £9,000 ceiling for garages and pubs? Many of us in rural areas think it extraordinary that that cut-off point was put in place. Will he tell us how many business rates revaluations have taken place and how quickly they are being processed?

Finally, will the right hon. Gentleman tell us why no date has been allocated for the Second Reading of the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill, which was presented to the House some weeks ago? Why are there no Government amendments to the Finance Bill, which will be debated today and tomorrow, to provide relief for rural areas? Does that not suggest that the Government understand neither the scale of the problem for rural businesses, nor the urgency with which measures must be taken to deal with it?

**Mr. Meacher:** The hon. Gentleman asks whether the powers exist to close footpaths that have been reopened. Of course, if there is justification in terms of the spread of the disease or new infections, the powers could be invoked. The Government have made a considerable effort to reopen footpaths, parks and other facilities, so we are anxious to ensure that they are not closed again, unless there is very good reason to do so in terms of the disease.

I believe that the BTA's efforts in the 12 main overseas markets are, as the hon. Gentleman says, a properly targeted exercise. The hon. Gentleman asks about the need to extend aid such as rate relief beyond immediate farm businesses. That is exactly what we propose to do for haulage and retail businesses, and it represents an extension of the existing limits on rate relief.

I should like to know about the patchiness, to which the hon. Gentleman refers, in the response of the Inland Revenue and the banks. I have made it clear that if there is any evidence of that, I will certainly ensure that I, or others, speak strongly to those who have made it clear that there will be no such patchiness and that sympathy will be generally and fully displayed.

I understand that the £9,000 threshold represents an extension or increase on the current level, but we believe that it is justified; it has not been arbitrarily set. The hon. Gentleman asks how many revaluations have taken place. I cannot give him that figure, but if we have the figure, I will certainly write to him. I certainly take the hon. Gentleman's point about the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill. I am very keen to see that Bill make progress, and I will certainly discuss it with my colleagues in Government.

**Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): Have my right hon. Friend and his taskforce been able to make any progress in opening footpaths, particularly in coastal areas and on arable land? Many people who have made representations to my office feel that some local authorities have shown tardiness in making progress on this important issue. Has any progress been made, either, on preserving the genetic stock of rare breeds, such as the rare hefted sheep breeds on the moors in the North York moors national park?

**Mr. Meacher:** I pay tribute to the work of the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes). She has taken particular responsibility for getting footpaths and other facilities open and has achieved considerable success. For example, Norfolk has reopened more than half its network, Surrey has reopened a similar proportion and even Cumbria, which has been badly hit by foot and mouth, reopened more than 100 paths before Easter. British Waterways has reopened two thirds of its 1,600 mile towpath network, the Forestry Commission reopened 80 sites before Easter and hundreds of National Trust properties are now open.

Let me say, particularly to Conservative Members, that even authorities, such as Buckinghamshire, that have retained a blanket approach are now responding to public demands to review decisions on individual paths. Such authorities may or may not be playing politics with the Government, but they must understand that they certainly should not play politics with rural businesses in their areas.

We are aware that rare breeds, particularly the hefted Herdwicks on the fells, are a real issue. Those special bloodlines must be preserved and we are still considering the best way to ensure that they are.

**Mr. Tom King** (Bridgwater): Is the Wales Office represented on the Minister's working party? If so, has he explained to it why he proposes to offer businesses—whether in Somerset, Devon or Cumbria—significantly worse terms of assistance than those that will be offered in Wales?

I endorse the remarks of the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). It is true that seaside areas had a reasonable Easter for tourism, because some people who might have gone into the countryside or to the national parks were diverted to seaside areas. However, prospects in truly rural areas, such as the national parks, are every bit as dire as so many of us

feared they would be, and they continue to be so. In those circumstances, the businesses that are anxiously listening to the Minister will have received scant comfort. Interest-free loans are not a blanket measure, because particular businesses can decide whether to take them up. However, unless the Treasury understands that such loans are the only measure that will genuinely help those businesses, the true infrastructure for tourism in rural areas will be lost.

**Mr. Meacher:** The question of the level of rate relief and the total to which it applies is a matter for England and the devolved Administrations to decide for themselves. The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that, in Wales, the relief is significantly higher, but that is a matter for the Administration there. We have judged what we believe a right and fair package to be.

The right hon. Gentleman said that certain businesses and areas are still suffering, and I am not complacent about that. I am well aware that many businesses are in a dire state. In some ways, what happened over the Easter break has eased the problem a bit. However, that is not true in some cases, and in others, businesses face the long period until Whitsun with a reduction in bookings. I entirely realise that.

The question is to decide the best way of providing help. The fastest way to give businesses help is to use the existing channels, and that is why we made £120 million additional lending available through the small firms loan guarantee scheme—*[Interruption.]* I am aware of the interest rate, which we are considering. However, we have extended the scheme to more businesses, including catering, retail and tourism businesses. In addition, we have given greater flexibility on repayment holidays and up to 10 years to repay. I have also met the banks, which assure me that they are taking a sympathetic approach. We will continue to consider all the options for helping businesses, including soft loan schemes, but we must be satisfied that new schemes will work quickly and are well targeted. Of course, as we have made clear, we cannot afford to fund every business.

On all the visits that I have made, and in all the meetings of the rural taskforce and with the rural development agencies, I have made it clear that we need precise, quantified evidence of the degree of need and the cost of relief. We are beginning to receive a considerable amount of information from various organisations, including the regional development agencies, which we are actively considering. I hope that we will be able to make a decision soon.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that his statements today and a few weeks ago reflect his ability to provide some relief because of the state of the economy, by contrast with the time when the Tories were in government—the experts in running up deficits instead of surpluses? Does he also acknowledge that I was in Parliament in 1992 when a crisis was caused in seven separate regions? Thousands of businesses went down the pan. It was not a case of 70 or 80 per cent. losses; all the shops and businesses that relied on the pits went under. Not one single penny was given by the Tory Government to help those failing businesses. Is he further aware that in Carlisle, where the current crisis is causing a big problem, the Tories called for an election for a Liberal seat and the people, who are so appreciative of the money that is being provided, kicked the Tories out, beat the Liberals and Labour won the seat?

**Mr. Meacher:** My hon. Friend, as so often, makes a telling point. We are all aware that the Tories are extremely good at offering large sums just before an election that they know they are going to lose and which they will not, therefore, have to meet.

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that, had he come to Staffordshire where there are 47 outbreaks of the disease or on an excursion to the Welsh marches with my wife and me last week, he would have been horrified by the complacency, unimaginativeness and ungenerosity of his statement, which did not begin to acknowledge the devastation in rural areas? Will he also accept that it is far more important to compensate businesses and to ensure that they survive—some of them depend on the agricultural shows that are being cancelled right, left and centre—than to go on bleating about footpaths? Does he know that, in my constituency, canal towpaths are open within 3 ft of livestock in fields, whereas playing fields in village centres are closed? There is total confusion about what is being done and he is taking a risk by encouraging the reopening of some footpaths.

**Mr. Meacher:** The hon. Gentleman is usually a fair man, but his comments are over the top. Incidentally, I was in the Welsh marches as part of my most recent visit and I saw at first hand the situation in parts of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire. I entirely agree that some local authorities are confused even now about what can be safely opened. There is no justification for that. The guidelines set out exactly how the guidance is to be operated. The great majority of local authorities are opening not only footpaths, but parks and facilities—including, as he suggests, playing fields inside urban areas. It is ridiculous that they were ever closed, but they can certainly be reopened.

I ask the hon. Gentleman to consider not just any particular item in the package but the cumulative weight of all the measures to which I have referred. They amount to over £200 million, and if we add what rural development agencies and charitable bodies have offered, the total is about £220 million, which is not a small sum. I am still seeking detailed evidence on which further selective but well targeted help can be based, and the hon. Gentleman ought to recognise that.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): There are 111 landfill sites in England being used for the disposal of carcases. What action has been taken to ensure that we are following European Union regulations, which say that carcases should make up only 5 per cent. of the content of such sites, with the other 95 per cent. being normal waste? That is particularly important in my constituency at the Erin void, where there is a problem because the site is right next to the communities of Duckmanton and Poolsbrook. We must ensure that not too many carcases are sent to those areas.

**Mr. Meacher:** The Environment Agency is responsible for ensuring that landfill sites are used in accordance with both EU and national regulations. I have no evidence that

*[Mr. Meacher]*

that is not happening, but if there is such evidence, I will be glad to follow it up. I do not know the particular sites to which my hon. Friend referred, but if he writes to me, I will pursue the matter.

**Mr. David Prior** (North Norfolk): Does the Minister agree that the foot and mouth virus could still be entering the country in imported meat products? If so, why does he not ban the importation of all meat products from countries that have the disease?

**Mr. Meacher:** That is one of the issues that the Government will be considering once the number of outbreaks begins steadily to reduce and we can see an end to this episode. The matter has been raised before, and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will examine it closely.

**Mr. Eric Martlew** (Carlisle): May I take my right hon. Friend back to the £15 million given by the taskforce to the RDAs? It is very welcome in Cumbria, but is it the first instalment? Is he convinced that the RDAs have the mechanism for giving out the money? Will he ensure that Cumbria, the worst affected county, is treated generously when the money is distributed?

**Mr. Meacher:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for what he said about the package in relation to Cumbria. My discussions with the leader and the chief executive of Cumbria county council lead me to believe that it is welcome, and I am glad to hear my hon. Friend confirm that. We believe that the RDAs are the right bodies to disburse the moneys. They have had considerable success in getting to know all the stakeholders and many of the smaller businesses in their areas. They, better than central Government, can distribute money to make sure that it is maximally effective. If there is further aid, which we are considering, we certainly intend that it should be delivered through them.

**Mr. John Burnett** (Torridge and West Devon): The Minister will know that my constituency has been dreadfully affected by the foot and mouth crisis. It has had a devastating impact not only on agriculture but on every business, including those in tourism and trekking. Dartmoor, in particular, is unbelievably badly affected and has come to a standstill. I spoke just now to the chief executive of Dartmoor national park. Will the Minister please ensure that the affected area boundaries are re-examined every week and that the reasons for changing or not changing them are published? I cannot emphasise enough that it is crucial to get the countryside open as soon as possible.

**Mr. Meacher:** I hear what the hon. Gentleman says and I realise that his constituency is one of the worst affected in the country. In terms of dealing with the backlog, Devon is probably the most seriously affected area now that the backlog in Cumbria has been cleared to a large degree. I accept that Dartmbor in particular has been grievously affected.

I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about a regular—he says weekly—re-examination of the infected area boundaries. I shall certainly discuss that with my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I undertake to ensure that what the hon. Gentleman seeks to achieve can be achieved, perhaps by the use of some such method as he suggests.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Given that the rapid disposal of mountains of carcases is crucial, have the rural taskforce or the Government been in touch with the Nevada department of agriculture at Reno or the school of veterinary medicine at the Louisiana state university at Baton Rouge, both of which have experience of the use of napalm? Is it not true that napalm will dispose of carcases in 60 minutes, whereas pyres take three days, and that because of napalm's lack of vaporising effect, its use does not give rise to the by-products, such as dioxins, that may arise from the burning of railway sleepers or old tyres?

Should not the use of napalm be considered urgently? Is the reason why it is not being considered, even though it was suggested in writing four weeks ago, the fact that there are overtones of Vietnam that might not be acceptable to the public? Given the crisis in the disposal of carcases, should we not at least think about it?

**Mr. Meacher:** My hon. Friend will not be surprised to learn that we have not consulted the Nevada and Louisiana authorities, but I take his point. I have said that the Government's priorities in order of preference are rendering, incineration in industrial plant, and burial on registered landfill sites. Those remain our priorities.

In Devon, the only option—other than the one that the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) unwisely suggested—is the use of pyres in the open field. We recognise that issues of public health are involved and we have tried to reduce dioxin emissions, as well as those of other relevant pollutants such as particulates, oxides of nitrogen and sulphur dioxide, by avoiding the use of wood treated with chlorinated agents such as lindane, large amounts of PVC on pyres, and chlorine bleaches in disinfectants. However, I have no Vietnam-related inhibitions about napalm and I am perfectly prepared to look at its use. If it can make a contribution to the—I hope—rapidly decreasing number of fires in open fields, I am happy to take it on board.

**Mr. Maclean:** Can the Minister not understand the seething anger in Cumbria when, with 40 per cent. of the country's cases, Cumbria—and, indeed, England—is treated as the poor relation; when we see £6 million lobbed to the tourist board across the border while peanuts are given to the Cumbria tourist board; and when we see on the Wales Office or Welsh Assembly website the boast that the rate relief given there is far more generous than that given in England? Can he not understand the mounting anger when, although the Labour-controlled county council says that we will lose £530 million by July, we get only a share of £15 million given to the RDA, which is money down the drain? Minister, we need cash now for the businesses that are being affected to save jobs now, as the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) suggested, not to regenerate them in six months' time.

**Mr. Meacher:** I recognise the right hon. Gentleman's sincerity. When I came to Cumbria, I was accompanied by him and I recognised his concern for the area. In areas

such as Penrith and Longtown, the region has been extremely badly hit. He is wrong to suggest that sums such as £6 million have been handed over in a cavalier fashion to the British Tourist Authority or the English Tourism Council. Those sums will assist areas such as Cumbria as much as others.

I recognise that although Cumbria and Devon will get the lion's share of the latest £15 million that I mentioned earlier, that is not sufficient by itself. The right hon. Gentleman will have heard me say on the day of my visit—if I remember correctly, I made this comment in a meeting at Longtown and in Penrith—that I wanted detailed information and quantifiable data on the basis of which I could judge the size of package necessary to tide businesses over. I am glad to say that the Cumbria taskforce, which is a good body, has been diligent in providing that information. I repeat that we are actively considering what further aid can quickly be given in a practical and well-targeted manner.

**Mr. Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter): Will my right hon. Friend intensify pressure on local authorities to reopen public footpaths? At Easter, I did a good deal of walking in Devon, where far too many footpaths are still unnecessarily closed. Also, can we please have an extra bank holiday in the autumn, as has been requested by the British tourism industry?

**Mr. Meacher:** We are extremely keen to reopen more footpaths. I know that the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston, will redouble her efforts to ensure that that happens. A large number of footpaths—I am not sure whether it is a majority—have now been opened, but many that are still closed could undoubtedly safely be used. We will certainly exert pressure to ensure that the guidance and guidelines are properly adhered to. On the question of a public holiday, I said in the south-west, where I think that the idea was promulgated, that we had considered the proposal. However, it is not currently on the Government's agenda.

**Mr. Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar): The Minister spoke about ways of reducing the public health risks from pyres. Today, he has been reported in various news reports as saying that the Government are monitoring the situation to establish a clear picture of how dangerous the pyres are. However, that is inconsistent with what I was told at a seminar organised for hon. Members three weeks ago, in which I asked what temperature the pyres had to reach to ensure that the virus was killed. I was told that there was a slight risk at the very beginning of the burning of a pyre, before the temperature started to rise, but that the Ministry of Defence was carrying out monitoring down wind of pyres to assess the virus and other risks. Presumably, that monitoring has been going on for a month, so surely an analysis of the health risks is now available. Will he publish the results and provide an assessment now of the health risks from pyres?

**Mr. Meacher:** I have already made it abundantly clear today that, although there is public health concern about dioxins, the matter must be seen in perspective. We estimate that the pyres have so far generated about 18 per cent. of the total amount—about 350 g—that is generated annually in this country. That needs to be seen in proportion, as the amount is about the same as that which is produced by two bonfire nights. Of course, bonfires on Guy Fawkes night undoubtedly generate a considerable amount of dioxins. That is understood by the public. I put the matter in those terms because it is important to see it in perspective.

We will certainly publish any information that we have about the public health impacts of dioxins. We are not complacent about that and we know that there is a public health risk. We are trying to minimise that risk and we are considering the options for disposal that will produce the least risk for the public. At the same time, we must recognise that leaving carcases rotting in the fields is the worst option of all. The problem needs to be dealt with one way or another. The Holdsworthy pyre is now being monitored. All the main pollutants, including dioxins, are being monitored and we will certainly publish the results.

**Mr. Nick Ainger** (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): In Pembrokeshire, we had the best Easter for many years. One of the reasons for that was the work of the county council and the Pembrokeshire coast national park with the National Farmers Union and the Farmers Union of Wales to open as many footpaths as possible before Easter. I emphasise that every footpath was opened with the full agreement of the local farmer and landowner. That needs to be replicated throughout the country. May I recommend to my right hon. Friend the advice and risk assessment that Pembrokeshire county council and the Pembrokeshire coast national park conducted? All local authorities should work with local farming organisations and tourist associations to open as many footpaths as possible.

**Mr. Meacher:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments and the example shown by Pembrokeshire. We are trying to achieve what he recommends. We have called together local authorities, and Government offices in every region have organised meetings with local authorities to ensure that they understand the guidance and the guidelines, and give a commitment to open footpaths, parks and other facilities as quickly as possible. I hope that his request is therefore being rapidly fulfilled.

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): The Minister will have noted some scepticism in the House about the scale of the package compared with that of the problem. To enable us to judge properly, can he tell us the taskforce's current working estimate of the overall impact of the foot and mouth crisis on the rural economy in lost output? Will he explain why it is considered adequate to spend a few million pounds in 12 major markets overseas to promote the tourist industry when the Government find it necessary to spend hundreds of millions of pounds on promoting themselves in this country? They are now the largest advertiser in the country.

**Mr. Meacher:** The amount of money spent overseas has had a disproportionately large impact. It is therefore wrong to suggest that it was not well spent. Of course I understand that at such a time people will actively lobby their Members of Parliament for more money to be spent. However, the Government have to examine each case with great care to ensure that businesses are tided over and that due money is provided. The taxpayers provide that money and it must therefore be entirely justified.

*Mr. Meacher]*

The hon. Gentleman asked me for our best estimate of losses. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport suggested that it is approximately £140 million a week. That is a substantial total. However, the real answer is not more Government money, however desirable that might be, but getting customers and visitors back into the countryside to spend their money in the way they wish.

**Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): I thank my right hon. Friend for his informal contacts with the Scottish Executive to ensure that the west highland way and Loch Lomond in my constituency were open for business at Easter. The Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise are coming to a conference that I am organising at Loch Lomond on Friday. Two hundred businesses will attend and I look to them for maximum flexibility and good news. Despite the protests of the Scottish National party, the ministerial visit and encouragement to tour operators from north America and Europe represent money well spent. Our aim is to open the countryside. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that the initiative continues?

**Mr. Meacher:** I am sure that my hon. Friend is right. We acknowledge that some limited quantities of Government money—perhaps, depending on the evidence, more than is currently being spent—are needed. However, the best way to assist people around not only Loch Lomond but in all resorts throughout the country is not simply to throw Government money at them, but to enable people who want to experience the beautiful landscape of Scotland to see for themselves that much of the propaganda that is spread abroad is wrong. They can then take back that message, thus enabling the market to operate normally and encouraging visitors to flock in from abroad. That is beginning to happen. The money has indeed been well spent.

**Mr. John Redwood** (Wokingham): Will the Minister tell the House how little money has found its way into rural businesses from his various schemes so far? The truth is that practically nothing has got through, while thousands of rural businesses are bleeding to death. Are not the Government dithering over vaccination and movement while businesses die and animals suffer?

**Mr. Meacher:** I know that some Members, such as the right hon. Gentleman, like to prepare their questions and come to the House to make good political points. Let me answer him. We are providing mandatory rate relief of £24 million; discretionary rate relief of £22 million; matched contributions, in regard to donations from the public, of £14 million, including £5 million from the Government; £120 million under the small firms loan guarantee scheme; a £15 million package for the four hardest hit areas; and VAT and income tax deferments that the Treasury now estimates to be worth some £12 million a year. That is solid, clear, precise and valuable assistance. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman makes a sign at me to show that he thinks that that amounts to nil. That is silly, because it amounts to a very great deal. Whether it is sufficient is a matter for argument, but to suggest that it is worthless shows the childish attitude of the Opposition as we approach an election.

**Mr. Jim Cousins** (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Those of us who represent big-city areas have rightly allowed these discussions and statements to be dominated by people such as our colleagues from Cumbria and Northumberland. However, I bring to the attention of my right hon. Friend the fact that a particularly vicious and unsubstantiated smear has been widespread. It is that restaurants in Newcastle's Chinatown were one of the sources of the outbreak. That has had a substantial impact on business in Newcastle's Chinatown and on other Chinese restaurants and takeaways throughout Tyneside. They are not covered at all by his proposals or by the Government's proposals to provide relief in rural areas. Is he willing to meet my hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) and me—we represent the part of Newcastle concerned—to consider how we can address the real problems that have been generated for those businesses by a vicious rumour and smear for which not a shred of evidence has been produced?

**Mr. Meacher:** My hon. Friend makes a serious point. One of the disadvantages in this kind of episode or crisis—whatever it is called—is that allegations are wildly thrown about and undoubtedly do serious damage. As he said, there is no evidence whatsoever—at least, none of which I am aware—that Chinese restaurants in the Newcastle area were responsible for the outbreak. Many other allegations have been made that are quite wrong. I read in yesterday's newspapers that deer had been widely infected with foot and mouth. Again, that is completely untrue, and it is important to correct such reports when we can. If it would help to meet my hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) with a delegation to try to put this matter right, I should be happy to do so.

**Mr. Brian Cotter** (Weston-super-Mare): In response to concerns about the ceiling for relief being set at £12,000—many of us think that it should be £50,000—the Minister said that discussions would be held with the Local Government Association. When will we hear the association's response on that issue? The Government talk about a sympathetic approach to deferral of VAT. What exactly does that mean? Furthermore, when people initially rang the hotline to ask for a deferral of tax, they were told that they would have to pay 8.5 per cent. interest, although it has since been suggested that that will not be the case. Will the Minister give the House a clear statement that people in great difficulty will not be charged 8.5 per cent. interest?

**Mr. Meacher:** On the first question, the hon. Gentleman is right. As I said, we have asked the Local Government Association to provide us, by the end of today, with details of its view—if it is its view—of the inadequacy of the £12,000 rateable value threshold and of the 5 per cent. as well. We will certainly give a response, but it will depend on the quality of the evidence. If we are persuaded that it is true that the 5 per cent. contribution from rural local authorities and the £12,000 rateable value threshold are seriously impeding the whole purpose of the exercise—which is to bring help to needy non-farm rural businesses—we shall be prepared to look at the position again.

The hon. Gentleman asked about a sympathetic approach on the part of banks—or perhaps he referred to the Inland Revenue, and the VAT authorities. If documented evidence is provided relating to the level of takings, and a plausible, demonstrable case is made that that figure results from foot and mouth, the offices involved will treat the matter sympathetically, in terms of the interest rate and the speed of repayment. If that is not the case, I shall be glad to hear evidence.

As for the deferment of VAT—which was mentioned earlier—I read in the paper that an 8.5 per cent. charge was being imposed. That is completely untrue. I said in my statement that in cases of hardship the 8.5 per cent. interest rate would be waived, and that is the case.

**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin** (West Derbyshire): Can the Minister explain why Scotland and Wales, which receive all their money via Her Majesty's Treasury, can give their local authorities a far better settlement than he can give English authorities? Has it anything to do with a Scottish Chancellor of the Exchequer and a fairly incompetent Deputy Prime Minister?

**Mr. Meacher:** Leaving aside the abuse—which ill befits what is a serious question—I should say that this is a matter for devolved Administrations. One of the consequences of devolution is precisely that those Administrations make their own decisions. They spend their money—they spend their taxpayers' revenues—in the way that they choose. They have done so; they are perfectly entitled to do so; and we have done the same.

## Points of Order

4.37 pm

**Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Beckenham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise the issue of the Crystal Palace Bill, presented on Tuesday 10 April, the day on which the House rose for the Easter recess. I have written to you about it, and also put a note on the board telling the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) that I was going to raise it.

The Crystal Palace Bill would transfer Crystal Palace and the park wholly to the Greater London Authority. Crystal Palace lies entirely within my constituency, although the London boroughs of Lambeth, Lewisham, Southwark and, indeed, Croydon surround the park. The hon. Member for Croydon, Central—whose Bill we are discussing—shares a boundary with me in the southern part of Beckenham but does not, as far as I am aware, share any boundary with me at Crystal Palace.

I seek your guidance on a number of matters, Mr. Speaker. I should be grateful if you could tell me what courtesies you believe should apply when a private Member's Bill affects another Member's constituency entirely, in terms of informing that Member—let alone Bromley council, which has heard nothing whatever about the Bill from the hon. Member for Croydon, Central.

More important, I understand that the Bill is potentially hybrid, because Crystal Palace park is governed by private legislation. I note, as you will have noted, Mr. Speaker, that Second Reading is due to take place on 11 May. If the Bill is likely to be hybrid—on which point I should be grateful for your guidance—will it be sent to the Examiners of Petitions? If so, will that happen before 11 May? Will the Examiners of Petitions be able to receive representations about the Bill before that date, or will Second Reading have to be postponed, whatever other external events may occur?

I am sure that you understand, Mr. Speaker, that I regard the Bill as an intolerable interference in the affairs of another Member of Parliament. I believe that it is, of itself, very complex, and should at least have warranted the giving of notice to those involved, as opposed to the total discourtesy of silence.

**Mr. Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving me notice of her point of order. The hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Davies) was not out of order in presenting his Bill. However, now that the text has become available, it is necessary to see whether the private Bill Standing Orders should apply to it. That will be the task of the Examiners of Petitions for Private Bills, to whom the Bill is today being referred. If those Standing Orders do apply, the Bill will be a hybrid Bill. I am afraid that the hon. Lady is not able under the Standing Orders to make representations directly to the examiners, but if the Bill makes further progress, she will, of course, be able to contribute to the debate.

As to prior consultation with the hon. Lady, notice was given of the introduction of the Bill in the usual way. The House's rules do not require anything further, but it would certainly have been in accordance with the established courtesies of the House if the hon. Gentleman had given notice of his intention to the hon. Lady.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am sure that the whole House will want

*[Ann Clwyd]*

to congratulate the authorities in Turkey on this morning successfully bringing to a conclusion a dangerous crisis involving hostages, including British hostages, without a shot being fired. However, there is another matter in Turkey. I remind the House that the Foreign Secretary has repeatedly said that the criterion for Turkey's membership of the European Union must be an improvement in human rights in Turkey. At this moment, 250 people in Turkish prisons are on hunger strike. Seventeen have died up to today. I think that we should ask the Foreign Secretary to make a statement to the House on what pressure the British Government are putting on the Government of Turkey to bring to an equally successful conclusion the hunger strike, which, obviously, should not continue.

**Mr. Speaker:** I am pleased that the people in the hotel in Turkey are no longer in any danger. As for the question of a statement, it is not a matter for the Chair.

# Orders of the Day

## Finance Bill

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

(Clauses 1 to 3 and 16 to 53 and Schedules 4 to 11)

*Considered in Committee, pursuant to Order.*

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

4.42 pm

**Mr. Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): On a point of order, Sir Alan. It is appropriate to draw to your attention to the fact that we are witnessing today a historic breach of the conventions of the House, in that the timetable motion limits the flexibility of the Opposition in today's debate. May I quote briefly from "Parliament: Functions, Practice and Procedures" by J. A. Griffith, emeritus professor of public law, Michael Ryle, a former Clerk of Committees in the House of Commons, and Mr. Wheeler-Booth, Clerk Assistant in the House of Lords? It says, on page 253:

"after second reading, which provides an opportunity for a broad debate on the Government's tax proposals against the background of the national economy, the committee stage of the bill is now divided between a committee of the whole House and a standing committee. The motion to commit certain clauses to a committee of the whole House (and sometimes new clauses on specified matters) is moved by the Government, but the choice of which matters should be considered in this way is, in practice, largely left to the Opposition."

The timetable motion means that the Opposition have very little opportunity to raise the matters that they wish to raise. No new clauses are permitted by the timetable motion.

All the clauses on the aggregates levy—clauses 16 to 49—are being taken on the Floor of the House, and all the serious clauses on that tax come at the beginning of the group of clauses, so have to be finished by 7 pm. The matter has not been left to the Opposition. If there were no 7 pm deadline, it would be easy to address those serious matters within the time scale. Perhaps this is a matter for the Procedure Committee to revisit, because the procedures and conventions of the House have been quite dramatically flouted today.

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** The hon. Gentleman will understand that this is not a matter on which the Chair can rule, as it is determined by other means. I have allowed the hon. Gentleman to make his point, but it now seems to be a matter of his approaching the Chairman of the Procedure Committee if he would like the matter to be examined further.

**Mr. Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton): Further to that point of order, Sir Alan. I wish to associate the Liberal Democrats with the request made by the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). Is it possible for you to consult the Government Whips to see whether they would be prepared to reconsider their position, given the strong feeling throughout the Opposition parties that there should be a chance for other issues to be debated during the Committee of the whole House ?

**The Chairman:** I am always ready to try to use my beneficial influence wherever possible in the House,

but what the hon. Gentleman is suggesting is outwith what I am permitted to do, especially in the absence of a Business Sub-Committee, for which no provision was made on this occasion.

## Clause 16

CHARGE TO AGGREGATES LEVY

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): I beg to move amendment No. 4, in page 12, line 25, at end insert—

'(2A) Prior to the commencement date, the Treasury shall publish a scheme of rebates to those persons charged with the levy proportionate to the environmental protection measures employed by that person in the process of commercial exploitation of aggregate, and such a scheme shall have effect on the commencement date.'.

The points of order raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and by the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) are relevant to the debate. A new clause has been tabled that is of direct relevance to the amendment, and common sense would suggest that they should be debated together, but the decision of the business managers means that we cannot discuss the new clause. We are discussing, at best, half the matter under consideration, and there will have to be a further debate in Committee covering very much the same issues; a debate from which, sadly—or perhaps not sadly—I will be excluded, as I will not be serving on the Committee.

The amendment is crucial in terms of understanding the Government's intentions towards the aggregates levy, the effect on the industry and the way in which the House would wish it to proceed. I represent an area where quarrying is a major industry. It does not employ huge numbers of people, but it is significant. The Mendips—particularly the east Mendips—contain some of the most concentrated areas of production in the national limestone industry, so this matter impacts substantially on my constituents.

Living, as I do, in the east Mendips area—not a million miles away from quarries from which some of the largest movements of material in Europe take place every day—I am aware of the pressures on the industry. There are strong reasons for providing the best possible environmental protection for the local areas in the context of national aggregates production. However, there are also strong reasons for recognising that this is an important industry which employs a great number of people locally, if not nationally, and is essential to our national well-being, as it produces—literally—the building blocks of our built environment and infrastructure.

Getting the balance right is important; I struggled with that for 12 years as a member of the minerals planning authority of Somerset county council, when we were dealing with the matter daily. We dealt with new applications and, in the case of interim development orders, with permissions that should have expired. We tried to reconcile the interests of the local community with those of the industry, and came to a reasonably satisfactory conclusion. In the past 15 years we have made substantial progress in finding ways to accommodate the industry, which has responded to the pressures that have been put on it. The industry has sometimes resisted those pressures, but it has also recognised a wider community interest.

As Ministers will know, the aggregates levy has been much discussed with the industry, and it was no great surprise that provision for the levy formed part of the Bill, because it had been announced in earlier statements.

**Mr. Allan Rogers** (Rhondda): The hon. Gentleman said that the issue had been much discussed with the industry, but that suggests that the Government listened to what was said. The proposals have not been altered in any way, and my experience of being involved in at least one discussion suggests that the Government have a closed mind on them.

**Mr. Heath:** The hon. Gentleman pre-empts what I was about to say. Although much discussion has taken place, and the industry—to its credit—has gone a long way towards meeting some of the Government's objectives, its proposals have effectively been rejected and a statutory levy will be applied, irrespective of whether it will do the job that the Government, local communities and, for that matter, the industry, recognise needs to be done. We need to improve local environmental standards and procedures to achieve the best possible result, and that is the issue at the heart of the amendment.

The voluntary proposals suggested represented a good deal for both the Government and the industry. Unfortunately, those proposals were not universally approved within the industry, because—perhaps inevitably—some did not wish to improve their working practices. However, some have already done a good job and were prepared to take on the challenge set by the Government, and to establish a sensible relationship. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is continuing discussions with the industry and recognises the moves that have been made, but sadly, that view is not shared by the Treasury, which is why we have a largely unchanged proposal that includes a half promise that, at some stage in the future, a rebate scheme will be introduced. In the meantime, the Government will apply the tax irrespective of the consequences for the industry and for local communities.

**Mr. Rogers:** I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not continue to use the word "environment" when talking about this tax. He must realise that the tax will not affect the environmental position and that a regulatory framework already exists. This is a money-raising tax, and has nothing to do with the environment.

**Mr. Heath:** I contend that it is possible to inject into the levy a little element of environmental protection, which it does not possess at the moment. The hon. Gentleman chides me for not being sufficiently aggressive towards Ministers early in my speech, but I wish to set out the proposals as I see them, and then to mention one way of improving them.

**Mr. Rogers:** The hon. Gentleman should get it right; I am aggressive not towards my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench, but towards the tax, which is wrong and ill conceived.

**Mr. Heath:** Clearly the hon. Gentleman is against the sin, but not the sinner. In my observations I will encompass both.

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): I understand the hon. Gentleman's eminently reasonable concern that the details of the rebate scheme should be published before the commencement date of the levy, but why will he not bestir himself one little bit further and make the reasonable demand that the Government publish those details before the passage of the Bill?

**Mr. Heath:** I am interested not in the passage of the Bill but in the start of this iniquitous tax. I have already voted against it in the Budget debate, so my position is absolutely clear. I am trying to get the Government out of the hole that they have dug—which is perhaps the appropriate analogy in this context. They are making exactly the same mistake as their predecessors made with the landfill tax. The way in which the tax is presented reeks of environmental rectitude, but it does absolutely nothing for the environment and hits the wrong targets.

The great problem with the tax is that it will not work. The amendment would help it to meet at least some of the Government's stated objectives. The tax will not improve the industry's environmental performance or create a more sustainable aggregates supply. The voluntary levy forcefully advocated by the Quarry Products Association and others would have met some of the objectives.

Crushed rock quarries have by-products, exactly as china clay quarries and others that are exempted from the provisions do. There are scalpings, overburden and washings. Scalpings make up about 40 per cent. of the material produced in a limestone quarry, but they have a very limited market. They are used for various jobs, but there is a strict limit to what people are prepared to pay for them.

If scalpings are included in the levy, they will not be sold, and other materials will be used. Indeed, the Government have clearly stated that one of their objectives is that china clay spoil should be used as an alternative. What, though, is to happen to the unsold scalpings, which thereby become waste?

**Sir Robert Smith** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): They will become subject to landfill tax.

**Mr. Heath:** Indeed, they could be doubly taxed if they were moved off the quarry.

The scalpings will have to be dumped, either in piles on the edge of the quarry or impacted into the base, which effectively sterilises quality rock lower down and takes up the productive floor of the quarry, to no one's benefit. It is possible to wash scalpings and separate out the clay, but that will not be done if the aggregates levy is applied, because it will be completely uneconomic.

The same applies to overburden, which is a substantial by-product of aggregates extraction—in a basalt quarry, for example, or when much of what is taken out is overlying jurassic oolitic limestone. That has to be taken off first if one is not to sterilise the stone that one wants, and it has to go somewhere. It has low quality uses, but if a levy is put on it, it will have no use and no market.

5 pm

If there is no system of local environmental improvement and no exemption scheme, we shall effectively be removing the white hills in Cornwall that we have all seen and agree should not be there—the moonscape around St. Austell—and replacing them with piles of red earth in Somerset. People will say, "What a shame, Somerset used to be such a beautiful county and look what they have done to it." We will create a wasteland, a moonscape, simply by applying this tax. I do not think that that is the Government's intention, but it is the inevitable outcome of what they propose unless the clause is amended.

With products that are derived from aggregates, there is a strong environmental argument that, given that we need pre-cast concrete products, the best way of producing them is as near as possible to the point of production of the stone. Otherwise, large quantities of stone are moved around the country to concrete works to form pre-cast concrete products that are then moved somewhere else, resulting in unnecessary lorry movements and adding to the environmental cost of the product for no benefit. Yet if the levy is applied in its present form to those added-value manufacturing processes, they will be priced out of the market. Producers in other countries will make those products—and although the Bill imposes a levy on raw aggregate, there will be none on manufactured produce. As a result, it will be non-commercial to use a local by-product to produce locally processed goods, and imports will be sucked in to undercut them, simply because of a misapplication of the levy.

**Mr. Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there are two ways of solving that problem, which is obviously acute if we want to stop 10,000 or so jobs being exported unnecessarily? The Government could adopt either the very wide exemption scheme proposed in his amendment, or our proposal in amendment No. 26, which redefines aggregates in such a way as to eliminate pre-cast concrete from the levy.

**Mr. Heath:** The hon. Gentleman is right. I know that I would be out of order were I to refer directly to the amendment to which he alludes. However, there are undoubtedly two ways of dealing with the problem. It is a very big issue in terms of potential employment and revenue loss. The estimated cost to the pre-cast concrete industry is £40 million; the levy will represent a 25 per cent. take on its profits. That is an unsustainable process of taxation, and it will simply drive jobs out of the country. There might be an argument for that if the levy achieved the environmental effects claimed by the Government, but it will not. It will have quite the reverse effect: it will be of disbenefit in environmental terms.

**Sir Robert Smith:** I emphasise my hon. Friend's point about the disbenefit in environmental terms. Transporting such products will clearly be environmentally damaging to the communities and the environment through which they pass.

**Mr. Heath:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He recognises the problem in his constituency, which has both aggregate producers and a thriving port. It is obvious that we must find other areas of supply.

**Mr. Andrew Tyrie** (Chichester): Does not the most severe environmental damage in many areas result from

the transport of the aggregates rather than the digging? Does that not strengthen even further the point made by the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith)?

**Mr. Heath:** The hon. Gentleman, too, is absolutely right. Indeed, his point is supported by the research that the Government themselves commissioned into the environmental disbenefits of the quarrying industry. The research found that the main problem was quarry lorries going past people's doors and windows along roads that were never built to accommodate them. That is the aspect of quarrying that people find most worrying—much more so than the occasional distant thud of an explosion that everyone expects anyway, or even the holes in the ground, which are often masked. If the hon. Gentleman came to the Torr works, which is one of the biggest quarries in the country, he would not know it was there until he arrived at the gates, because a great deal of landscaping has been done to ensure that it is not evident. He would, however, be aware of the heavy transport passing through all our villages—not so much from Torr, which has provided a railhead, but certainly from many other quarries. That has a substantial effect on local communities.

**Mr. Tom Levitt** (High Peak): The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point about transport, but is he aware that the Government already provide schemes whereby grants can be given to quarry companies to improve rail access, as has happened with great success in some constituencies, including my own?

**Mr. Heath:** I have just said that the Torr works has a railhead, as does the Hanson quarry at Whatley. Those are very welcome, but the tax could, if designed properly, encourage more companies to have one. In its present form, with no rebate scheme, the levy will discourage companies from taking steps to improve the local environment. There is no competitive benefit for them; indeed, there is no benefit beyond public-spiritedness and a good relationship with their local communities. I fear that the Bill will result in enormous environmental disbenefit in communities such as mine.

**Mr. John Burnett** (Torridge and West Devon): Does my hon. Friend agree that many constituencies, including mine, have virtually no railways, but several quarries and utterly unsuitable roads?

**Mr. Heath:** My hon. Friend is right. It was ever thus, I fear; when I was leader of Somerset county council, the minutes of the council's first meetings were kept in my office, and when I read the minutes of the very first, I found a discussion of the difficulties caused by quarry lorries in the Mendips and their effect on local roads. That meeting was held in 1889, so the issue is of very long standing.

**Mr. Alasdair Morgan** (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Is it not likely that the condition of the roads will be even worse once the tax is imposed, as local authorities, whose budgets will be drained by the tax, will have even less to spend on them?

**Mr. Heath:** It is an interesting by-product of the levy that the cost will fall heavily on local authorities, which will be trying to repair the infrastructure damaged by heavy transport.

We were touching on the issue of employment loss in the concrete industry as a result of these measures. There is the same potential in the quarrying industry itself. The Government estimate that the introduction of the levy will reduce demand for aggregate by 10 per cent.—although, interestingly, not demand for the highest grade aggregate, which is the main driver of a quarry's output. The reduction will be in demand for the lower grade aggregate, and will have little direct financial benefit in terms of the demand for new permissions. At the same time, the changes in specification will increase costs for the primary producers. As a result, cost-saving will be achieved only by passing on costs to local authorities, or by reducing the number of people directly employed in the industry.

The Government's claim for the tax is that the surplus will go into a sustainability fund. That was the way in which it was originally sold to local communities in quarrying areas. They were told that it was a great idea because some money would be taken out of the quarrying industry and put into making their local environment better. However, the proposals and the responses to the consultation on the sustainability fund do not for one moment suggest that communities local to the quarries will benefit.

I have a great deal of time for the notion that something should be done about St. Austell, which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor). If money is available to do something about the China clay spoil tips, no doubt he will welcome it. However, to sell that as a direct benefit to communities affected by quarrying in Somerset is stretching the tail a little further than may be appropriate.

When the Government's own press release of 25 August states that local communities affected by quarrying are set to benefit from environmental improvements, I have to question the good faith of those proposals. Those benefits are not in the draft proposals. Indeed, the draft seems to ignore the responses of the minerals authorities directly affected. I know that the Financial Secretary to the Treasury has received a letter from the minerals planning forum of Somerset county council stating that in terms. It appears to the forum that the views of Somerset, of Derbyshire and of Leicestershire—the key aggregate producing areas, which between them produce almost half of England's crushed rock aggregates—have been almost completely ignored in the proposals for the administration of the sustainability fund. There is a real suspicion that, in relation to their economies and the quarrying industry, much more will go out of those areas than will come back.

That is why a rebate scheme would be of direct benefit. Such a scheme would actually specify the local environmental improvements to be undertaken by the quarrying companies, and would give them a direct commercial advantage for having done the things that we all want to be done. Indeed, the industry itself has argued strongly for that. I do not want to put words into the industry's mouth—it is clearly against the concept of an aggregates levy in toto—but having accepted that it is the Government's intention to impose such a levy, the industry is saying, in effect, "Let's have a sensible rebate scheme, and let's have it before the tax starts to operate."

As the Financial Secretary will know, one suggestion made by the Quarry Products Association is that a benchmark might be a formal environmental management

*[Mr. Heath]*

system such as ISO14001. That is one suggestion among many, but it would provide a framework whereby some of the benefits from the imposition of the tax would directly accrue to the communities affected; it would bring the benefits home. That sensible objective should commend itself to hon. Members on both sides of the House; indeed, I suspect that the proposal represents what the Government will eventually do.

**Mr. Tyrie:** That objective is the only reason for suggesting it.

**Mr. Heath:** I agree absolutely.

5.15 pm

My principal quarrel today is with the fact that, for reasons that escape me, the Government are going ahead with a commencement date for the aggregates levy without having in place the main objective—some may say the subsidiary objective—of the local environmental rebate, which would make the levy work in favour of local communities and drive down the environmental costs, as well as avoiding an increase in the commercial costs to the companies involved. That would be put right by amendment No. 4—in combination with new clause 1, which we are not allowed to discuss now, but which will be debated in the Standing Committee.

**Mr. Edward Davey:** My hon. Friend is making a powerful speech. Will he elaborate a little on the type of environmental protection measures that he wants to be included in his rebate scheme? In particular, he referred to the environmental damage done to local communities by the noise and dust from the lorries that carry the aggregates. Does he want his scheme to include measures to tackle that problem, or should it be dealt with by separate regulations?

**Mr. Heath:** My hon. Friend is right to suggest that some things are susceptible to regulation, but having wrestled with the problem for more years than I care to remember, I can tell him that it is very difficult to do by regulation all that is required. An incentive is needed for the companies to take the measures that they know they should implement if they can, because it is sometimes commercially impossible for them to do so. There is an obvious difference in attitude between the companies that take their responsibilities seriously—very often, those are the bigger companies—and those that do not. There is no "big is bad and small is good" argument here; it is often the other way around in this context.

Many of the companies are prepared to develop the infrastructure that makes a difference. Railheads were mentioned earlier, and they make an enormous difference. If a large quantity of stone can be moved by rail from Somerset to Surbiton—which is done every day—a vast number of lorry movements in inadequate lanes are prevented, which makes a big difference to local communities. If reinstatement schemes are properly funded and made to work, a huge difference is made to the use to which the quarry is put after production.

Many quarries use old permissions, which were granted in terms that no responsible planning authority would use at this stage in the game. Those companies will respond if they are given an incentive to implement all the measures that they could, if they could afford them, and if they are not commercially disadvantaged by doing so. Their proposals show that they are willing to respond. I find it inexplicable that, because of some form of misplaced machismo, the Government are determined to go ahead with the levy without including the necessary rebate structure, which I am proposing. The rebate would make a huge difference to the effectiveness of the tax in terms of its environmental benefits, and I commend it to the Committee.

**The Chairman:** May I remind the Committee that there is a limited amount of time to debate such matters, and it would be helpful if hon. Members had regard to the fact that other colleagues wish to contribute? This is not a stand part debate, and although it has ranged reasonably widely until now, it cannot be expanded into a stand part debate. Hon. Members who want to contribute to a stand part debate should bear that fact in mind in making contributions on the amendment.

**Mr. Rogers:** I have a little knowledge not of the taxation system, but of aggregates. I support all the Government's efforts in raising and spending taxes in a very positive way. My constituents and many poorer areas of the country have certainly benefited enormously as a result of the Government's financial and economic policies.

I shall not support the rebate suggestion in the amendment, because it merely tinkers with the central issue that the Committee must address. From what to what will the rebate be made? If the Government cannot get the sustainability fund that arises out of the taxation together in a proper way, I do not understand how any form of rebate system can be of specific benefit to the industry.

We are debating not a criminal activity, but an industry that is fundamental to the economy of this country. Mineral development goes back to pre-history and the Wealden area and East Anglia contain superb examples of the restoration work that can take place after the mineral workings have gone. Such areas are now popular holiday resorts.

Up until the industrial revolution and through to the present time, minerals have done much for the life of this country. I am sure that you, Sir Alan, got out of bed this morning in a house that was built of lovely sandstone or limestone, that you stepped out on to a path that was made of aggregates that had been extracted, and then on to a road that was also made up of aggregates. You may have even got on to a train that ran on metal that had been extracted from the earth and on a track that was bolstered by the aggregates that underlay the rails. Wherever we are and whatever we do, we desperately need to extract minerals from the earth.

I certainly accept that, for years, extraction took place in not too nice a fashion. For example, the china clay pits near St. Austell in Cornwall brought a great deal of wealth and industry to the area, but they are considered scars on the landscape by people who do not appreciate them properly. I come from an area in which there were 63 coal mines and where there was much exploitation and dumping of colliery spoil. Much of that land has now been landscaped and is used in a practical way.

**Mr. Burnett:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Rogers:** No, I will not because of the shortage of time.

The aggregates tax is a tax on a vital industry, and it will not serve the purpose that the Government suggest that it will. My quarrel with them is not that they are taxing as such, but that they are presenting this tax as an environmental tax.

About eight or 10 years ago, I remember sitting down with some of my colleagues when the Labour party was in opposition. One of our environmental spokesmen was terribly excited about a meeting at which a representative of Friends of the Earth had said that the extraction of material in a certain place would destroy the water table. When I had a proper job I was a geologist, so I must confess that I was a little confused and wondered how the water table could be destroyed by extraction. However, at the end of the discussion I turned round and said, "I hope that we will have a minerals policy that is not based on the views of the last lobby group to whom our spokesman talked." I fear that that has happened with this tax. It originated with a lobby group and has been dressed up even though there is no way in which it is an environmental tax. If Ministers have been convinced by their advisers or by the political input that has gone into the Department that it is an environmental tax, I am very sorry that that has happened.

Although I accept that some people may not extract minerals in the best possible way, the industry is doing a good job because it has been regulated. Planning regulations are the way to improve the environmental standards for extraction and restoration work. If the industry does not conform to those regulations, the offending companies should be shut down. However, nearly all the companies that I know of extract in a principled manner and are only too anxious to restore. The national water sports centre in Nottingham is a classic example of effective restoration after mineral extraction. It is not necessary to tax the industry to get it to behave properly, because it is already doing that. Quarries in my area have been used for recreational activities. Companies such as Foster Yeoman—I do not know whether it operates in the constituency of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath)—do superb restoration work. I recommend the books that it publishes, such as "Wildlife after Gravel".

The tax is hypocritical. If money is to be raised, let it be done practically. Although not a concern for my constituency at the moment, most mineral extraction takes place in rural areas and is often the only alternative to farming. It provides much ancillary employment in the haulage industry and other businesses that supply the quarries and quarry extractors. A tax on the industry is a tax on jobs. I cannot envisage it improving the environment. The only way to do that is to impose tight planning controls, planning regulations and planning enforcement on mineral extraction.

**Mr. William Ross** (East Londonderry): The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) said that the tax was a tax on jobs, but it is more than that: it is a tax on the cost of a house because a considerable amount of aggregates goes into building a home. Although I hope that we will have time to debate amendment No. 24, which relates to Northern Ireland, I shall concentrate on amendment No. 4, which refers to

"rebates to those persons charged with the levy".

The problem is not the detail of the tax, but its imposition. Much of what will be said will focus on its effect on the economy in general. Many people will not think that the tax matters to them individually, but it will ensure an increase in the building costs of every house. An average-sized dwelling uses about 80 tonnes of building sand, 200 or 300 tonnes of hardcore and concrete bricks and blocks. That is a considerable weight and adds up to a lot of money. I estimate that the tax will place a hidden extra cost in tax alone of much more than £1,000 on the smallest house and £2,000 or £3,000 on a larger dwelling.

We are driving up the cost of housing, and the tax will translate into a tax on all houses sold. The increase in the cost of new dwellings will increase the price of existing dwellings. When the Government consider the effect of the tax on road building, they might say, "It doesn't really matter. It's being recycled back to us in one form or another", but that is not the point. Everyone who uses aggregates in buildings and road construction puts on a percentage and the total sum at the end of the cycle will be much larger than the initial tax.

5.30 pm

I am aware of, and sympathetic to, the many valid arguments against the tax which will be made in the debate and to many of us individually. The Government's arguments for introducing it are pathetically weak. It has nothing to do with being green; it is simply a revenue-raising exercise that will do far more harm than good. The industry will not have significant revenue returned to it by any other means, so the tax is clearly not revenue neutral.

The tax will not increase recycling. By and large, where it is possible to recycle materials, people will do so. The resources are finite, and so is the capacity for recycling. Substantial recycling is already being carried out and is economically viable. Without this tax, we could and would go on recycling as much as possible throughout the country. The tax is not environmentally friendly because there is no disincentive for the primary producer who removes material from the ground. He is driven by demand from other industries.

Once again, unfortunately, it is the peripheral regions of the United Kingdom that will suffer most from the tax. In Northern Ireland, in particular, the burden will be compounded by factors that do not impact on the industry in the rest of the United Kingdom. In a letter dated 31 October last, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury said:

"These costs will be significantly higher for the transportation of concrete blocks, as these have to be handled by a specific type of truck. Taking the levy rate of £1.60 per tonne and even assuming transport costs are no greater than 10 pence per tonne mile, it would appear uneconomical to transport the processed aggregate more than . . . 16 miles."

Estimates from the industry in Northern Ireland show that it would be easy and viable to transport aggregates and their products up to 25 miles, so at least 50 per cent. of Northern Ireland is within range of the frontier, and there is no tax in the Irish Republic.

Apart from the low value of aggregates in Northern Ireland and the distribution of the industry there, we must remember that it is the only region of the UK that shares a large frontier with another state. If the Financial Secretary examines the matter a little more closely, he will realise that such a tax was considered by other EU states and rejected, as it was confidently predicted that the

*[Mr. William Ross]*

aggregates industry would collapse in countries such as Holland and France. In Great Britain, the effect of the tax is masked to some extent by the fact that all imported aggregates come by sea, so it is easy to control the taxation of material at ports. However, aggregates can simply be put on a lorry and driven across the frontier into Northern Ireland. It is a different ball game.

**Mr. Bercow:** Further to the point that I put to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) earlier, does the hon. Gentleman agree that his fear of an especially adverse impact of the tax on the people of Northern Ireland serves further to underline the necessity of publishing the details of any rebate scheme not merely before the commencement date of the tax, when it will too late to debate them, but before the passage of the Bill itself?

**Mr. Ross:** The hon. Gentleman is perfectly correct, and I hoped that the Government, who place so much stress on transparency, would be more than willing to produce all the facts and figures and the details of the research that has been carried out. They have lamentably failed to do so up to now. Those of us who have talked to the industry in Northern Ireland take the view that much, if not all, of the regional aggregates industry will suffer grievously as a consequence of the tax.

The House knows as well as I do that the Government are not averse to granting regional tax exemptions that they consider necessary—for example, the exemption from air passenger duty for travel between the highlands and islands and mainland Scotland. I think that a similar exemption should have been granted for travel to Northern Ireland. I travelled here today by air and will return home in a few days by air, just like almost everyone else who travels in and out of Northern Ireland. Sea transport of human cargo is far less prevalent now than it used to be. Exactly the same argument applies to Northern Ireland as applies to the highlands and islands—however, that is a debate for another day.

The Government have demonstrated a certain pragmatism in their approach to regional problems—the problems of being on the periphery of the kingdom—so they should have demonstrated the same pragmatism when considering the imposition of the aggregates levy in Northern Ireland. It is estimated that the industry there is worth about £35 million in tax to the Treasury. That estimate is based on the 1999 figure of 23 million tonnes of aggregates, of which 22 million tonnes would be taxed under the proposed scheme. However, it has been estimated that the imposition of the tax would cost 4,000 jobs—70 per cent. of those employed in the industry in the Province—and that it would cost the Treasury £60 million. The deal does not strike me as a good one.

The majority of the jobs in the industry are not in extraction, but in the value-added end of the process; however, the value-added end can easily migrate to the Irish Republic—indeed, some has already done so. Raw products would continue to be extracted in Northern Ireland, but they would be taken across the border to be refined or processed, usually into concrete products, and then returned to Northern Ireland, thereby escaping most of the duty—I understand that there is no tax on imported downstream products. Therefore, the environmental tax might result in up to three times more lorries on the roads of Northern Ireland, bringing the value-added products into the Province, as well as the loss of jobs in concrete manufacturing. The issue is extremely serious to those in Northern Ireland.

In addition, it must not be forgotten that the average value of raw aggregates is £2.60 a tonne in Northern Ireland, whereas the average value in Great Britain is £6.50 a tonne. Translating the proposed tax into a percentage of value, it would be a 60 per cent. tax in Northern Ireland, but only a 25 per cent. tax in Great Britain. That disproportionate burden presents an extremely serious problem that the Government should address.

In previous Budgets, the Government have demonstrated in small ways their willingness to consider the problems of those who are on the periphery of the kingdom—the air tax is one example. I can think of a few suitably pragmatic solutions to the obvious problem arising from the aggregates tax. I do not know whether the Government have carried out a thorough analysis of the impact on the industry in Northern Ireland—I shall not embarrass Ministers by asking—but to my knowledge none of their research was conducted in the Province, and I dispute the mythology of the contingent valuation system. I seek some rational consideration of the impact that one-way cross-border trade will have on the economy and job prospects in Northern Ireland. The Government should give at least some assurance that they will consider that problem.

It would be possible to exempt the Province from the tax and for the Treasury to make a net saving in the process. As a lesser evil, the Government could impose the tax at a rate that fairly reflects the lesser value of raw aggregates in Northern Ireland; that could be done by setting it at a lower rate, or introducing it as a percentage of product value. The Government could at least tax imported value-added products. Those are real options and I urge the Government to consider using them to protect the industry in Northern Ireland while there is still an industry there to protect.

Over the years, I and other Northern Ireland Members have uttered clear warnings about the effect of the steadily increasing tax on fuel. The Financial Secretary knows perfectly well about the consequences of ignoring those warnings with regard to Northern Ireland, and about the enormous loss to the Treasury that is associated with fuel smuggling, racketeering and thuggery of all sorts. Interestingly, since foot and mouth reared its ugly head, the amount of smuggled fuel seems to have fallen rapidly and has stayed down. People now seem able to seal the border to stop foot and mouth disease getting across, even though they could not seal it to stop murderers crossing. However, I let that go, as it is also a matter for another day.

The Government have a chance to consider seriously the tax before it comes into operation, and they should give favourable consideration to the impact that it would have in the regions and, in particular, in the Province that I have the honour of representing. They must consider what will happen, unless they can achieve the miraculous feat of persuading the Republic of Ireland Government to introduce the same tax in the Republic, which would put us all on a level playing field. At the end of the day, that is all that we want, but we do not currently have it.

The tax impacts differently within Great Britain and impacts on Northern Ireland in particular, but it is a bad tax anyway.

**Mr. Levitt:** A few weeks ago, *The Mail on Sunday* described me as sycophantic. Obviously, it had never heard me talking about aggregates tax. I am co-chairman of the parliamentary minerals group and a member of the GMB, which is the largest trade union in the quarrying industry. The Quarry Products Association was launched in my constituency in 1997. Quarrying is the largest single part of the manufacturing industry in High Peak, which has nine major quarries and many smaller ones. I lay some claim to the second runway at Manchester airport, all 2 million tonnes of which used to be located in my constituency, but were transported by rail to the site.

In the quarries of High Peak, we have some of the best environmental practices that are used in quarries today. We have some massive quarries that are practically invisible to the outside world. Blue Circle at Hope takes some 70 per cent. of its product out by rail rather than road, and always stays one leap ahead of the law in terms of environmental emissions and so on. Some very good practices are followed not only by Blue Circle, but by Tarmac—formerly Buxton Lime Industries—RMC and Lafarge. The big names are all represented in the area, but unfortunately, so are some of the worst. In particular, a quarry at Moss Rake, next door to Blue Circle, is a disgrace. I shall say more about that very small, but highly visible, quarry in a few moments.

My views on aggregates tax in general are well known to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Treasury. My hon. Friend the Financial Secretary and I have spent many happy hours debating the issues either publicly or privately. I have tabled parliamentary questions and led delegations in relation to the matter on behalf of the all-party minerals group. I am a sceptic about the aggregates levy, which is why I think it right to consider carefully the possibility of introducing a rebate scheme. That does not lead me to conclude that I shall vote in favour of the amendment, for reasons that I shall explain in a moment, but I think the tax needs improving.

**Mr. Letwin:** Will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether he will vote against the clause?

**Mr. Levitt:** I shall say exactly which way I shall vote, but the hon. Gentleman will have to wait for that moment to arrive. *[Interruption.]* I shall not change my position between now and a few minutes' time.

Let me say why the tax needs improving. I believe that it is based on a very narrow and controversial definition of costs and benefits. It does not discriminate between existing good and bad practice. It makes the assumption that it is only improvements on the current state of play that will be taken into account. Contrary to some claims for it, I do not understand how the tax promotes recycling.

5.45 pm

Contrary to the comments of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), the landfill tax accelerated a move towards recycling. The investment of many companies in recycling building materials, the fact that some parts of the country have a greater demand for materials while others have a greater supply, and transport costs that can militate against using recycled materials, even when companies want to, all mean that the industry is already reaching its maximum capacity for recycled materials. The supply of recycled materials is not available in the right place and at the right time to enhance further use, even if an aggregates tax provides an incentive.

The industry remains unconvinced about the operation of the sustainability fund. I suspect that those who tabled the amendment wished to replace the tax or at least complement it with a system of rebates. At least the sustainability fund has the advantage of being proactive, whereas a rebate scheme would presumably only react to changes. The industry—certainly the Quarry Products Association—is well aware of its responsibilities.

Nowadays, the industry cannot and must not ignore environmental interests and progress. Quarries are part of and integral to their neighbouring communities, where many of their employees live. The industry recognises that, and the fact that a clean reputation is commercially and hence economically a good asset for quarries. Good practice already exists in environmentally sound quarrying. We must not pretend that it does not, or fail to reward those in the industry who have got their act together in the past and produced some excellent environmental measures.

Over the years, the Quarry Products Association has presented arguments on behalf of the responsible elements of the industry. However, its strategy has a major flaw. It accounts for only 80 or 90 per cent. of the industry. The remaining 10 per cent, which, by and large, comprises the smaller operators who may be represented by the British Aggregates Association, and, more importantly, those represented by nobody, do the most damage to the environment and the industry's reputation. The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) nods. It is therefore odd that the amendment that he has tabled in the next group would exclude such cowboys and smaller operators from the Bill.

**Mr. Ottaway:** I was nodding because I believed that the hon. Gentleman said that small quarries were environmentally effective. We believe them to be so.

**Mr. Levitt:** I invite the hon. Gentleman to the Peak district where he can compare large and small quarries. Planning regulations are tighter in national parks than elsewhere, but he will find that the worst offenders, who are prepared not only to leave an unacceptable scar on the landscape but to raise two fingers to health and safety regulations, are the smaller operators. I do not want them excluded from the Bill. However, that is covered in the next group of amendments.

**Mr. Ottaway** *rose—*

**Mr. Levitt:** If the hon. Gentleman has something to say about my comments rather than about the next group of amendments, I shall give way.

**Mr. Ottaway:** I rise because I do not believe that we shall reach the next group of amendments. The point behind them is that the smaller quarries are in rural areas. They are environmentally effective because they are dotted around the country—

**The Temporary Chairman (Dr. Michael Clark):** Order. We cannot debate the next group of amendments simply because the hon. Gentleman believes that we will not reach it. [HON. MEMBERS: "The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) is talking about it."] If the hon. Gentleman does that, I shall check him.

**Mr. Levitt:** I will not go further on the question of smaller quarries. I shall do precisely the opposite, in saying that one of the quarries in my constituency, at Tunstead, is visible from the moon. It has the largest quarry face in Europe and is in a very rural area.

I return to my conclusion. Let me not give the impression that the Government have not been listening. I disagree with those hon. Members who have suggested that they have come up against a brick wall. There has been no such brick wall. Certainly, £1.60 a tonne is less than the amount that it had appeared might be introduced, and imported aggregates being subject to the same levy is an improvement on the original proposals.

The fact that there are many exemptions will also be welcomed by many industries and many parts of industries, although the provisions could be incredibly complex because quarries such as the Tarmac quarry in my constituency produce materials that might be subject to the aggregate tax in certain circumstances but not in others—perhaps if they were dirty but not if they were clean—and might be subject to it at some time in their life but not at others.

**Mr. Letwin:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Levitt:** I want to draw to a close so that others can speak.

It is significant that a rebate system of some sort—I do not know what—is, I believe, being discussed by the Government and the major representatives of the industry, those whom I call the responsible elements of the industry. A rebate system must take into account good practice and the current records of the companies. It must encourage progress on environmental measures and apply to the whole of the industry to be affected by the tax. However, I do not think it essential—this is the key—to include such a rebate scheme in the Bill. The sustainability fund is in the Bill, and because how it will be used is not defined, it will be able to be used in a way that could include a rebate system.

**Sir Robert Smith:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Levitt:** I want to conclude, if the hon. Gentleman will excuse me.

I voted for this part of the Budget, and I shall vote for the Bill at the end of the Committee and on Third Reading, however much I think there are opportunities for improvement. The amendments before us today are at worst mischievous and opportunist, and at best—as in this case—premature and, hopefully, unnecessary. That is my objection to the amendment under discussion.

It is three years since the aggregates tax was first suggested, and a year before it is to be implemented. Now that the basic arguments against the levy have been lost and the Government have the backing of the House to proceed along the lines that they are, this is not the time to rock the boat. It is the time to tell Ministers that the tax is unpopular with large sectors of industry and the work force. The proposal assumes a starting point that all quarries are equally bad; it promises much to the green lobby without providing the capacity to deliver; and it is far from complete in terms of being a genuine and fair package of measures to balance the legitimate concerns on both sides of the debate. However, the opportunity for correcting those issues is still there.

The way in which the sustainability and environmental clauses relating to the aggregates tax will be implemented will be an essential factor in the way the Government's environmental record is seen. It is important to have a very strong environmental element in the Bill, and in the levy. We must recognise and reward those parts of the industry that have already gone down that road. Without my full enthusiasm, but in opposition to the amendment and in support of the Government's position, I hope, on balance, that the Minister will take the opportunity to redouble his efforts to find an environmentally acceptable way forward in co-operation with the industry.

**Mr. Alasdair Morgan:** Unlike other Members who have spoken this evening, I do not have any significantly large quarries in my constituency. However, there is a fair number of small quarries, all of which are run by large operators. The small number of jobs that those quarries provide is important in the rural context, in which it would be significant to lose even half a dozen jobs in a small village or town.

The amendment deals with environmental protection, which is a worthy objective. However, in my four years in the House, I have not had a single complaint from any of my constituents about any of the quarries operating in my constituency. They are carrying on blithely unaware that their environment needs protection from the quarries in their midst.

In terms of the amendment, it seems eminently reasonable that if protection measures have been taken, are being taken, or are to be taken in future, there should be some rebate to compensate the companies for so doing. However, if protection has to be put in place and measured, we need something against which to measure it. We need to be able to assess the damage that has allegedly been caused—or could be caused—by the quarries.

Initially, when I heard about this tax, I thought, in my naïveté, that some assessment or measurement of the damage being caused had been undertaken. It was only after some probing that I came across the measurements to which the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) referred, relating to the environmental costs and benefits of the supply of aggregates, which are, in effect, a glorified opinion poll asking people how much they would pay to have the quarry on their doorstep taken away.

That reminds me of how people are asked how much they would pay for organically produced foods in their supermarkets. Of course, when they go to the supermarkets, they do not, by and large, pay the extra money for such goods. They simply take the goods that represent the best buy. That is perhaps what we should be doing with aggregates, rather than listening to this sort of nonsense. Incidentally, no survey was ever undertaken in my constituency. None of my constituents was ever asked whether they felt that any environmental costs were being

inflicted on them. In fact, only two quarries in the whole of Scotland were surveyed, and—as we heard earlier—none in Northern Ireland. It is nonsense to base any way of assessing environmental damage or environmental protection on such measures.

The small local quarries to which I have referred produce mainly for local consumption. The aggregates produced in my constituency are not trucked long distances, except perhaps within the constituency itself, because it is more than 100 miles long and about 100 miles wide. If those quarries were closed, the product would have to be brought in from elsewhere, at greater cost to the environment. That cost would not be measured, and nothing in the Bill would prevent it.

Where there will be environmental benefits, we should help them. However, the best protection for such benefits in my constituency would be to keep open the quarries that are currently producing there. The best way to protect the environment would be to scrap this tax. The second best way might be to pass the amendment.

**Mr. Edward Davey:** If the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) was not guilty of sycophancy today, he was certainly guilty of casuistry in developing his case. He also made an error in saying that provision for the sustainability fund was in the Bill. It is not, and that is why the amendment—and new clause 12, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), which we shall debate later—are so important.

The Liberal Democrats believe that the acceptability of the aggregates levy might live or die by whether an environmental protection scheme and a rebate scheme are incorporated in the provision at the same time. That is what the Government promised. Indeed, in the Red Book of March this year, they reiterated the promise that the rebate scheme would be introduced at the same time as the levy. Yet we are faced with a Bill that contains no such scheme.

We have been told, when the Minister went before the Environmental Audit Committee, that the Government are finding such a scheme very complex, and difficult to design. What faith are we supposed to have in the Government if they state so openly that they are having problems drawing up such a scheme? Can we believe that they will produce one? Until they do, the aggregates levy should not be allowed to commence. That is why the amendment is so important.

6 pm

**Sir Robert Smith:** Is it not very damaging to the cause of any environmental debate that the Government should be cynical enough to be seen to introduce a tax that purely raises money for the Treasury, when they have not worked out how to give the money back?

**Mr. Davey:** I am grateful for that intervention, which brings me to my next point.

Time and again, Governments—Conservative Governments, and the current Labour Government—have introduced environmental taxes saying that they will give the money back, and have then not fulfilled the pledge. That is indeed very damaging to the cause of the environment. It undermines the faith of consumers, both individual and corporate, who, when they hear future Governments talk about environmental tax, will think, "Oh yes—here comes another revenue-raising measure." It also undermines the whole case for environmental taxation, which is very strong if the policy is implemented properly. I do not believe that the Government are implementing it properly in this instance. Introducing the tax without a rebate scheme is bad politics; it is also bad economics.

I support the amendment. My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome spoke with great authority; I think that those who read the report of this debate will be impressed by his grasp of the detail, and the Committee is indebted to him.

**Mr. Letwin:** I intend to speak for approximately 30 seconds, owing to the constraint imposed by the ridiculous way in which the timetable motion was proposed.

I agree, broadly, with nearly all that has been said by Members on both sides of the Committee about the desirability of an amendment of this kind if we are to have clause 16 at all, but I shall reserve virtually all my remarks for the extreme desirability of not having the clause in the first place. I shall therefore forgo my opportunity to rehearse all the arguments that have already been advanced so pellucidly.

**The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms):** I shall be brief and confine my observations primarily to the points made in the amendment, although we have had a rather more wide- ranging discussion. I hope that we shall have further debate once the amendment has been dealt with.

I do not accept Opposition Members' complaints about the arrangements for the debate. It was Opposition Members who said that they wanted two days' debate on the Floor of the House, and those two days have been provided. They also said that they wanted to discuss the aggregates levy, hydrocarbons and income tax, and all those topics will be discussed over the two days.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) suggested that there should be a debate on new clauses at this point, but debates on new clauses always take place at the end of Finance Bill debates. That is not a feature of the timetabling arrangements; it is a long-standing arrangement in itself.

**Mr. Ottaway:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Timms:** I will, but I want to be brief, given the other matters on the agenda.

**Mr. Ottaway:** I shall certainly be brief.

The Minister was present for my point of order at the beginning, when I pointed out that the instructions on procedures of the House written by the Clerks made it clear that new clauses could be debated on the Floor of the House.

**Mr. Timms:** In the case of Finance Bills, new clauses are taken at the end of the proceedings. That has always been the case.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) made a number of wide-ranging points about, for instance, scalpings and pre-cast concrete blocks. As both issues are

*[Mr. Timms]*

dealt with in later amendments, I shall not go into detail now. He also talked about the Quarry Products Association package. At the time of last year's Budget, we had got as far as a proposal that was not supported by a significant proportion of the industry, and that was likely to be open to legal challenge from those in charge of smaller quarries who objected to the package. Because the package was not viable at that stage, we decided to proceed with the levy.

The levy will directly help to address issues raised by the hon. Gentleman and others, in three ways. It will ensure that the price of aggregates reflects the environmental costs of obtaining aggregates through quarrying; it will give an additional price advantage to recycled aggregates; and it will provide resources for a sustainability fund.

**Mr. Rogers:** My hon. Friend said that the levy is partly intended to cover the environmental cost of extraction. Can he quantify that environmental cost, say, per tonne?

**Mr. Timms:** I can indeed. The environmental costs and benefits of aggregates have been the subject of extensive research published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, which my hon. Friend may not have had a chance to see. It is probably the most authoritative study of its kind in the world. As the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) said, it is a contingent valuation methodology study. It concludes that the average environmental cost is £1.80 per tonne. We have taken a prudent and cautious view, and gone for a levy of £1.60 per tonne.

The third way in which the levy will help directly to address the issues relates, as I said, to the sustainability fund, which will deal with the impact of quarrying in the communities that are affected. Initially, it will amount to £35 million a year.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome feared that some responses to the consultation had not been taken into account in the consultation summary. Owing to difficulties, some submissions, including the one from Somerset that he mentioned, did not reach officials in time to be included in the summary. However, I can reassure him that all responses received, including those received after the deadline, will be taken fully into account in decisions on how the sustainability fund will be used, and that those decisions will be announced in due course.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) argued that there should be further regulation. The Government are considering revising mineral planning guidance to improve the sustainability of quarrying for aggregates, and to reduce further the environmental impacts of extraction, but it is right to address cost issues as well. He spoke of a tax on jobs, but this is the opposite: the package will use the proceeds primarily to reduce employers' national insurance contributions, thus reducing the tax on jobs.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry suggested that the package was not revenue-neutral, but it is, for the very reason that I have just given. The proceeds of the levy will be used to reduce employers' national insurance contributions, and also for the sustainability fund. This is not a revenue-raising measure for the Treasury; there will be no net benefit for the Treasury.

**Sir Robert Smith:** Does the Minister accept, however, that the package is in no way region-neutral? The charge will be levied in areas containing quarries, but the money will not necessarily go back to those communities.

**Mr. Timms:** Certainly, the levy will not be neutral for particular communities, but it will be neutral nationally. It has been suggested that this is a revenue-raising measure; I simply wanted to point out that it is, in fact, revenue-neutral.

The points about Northern Ireland raised by the hon. Member for East Londonderry will be dealt with in a later debate, but I will say now that I was pleased to hear from him that the incidence of fuel smuggling across the land border had fallen. Hon. Members will want to raise other points about Northern Ireland when we reach the relevant part of the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that other countries were not proceeding with levies of this kind. That is not the case: there are already aggregates levies in France—one of the countries that he mentioned—Sweden and Denmark. I understand that the Netherlands is proceeding with the proposals that it has drawn up.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) has taken a close interest in the matter. As he said, we have discussed it in a lively way on a number of occasions. Recent research published by DETR indicates that there is significant scope for additional use of recycled aggregates. The figures show that about 22.7 million tonnes of recycled aggregates are being used a year and that another 12.7 million tonnes have potential for recycling, so over half as much again is available. There is therefore a good deal of mileage in improving the price attractiveness of recycling in the way that the levy does. The figures that I have referred to do not include the use of china clay spoil, to which the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome referred, so there is a lot of scope there.

The amendment seeks in effect to delay implementation of the levy to allow development of a rebate scheme under which persons responsible for subjecting aggregate to commercial exploitation who undertake environmental protection measures would benefit from a rebated rate of aggregates levy. That is rather narrower than a number of the points that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome made. The proposal is that the amount of the rebate would be proportionate to the extent of the environmental improvement measures.

We indicated in the Budget that we were attracted in principle to applying a lower rate of levy to aggregate extracted from quarries with the lowest environmental costs—so-called "green quarries." However, in discussing that matter with the industry, I have always made it clear that developing such a scheme would not be straightforward. It certainly cannot be put in place before the implementation of the levy next year. There are a number of difficulties to be overcome. There will be practical difficulties in relation to assessing compliance, defining environmental performance, the treatment of imports, EU state aid rules and UK competition policy.

We will continue to explore how we can overcome those difficulties, but it will take some time. In any case, the actual terms of a legislative clause cannot be

determined at this stage. I am not quite sure what a "scheme of rebates" linked to "environmental protection measures" means. It was not spelled out in the hon. Gentleman's speech, but something along those lines might be one way to do it. There may be other ways, too. For example, for it to be effective, we would need to ensure that any reduced rate scheme benefited quarries with the lowest actual environmental costs. It may be that those are linked directly to location: a quarry that is well managed, but located in a densely populated area or an area of outstanding natural beauty may still have a greater impact on the environment than one that creates a lot of dust and noise, but is located in a remote, sparsely populated area. Those are all issues of which we need to take account.

The amendment could not be implemented as it stands. It would require at the very least a significant delay in the implementation of the levy. We have had a lengthy period of preparation for the levy and I would not support a delay at this stage. I therefore hope that hon. Members will not support the amendment.

A number of hon. Members have queried the benefits of the aggregates levy. I disagree with them. There are clear environmental benefits from the introduction of the levy. I am glad that others support that view. For example, last month, the Wildlife and Countryside Link wrote to me as the liaison body for a coalition of organisations and with the support of the Council for the National Parks and the Council for the Protection of Rural England. It expressed its strong support for the Government's proposed aggregates levy:

"The environmental damage which the Aggregates Levy is designed to address is occurring now. WCL therefore urges the Government to introduce the Aggregates Levy as soon as possible".

I agree.

**Mr. David Heath:** The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) made a convincing speech, used all the right arguments and then came out with completely the wrong conclusion. The Minister used neither the right arguments nor reached the right conclusions. He totally failed to convince and I must ask the Committee's opinion on the amendment.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 149, Noes 268.

**Division No. 186]** **[6.15 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Sir Robert Smith and**
**Mr. Bob Russell.**

**NOES**

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben

Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Hallam)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Sloane, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Wooles, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Mike Hall and**
**Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**Mr. Ottaway:** I beg to move amendment No. 9, in page 12, line 31, at end insert—

'(4A) The first 250,000 tonnes of taxable output per taxable person in each accounting period shall be exempt from the levy; and for the purposes of this subsection, where a taxable person carries on business in partnership, that partnership shall be the taxable person for the purposes of the exemption.'.

The purpose of the amendment is to help the small quarry operator—the type of operator described by the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) as a "cowboy". I do not accept that description, because there are many good small operators and that was an unwarranted slur on them.

**Mr. Levitt:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Ottaway:** I am sorry, but the timetable motion is so tight that I intend to be very brief.

Five large companies control 80 per cent. of the aggregates market and 90 per cent. of the market in ready-mixed asphalt. The existence of the small quarry

operators maintains competition, leads to environmental improvements and provides jobs in remote rural areas, where the small operators are located. The amendment provides that the first 250,000 tonnes of aggregate would be exempt from the levy. The principle is the same as applies in personal taxation, with tax-free allowances, and in the small business rate of corporation tax, which is lower at the bottom end of the scale.

The aggregates levy will make it harder for the smaller operators to compete. They tend to be located in the remoter rural areas, and the major operators are mainly in the south of England, where aggregates earn £12.50 a tonne. In remote areas, such as Scotland, the value of aggregates is £2.50 a tonne. The flat rate levy will therefore be 12 per cent. in the south-east but more than 50 per cent. in remote rural areas. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) mentioned secondary aggregates; they can be worth as little as £1 a tonne, which would make the aggregates levy a huge 160 per cent.

The second factor that will make life more difficult for the small operators is that the majors also tend to control the downstream operations in ready-mix and in asphalt. The majors will load the levy on to those products, but that option will not be available to the smaller operators. The third factor is the bureaucracy that the levy will involve. Some of the product mined will be used as aggregate for construction, but some will be used as an industrial mineral and will not attract the levy. That will lead to complex bookkeeping arrangements. In-house products, such as recycled or reclaimed products, can be blended with mined product, which will also lead to complications in bookkeeping. Complex computer systems will be needed, and the small operators doubt whether they can afford the additional cost of the software.

The result will be that the small operators will go out of business. Jobs will be lost in rural areas and the big companies will move in and finish off the smaller guys, as they have been trying to do for some time. The environmental consequences will be serious, because customers will have to travel further to get their aggregate and it will have to be delivered further afield, with consequences for transport systems. Fewer, larger quarries will result, which will be both environmentally and commercially detrimental.

Most small operators tend to be family-run organisations with limited staff and resources. The burden of regulation is tough enough for them, and the levy will be the last straw. The consequence will be job losses and environmental damage.

**Mr. Levitt:** I wish to put it on record that I did not say that all small quarry operators were bad. However, bigger operators, which can invest in environmental measures, tend—in my experience of the quarries in my constituency—to have a better record. Some of the smaller operators are more likely to flout planning regulations and to take the least care of the environment. They also put health and safety regulations to one side and refuse trade union recognition. Therefore, the special pleading on behalf of smaller operators is not justified. I would be happy to be proved wrong, and I will happily visit all the quarries in the constituency of the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) if he will visit all the quarries in High Peak—but I have no hesitation in opposing the amendment.

**Mr. Christopher Gill** (Ludlow): I wish to put on record my opposition to the tax, and to express my great disappointment that the voluntary scheme proposed by the Quarry Products Association has been ignored in favour of this huge cost imposition. It will be a tax on jobs, which are very valuable in rural areas. Of course, the economy in those areas is already suffering badly as a result of the Government's mishandling of the problems caused by foot and mouth and the downturn in the agriculture sector.

The tax will impose an additional cost burden on every construction project, from roads, railways and port facilities to housing developments, property repairs and home extensions. There are several quarries in Ludlow, some run by small private companies and some by large plcs. They quarry sand, gravel, limestone and granite. In particular, stone from Clee hill is sent to south Wales, where it is converted into rockwool, an insulating material. I hope that the Government will take some notice of my concerns about the effect on the valuable and irreplaceable jobs in my constituency, which will be prejudiced by this unnecessary and unjustifiable tax.

**Mr. Timms:** I hope that the House will not accept the amendment. The package is not a tax on jobs. Indeed, I made the point earlier that it is the opposite, because the bulk of the proceeds from the levy will go on a reduction in employer national insurance contributions. The hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) mentioned the new deal proposal by the Quarry Products Association, but one of the reasons why that was not a viable package in the end was the opposition to it from the smaller quarries, which argued that

> "The QPA new deal has been tabled as an industry-funded alternative to taxation, but heavily discriminates against the smaller independent operator."

It is precisely the smaller quarries that felt that the package should not go ahead.

As my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) rightly said, the levy is being introduced to deal with the significant environmental costs associated with quarries, and applies to all aggregates extracted from any quarry, including the first 250,000 tonnes in an accounting period to which the amendment refers. Typically, there will be four accounting periods in a year, so we are talking about quarries producing up to 1 million tonnes a year. Not only small quarries but some of significant size would benefit, so the amendment is not targeted quite as the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) intended.

A de minimis limit is in any case not usual with a specific, one-stage, non-deductible tax. Another serious difficulty about the amendment is that such an exemption would be seriously anti-competitive for the UK as a whole, because under EU law all imports would have to be treated as below the de minimis level and therefore exempt from the levy, which would obviously have a very detrimental impact on UK quarries that paid the levy.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw the amendment.

**Mr. Ottaway:** I am grateful for that response, and beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Letwin:** In a rational world, we would now be beginning a significant debate on the clause, which is the single most important clause in the Bill—not a great dignity in this case, but true. However, because of the way in which the Government have timetabled the proceedings, that option is no longer available. Moreover, we will never get to debate the serious amendments tabled to clauses 17 and 18, which are the second and third most important clauses in the Bill. I do not think that there is any previous example of a Government so determined to ram through a half-baked Bill that they fail to allow any time whatever to debate its most important parts.

To do Ministers justice, I suspect that this is a comedy of errors rather than an attempt to undermine parliamentary sovereignty. I fear that that is also true of the whole of the clause and the tax that it introduces. There are some half-good ideas sitting at the back of somebody's mind, but they have not been brought to the forefront of the lobes of the Ministers and officials involved. Still less have they been translated into a coherent regime. That is because, although it has taken three years in the gestation, the whole scheme bears all the appearance of having been concocted at the last moment without the necessary consultation.

This is above all a tax that demanded a Special Standing Committee procedure, which would have enabled the Financial Secretary to discuss properly with the industry how it could be implemented so as to achieve the Government's aims for it. Nothing of that kind has been done, as became very clear in the response to the debate on amendment No. 4. The tax was produced by the wrong procedure, and is therefore the wrong tax.

**Mr. Edward Davey:** The hon. Gentleman is making an important point. Does he agree that it would have been possible for the Government to introduce an aggregates tax with a better rebate scheme, and that it would still be possible for them, having heard the debate, to design a tax that might gain wider support?

6.45 pm

**Mr. Letwin:** Yes. We know that it would have been possible because the climate change levy, which my colleagues and I inveighed against at length, was none the less much better designed than this tax in just that respect: at least it was so constructed that it aimed to allow the arbitrary powers of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to be brought to bear on that part of industry that the Government wanted, as they put it, to reform its ways. I objected to that tax, and I object to this one. I object to that manner of proceeding, but at least it would have been a rational and coherent manner of proceeding—objectionable but rational. This tax is objectionable and irrational, because it has been wrongly introduced, just as the hon. Gentleman said.

I want to dwell on a feature of clause 17 that we will not have time to debate. The tax is amazingly complicated to enforce. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) referred to the problem with scalpings, and there are many similar problems, as exposed in the amendments tabled to clause 17. It is extraordinarily difficult to disentangle one item that is being extracted from a quarry from another.

It is not only a matter of Ministers having moved too fast. Even were they to have moved at a reasonable pace, they probably would not have been able to design an easily enforced version of the tax. One of the principles of taxation should be that it is so clear that it is easy to enforce. Many theoreticians thought that the selective employment tax was wonderful. Alas, it had disastrous consequences, because it was almost impossible to enforce in any rational way. This bears all the hallmarks of being another such tax.

At best, the tax will be highly intrusive, because the machinations required for the inspectors to enforce it properly will be horrible. Most businesses already resent the appearance of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise at their premises, partly for good reasons and partly for bad. One good reason is that they find it a distraction from their ordinary business. The distraction involved in a normal VAT inspection will be as nothing to the distraction involved in the heroic efforts of inspectors from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise to turn themselves into geological experts who can disentangle one extracted item from another, when none of the quarry operators involved find it easy to do so.

Far worse, this comedy of errors is in fact a tragicomedy, because the Government, for some unfathomable reason, have ignored—they cannot have forgotten it, because it has been pointed out to them so frequently—the fact that, as the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) said, the way in which the tax has been designed, although an improvement on the climate change levy in the respect that it allows for credits against exports and taxes imports, means that it does not tax the form of import that has been incorporated in pre-cast concrete, for example. That will prove a disastrous blow for the aggregates industry in Northern Ireland and a significant blow for parts of the industry in southern England that will face severe and unsustainable price competition from Normandy and elsewhere in northern France.

I do not know why the Government have chosen needlessly to expose British industry in that way, putting at risk between 4,000 and 10,000 jobs, depending on which estimate one takes, but it is clear to me that it can be no part of a rational economic policy to design a tax with that effect. As the Bill is drafted, it has that effect ineluctably. Had the Government been willing to accept the exemptions proposed in amendment No. 4, some firms at least would have been able to avoid the effect, but as it is none can.

**Mr. Timms:** I should like to challenge the hon. Gentleman on his point about concrete blocks. As I understand it, the current proportion of consumption in the United Kingdom of concrete blocks supplied from abroad is 1 per cent. What does the hon. Gentleman think that it will be once the levy has been introduced? His point is entirely vacuous.

**Mr. Letwin:** I am surprised, because although I often disagree with the Financial Secretary, he almost always makes a powerful argument. As I understand the matter,

having talked, as he must have done, to the Quarry Products Association and the British Aggregates Association—before I go any further, I should declare an interest, because I may have one that I am not aware of—there will be the ability to import a series of substances made up from aggregates from south of the border in Northern Ireland, and concrete blocks from Normandy and northern France by ship, to substitute for what are currently used as building materials because of a huge inbuilt price advantage. If I remember correctly, the equivalent tax in France is about 5p per tonne. If there is a price advantage of £1.55 per tonne we can expect to see a change in the structure of the industry and of demand in the UK. That point must have been made to the Financial Secretary.

**Mr. Timms:** The hon. Gentleman will recognise that significant transport costs must be set off against any tax differential that might exist. That is why I think that his suggestion that the introduction of the levy will result in large job losses is entirely unfounded.

**Mr. Letwin:** Industry experts have gone through the cost structure of transport with us, which was alluded to earlier, and have demonstrated to our satisfaction that where demand for these products is appropriately located, as in Northern Ireland and on the south coast, and where there is a readily available means of transport, whether it be by rail or road or ship, the transport costs are not prohibitive and there will remain a significant cost advantage. If the Financial Secretary has figures showing the contrary, surely he would have been able to persuade the industry of that fact by now. There is no reason for the industry to make this argument if it is not true, because the Financial Secretary has already taken the trouble to exempt exports and imports otherwise. Surely he could now do what the industry asks in relation to fabrication.

**Mr. Timms:** I will be meeting industry representatives next week and will be discussing that with them. There is an issue to do with Northern Ireland that we will come to later. However, I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's point about supplies from France to southern England is a serious concern.

**Mr. Letwin:** I very much hope that the Financial Secretary is right and that he will be able to persuade the industry of that, although I am not persuaded. We will indeed come back to the question of Northern Ireland.

I turn now to an element of mythology, which the Financial Secretary has been assiduous in peddling, if I may use a derogatory term. He and his colleagues exposed the myth in the Budget. The hon. Gentleman maintains, as he did with the climate change levy—and I do not doubt his honesty in maintaining it, but it is a myth—that it is a fiscally neutral measure. Of course, he is right—on day one, it is a fiscally neutral measure. The landfill tax was also fiscally neutral when it was introduced. This Budget increased the landfill tax. Did it increase the rebate of national insurance contributions likewise? No.

Will we have an assurance from Ministers this evening that at no time during the lifetime of this Government, or of any Government for whom they are responsible, will there be an increase in this tax without a commensurate increase in the rebate on national insurance contributions? If we get that commitment, I will withdraw my assertion. However, I doubt that we will. The Government have shown through their actions on the landfill tax that they have no inhibitions about increasing such taxes and removing the day one fiscal neutrality.

If I made you the grand offer, Dr. Clark, to engage in a fiscally neutral transaction with you in which you gave me a pint of beer and I gave you an equivalent amount of whisky, but you promised me that you would give me as much beer in all the subsequent years of your life as I demanded, without my making an equivalent promise to you in terms of whisky, you would be a mug. That is what the British public will be if they are led to believe that this is a fiscally neutral measure. It is nothing of the kind. Naturally, you would not engage in such a transaction, Dr. Clark. There is no reason for anyone to believe that this is a fiscally neutral measure; it is a platform for engaging in tax raising.

The Government have gone to considerable public expense—I cannot recall the exact figure, but I suspect that it is about £100,000—to produce a magnificent report. The Financial Secretary referred to it—indeed, he waved it around a moment ago. This magnificent report purports to show that the figure of £1.60 a tonne—or, rather, a slightly higher figure, once we allow for some fancy manoeuvres—is justified as the tax in this case because of the optimality rule. That rule states that one must always tax at exactly the cost of the externalities—the cost of the damage done.

This is a really splendid thesis, and it is absolutely true. However, it relies on accumulating a group of human beings who are geniuses and are sufficiently talented to find out the cost of the damage. Alas, in the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, no such geniuses were to be found by Her Majesty's Government. Instead, they employed some ordinary human beings in the form of very intelligent, highly qualified consultants. You may not believe this, Dr. Clark, because it sounds as though I am making it up, but these consultants asked a large number of people who lived somewhere near quarries in various places how much they would pay, if they were given the option, to avoid having various things near them, including quarries and the trucks associated with them.

This is a marvellous idea. We can just imagine these earnest seekers after truth wandering around the highways and byways of the areas of outstanding natural beauty where quarries are to be found and asking Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Smith exactly, to the nearest 5p or so, how much they would be prepared to pay to avoid having a quarry 300 yd from their home. Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Smith gave them the answers; they added everything up and produced, for about £100,000, a huge report for the Financial Secretary and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, which has been taken very seriously. I do not know at which point "Yes, Minister" takes over from serious government, but it took over long before the report was produced. The fact is that optimality is as much a myth as fiscal neutrality.

We come now to the ghastly fact that this tax will be enforced by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, notwithstanding its complexity and irrationality, and notwithstanding the fact that it will not achieve any serious environmental effect because there is no rebate scheme, which would have been necessary for it to have such an effect. There is already a serious problem about the arbitrary powers that have been allocated to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. We spoke about that at

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*[Mr. Letwin]*

tedious length during the previous Finance Bill. The Conservative party has put forward a 10-point plan, which is just the beginning—the tip of the iceberg—of an attempt to constrain those arbitrary powers. Yet clause 16 provides a huge extension of the arbitrary powers of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

I shall give just one example, which, again, we will not be allowed to debate. If someone appeals to the commissioners—and the system is designed so that one can appeal without having to go to court and needing lawyers—and they do not give an answer after a certain period, what does this magnificent Bill provide? One might think that the appeal would be won by the appellant if the commissioners did not reply. Not at all. Under the Bill, if the commissioners do not answer, the appeal is refused.

**Mr. Timms:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Letwin:** I am sorry, but I shall not give way on this occasion, as I have one minute left. However, I would be happy to allow the Minister to reply at length if his Whip will rearrange matters so that we can have a serious amount of time in which to debate this.

In my final half minute, I want to say simply that this tax is irrational and is being introduced in the wrong way. It has the wrong powers of enforcement and it will cost jobs. Even more than all that, though, it is an empty box. Almost everything that will bring it into effect will come in a series of regulations that the House will never seriously debate. People fought and died to establish as the principal feature of our parliamentary democracy the sovereignty of Parliament over taxation. To remit the basis of our taxation to regulation is a precedent that Members on the Government Benches will live to regret as much as we do.

*It being Seven o'clock,* THE TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, *pursuant to Orders [7 November and 9 April], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 286, Noes 126.

**Division No. 187]** **[7 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*

Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Mike Hall and**
**Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Baldry, Tony
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Horam, John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Peter Atkinson and**
**Mr. Stephen Day.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Clause 16 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

THE TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

*Motion made, and Question put,* That clauses 17 to 22 stand part of the Bill:—

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 287, Noes 123.

**Division No. 188]** **[7.15 pm**

**AYES**

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom

Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Mike Hall and**
**Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward

Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Horam, John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Peter Luff and**
**Mr. Stephen Day.**

*Question accordingly agreed to.*

*Clauses 17 to 22 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 23

WEIGHT OF AGGREGATE

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Letwin:** Clause 23 is remarkable. Clause 23(1) states:

"The Commissioners may make regulations for determining the weight of any aggregate for the purposes of aggregates levy."

Forgive me for being personal, Dr. Clark, but if I were to propose to weigh you, I doubt whether it would be necessary for me to make regulations for determining the weight; I would instead employ some scales. The matter would be straightforward; the weighing would be objective, so why is it necessary for the commissioners to make such regulations?

Of course, the answer is that it is not simple and objective to weigh aggregates; it is not just a matter of finding the aggregates and popping them on to some scales. Those involved must work out what they are weighing and which bits they do not want to weigh. That is why clause 23(3) states:

"The regulations may, in particular, . . . include rules about—

(a) the method by which the weight is to be determined;

(b) the time by reference to which the weight is to be determined;

(c) the discounting of constituents".

As I said during the previous debate, we must imagine the good folk of Customs and Excise posing as geological experts and, in this case, as weighing experts, and working out how to discount constituents, such as water, and how to find the right time to weigh so as not to weigh the right thing at the wrong time—as bad as weighing the wrong thing at the right time.

All that will be determined by regulations which we have not seen, and I speculate that the Financial Secretary has not seen them either. Of course, I may be wrong, and if he would like to explain the regulations and how the Government will determine how to weigh the aggregates, I should be happy to admit at once that I am wrong to speculate that he has not the foggiest clue about the answer to that question. In the absence of such an assurance, I suggest that he imagines that someone will eventually produce some regulations for him, that the commissioners will be given those regulations and that they will send out the troops of Customs and Excise to apply them.

The general observation that I made in the debate on clause 16 applies in this case: this is not a simple matter. As we traverse the remainder of part II at unholy and unnecessary length, given the way in which the timetable motion was constructed, we shall find that there are many such instances. I hope that the Financial Secretary will be able at least to explain how he envisages the process working in practice, but I fear that it will be a long time before we see the regulations themselves. It will be even longer before someone works out in which of the many respects they are wrong and how they need to be revised ex post facto once it turns out that large parts of the industry have been driven mad by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise weighing things incorrectly. Appeals will be made, letters will be written and efforts will be made to reverse the mistakes that have been made.

7.30 pm

**Mr. Edward Davey:** Would the hon. Gentleman like to speculate further about the regulations that are mentioned in the clause? Does he think that there will have to be regulations for each type of mineral and each type of aggregate because of their differing relationships with water? Presumably, minerals and aggregates come in different shapes and forms and contain differing proportions of water.

**Mr. Letwin:** The honest answer is that I do not know how the regulations will be formulated or how specific they will be. They will obviously have to ensure that, each time something is weighed, it is a relevant substance in the normal layman's sense and that it is not a relevant substance under the terms of clause 18(3). If any of the relevant substances in that subsection have been admixed with anything that is to be weighed, the substance will not be an aggregate under the terms of the Bill and should not be subject to the levy. The weighing system will have to ensure that anhydride, ball clay, barytes, calcite, china

*[Mr. Letwin]*

clay and so on are not weighed by mistake. Some fancy footwork may therefore be required to ensure that they are not.

It will be interesting to discover whether the Financial Secretary knows the answer to these questions, but I speculate that he does not. More importantly, I speculate that, when the regulations are made, it will turn out that those who have framed them do not quite know the answers. Only later, by a process of error, will people discover what should have been in them in the first place. That illustrates the general point that this is a hugely intrusive tax.

**Mr. Timms:** This is a very conventional clause that does not contain any surprises. The aggregates levy is calculated by reference to weight rather than selling price, because the levy is designed to address the external environmental costs of the extraction of the aggregate and that can be done fairly only by reference to a more constant and uniform factor. Weight is such a factor.

As the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said, the clause will enable Customs to draft regulations that cover the details of how and when the aggregate is to be weighed. It is important that there be clarity on that because the levy will be £1.60 per tonne, so weighing correctly will be important. The clause will give Customs the power to make different rules to cover different circumstances; and where possible, there will be clear and widely applicable regulations for determining weight.

The practicalities of the task and the differences in methods and equipment within the industry make it unlikely, however, that a universally applicable method can be set out in the regulations. The clause therefore provides that regulations may permit agreements to be drawn up between Customs and individual businesses regarding methods of recording by weight.

The hon. Gentleman has referred to the alleged complexity of the measure, but in point after point, what is being introduced for the aggregates levy follows precisely the approach taken over the landfill tax which was introduced by the previous Government. Of course, the landfill tax is also based on weight, so regulations had to be made on how landfill material is weighed. The wording used in that instance is precisely the wording used in this clause. No doubt I shall have the opportunity to repeat that point later in the debate, because many of the clauses that the hon. Gentleman criticises for their complexity follow word for word the provisions enacted for the landfill tax, which was enacted by the previous Government whom he and his hon. Friends supported.

By attacking the character of an environmental tax measure that mirrors and is based on the principal environmental tax measure that the previous Government introduced, the hon. Gentleman raises an interesting question as to whether Conservative Members have changed their minds about whether it is right to take steps, as the previous Government did, to safeguard the environment. I shall certainly listen with interest to what he says on that point.

**Mr. Letwin:** I apologise to the Minister for asking him a detailed question rather than allowing him to dilate further on the general principles, but will the system for weighing be so designed that clause 18(1)(b) will be applied in such a way as to mean that the dust that results when aggregates have been produced as part of a process that is exempt will be weighed as part of the aggregate?

**Mr. Timms:** The hon. Gentleman needs to wait until the detailed regulations are consulted upon, and then he will see the answer for himself. However, I reassure him that Customs will consult widely with industry at every stage in the run-up to the introduction, and in the finalisation, of the regulations. The central point is that the clause does exactly what was done for the landfill tax. That is what needs to be done to ensure the successful introduction of the levy. I have no doubt that that will be the consequence.

**Mr. Letwin:** I am grateful to the Financial Secretary for giving way again with his typical courtesy, but he has restated the thesis that the levy somehow draws on the landfill tax. Where in the landfill tax legislation is there any mention of the discounting of constituent parts such as water?

**Mr. Timms:** The point is that there are already regulations about weighing. The form of words used to give Customs the power to issue those regulations is the form of words that has been used in this clause.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 23 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

**Clause 24**

THE REGISTER

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Ottaway:** The clause relates to registration and is one of those clauses that appear under the heading "Administration and enforcement".

Subsection (1) will impose a duty on the commissioners of Customs and Excise

"to establish and maintain a register of persons who are required to be registered for the purposes of the aggregates levy."

The clause then lists the people who are required to be registered and they include those who carry out "taxable activities". It would help if the Financial Secretary explained how Customs and Excise will organise itself to do that; I imagine that it will recruit people who are experts in minerals. People whom one would not normally expect to work for Customs and Excise will specialise in this subject; but will he explain how such expertise will be provided?

In particular, the clause goes on to say:

"a person carries out a taxable activity if a quantity of aggregate is subjected to commercial exploitation".

What does "commercial exploitation" mean? I am sure the Minister is aware that many people in the industry are concerned about the ability to identify and register everyone involved. Does he expect people to come forward to register for a voluntary code? What happens when someone does not expect to be in the aggregates business, but a by-product pops up which the Minister would describe as aggregate? I know that ignorance of the law is no excuse, but how would that business man know that he has to declare that he is producing aggregate?

I hope the Minister appreciates that many people have doubts about the register. Their concern is justified. Many non-mainstream and fringe operators might evade the aggregates tax and disadvantage responsible operators. How will he police the register and ensure that it is an accurate document that reflects the activities of the entire industry?

We know that the Treasury is discussing the implementation of the register with the industry, and phrases such as commercial exploitation and construction use of aggregates have been clarified. However, is there a minimum level? I am not alluding to thresholds before the levy is imposed, which I raised when we discussed the previous amendment, but if a person produces a de minimis quantity, is he expected to register? Will the regulations—of which the Minister may or may not be aware—address that problem?

I understand that secondary legislation will be introduced later this year to make the measure workable, but perhaps the Minister can give an idea of his approach, because we need the matter clarified. Although the clause heading is simply "The register", the clause itself goes to the heart of what is workable. If there is any doubt about that, will the Minister recognise the industry's concerns and consider delaying the introduction of the levy until the serious concerns on the register are addressed?

**Mr. Edward Davey:** I shall be brief. As the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) said, the administration of the register could give rise to costs as it is set up and rolled out. I understand that a compliance cost assessment has been made. What are the costs estimated to be? Although there is a great deal of detail about who is to registered, how they will be registered and how the commissioners should keep such information, the commissioners are not obliged to minimise the compliance costs on the industry and are given a fairly free hand in going about the registration process. How do the Minister and his Department intend to keep the administration costs that will be imposed on business to the minimum necessary to collect the levy?

7.45 pm

**Mr. Letwin:** I want to raise two specific issues. The first relates to clause 24(2), which tells us:

"A person is required to be registered for the purposes of aggregates levy if he . . . carries out taxable activities".

That takes us to the heart of the problem: who is such a person and how does he know that he is such a person? My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) referred to that issue.

Clause 18 is relevant in determining whether someone should be registered under clause 24(2)(a). Let us take the example of a sole trader who is principally engaged in an exempt process, such as rock cutting, to produce what is described in clause 18(2)(a) as "dimension stone". If I have correctly understood the enormously intricate articulation of clauses 17 and 18, that is not, according to clause 18(2), a taxable activity. A person engaged in that activity would not be caught by clause 24(2)(a) and thus would not have to register. However, if the exempt process produces what is described in clause 18(1)(a) as

"spoil, waste, off-cuts or other by-products",

then, according to the definition in the governing clause, 18(1), those items would be classed as aggregate and thus subject to the levy under clause 16.

So a cutter of rock—let us call him Mr. Jones—quietly sets himself up to produce dimension stone. He merrily imagines that he is not in any sense a taxable person under the Bill, but suddenly discovers that by virtue of some of the spoil, waste, off-cut or other by-product, he has become taxable. What is to become of poor Mr. Jones? At what stage is he breaking the law? What should he have known in advance? How will Customs and Excise deal with him if it discovers ex post—as he may discover ex post—that he was in breach of clause 24(2)(a)?

My second concern relates to value added tax legislation. Much of what we are about to consider in laborious detail is a set of standard clauses derived from such legislation. No doubt the Government will recognise that. Alas, the clauses are nastier forms of the standard, which in itself is nasty. Both governing parties must take joint responsibility, over the past half century, for that. VAT legislation is an abomination to mankind. I take no pride in being a member of a party that played its role in that. However, this Government have done nothing to remedy the problem; instead, they have made it worse.

Clause 24(6) proposes something that is worse than most other measures in similar legislation. No doubt if the Minister reflects on it, he will agree that it is intolerable. I have just exposed the genuine doubt of Mr. Jones who does not know whether he is conducting a taxable activity. However, we learn in subsection (6) that

"where it appears to the Commissioners"—

note, Mrs. Heal, that it simply has to appear to them—

"that any person is operating or using any premise"—

I do not quibble with that—

"or intends to operate or use any premises . . . for winning any aggregate",

then, in principle, he can be caught by the tax.

Mr. Jones has not even got to the stage of setting up his business; much less has he produced the dust that may or may not be weighable—the Minister was unable to tell us—as a spoil, waste, off-cut or other by-product captured by clause 18(1)(a). There is no dust or stone on the premises; there is only Mr. Jones on the premises. However, he made the mistake of trying to raise money for his business by issuing a prospectus to various of his friends suggesting that they join him in his venture. For all I know, and for all the Minister knows, it may appear to the commissioners that Mr. Jones intends to operate the premises for the purpose of producing a taxable substance, but that is not the purpose at all. The purpose is to produce, by an exempt process, an item that is not taxable—but the by-product is taxable because the Minister's drafting seems to make it so. I do not know whether or not it is taxable because I cannot really understand the Bill, and I do not suppose that the Minister can either. In any case, it may be that the Bill makes the dust taxable—hence it presumably appears to the commissioners to constitute Mr. Jones's intention to operate or use premises for winning aggregate.

We have reached the limits. I understand that Customs and Excise is, thank God, run by British civil servants, who are, on the whole, reasonable people. On the whole, therefore, they will probably administer this appalling, tyrannical legislation in a rather less than appalling and

*[Mr. Letwin]*

tyrannical fashion. However, that is merely probabilistic. The House should not be passing legislation that permits commissioners to determine whether a person intends to do something which he could not possibly know that he intends to do, because he would not have had the slightest reason to find out whether the legislation applied to something that he could not have been expected to expect it to apply to. That is appalling indeed.

I do not suppose that politicians in the Treasury today have any more intention of producing such legislation than they ever did, but someone has come up with this wonderful drafting. No doubt it was drawn from some obscure part of the arcana imperii of VAT legislation or, for all I know, the legislation on the landfill tax. The Minister thinks that he can taunt me about that tax, but I intend to disillusion him on that point. I was not in Parliament to vote for the landfill tax and I would not have voted for it if I had been. The landfill tax stands as a token of only one thing—the Minister's mythology when he says that these measures are fiscally neutral. He is the representative of a Government who raised the landfill tax without raising national insurance contributions. Whatever the origins of this provision, Conservative or Labour, and whether it is intended for long-term or short-term misuse, I care not—it is wrong and indefensible and it ought not to be in the Bill.

I turn now to clause 24(8), which is also very interesting. It tells us:

"Where any entry in the register at any time specifies that any premises registered under a person's name as a registered site are to be taken to be the originating site of"—

there follows a list of several things—

"any question for the purposes of this Part as to the boundaries at that time of the originating site . . . shall be conclusively determined in accordance with that entry."

Let us return to Mr. Jones. What is his situation? The prospectus issued by Mr. Jones seems to the commissioners to make him a taxable person because he intends to do something that, unknown to him, may produce a by-product that is an aggregate for the purpose of the levy, and so he has to register. The area that he registers conclusively determines the boundaries of his action. When he intends to begin his operation, his intentions may relate to a place different from the one where he will actually operate.

I do not see how subsection (6) combines with subsection (8) to produce anything other than the most unholy and arbitrary mess. I may be wrong about that. There may be a long tradition of such statutory construction in other Finance Acts. The Financial Secretary may be able to explain to us how a definitive boundary, established on the basis of an intention as it appears to the commissioners, but which is not yet represented by an actuality of production, can nevertheless be treated by the courts as a reasonable proposition. My mind boggles at that, but it may be the case, and I look forward to hearing from the Financial Secretary how subsection (8) will interact with subsection (6).

**Mr. Timms:** The clause sets out the requirement to register for the aggregates levy. It brings into effect schedule 4, which in turn gives further detail on the required procedures and conditions. A business has to register if it is responsible for the "commercial exploitation" of aggregates in the UK. That phrase is defined in clause 19. The businesses that will be most affected are those that extract aggregates, but the clause may also affect those businesses on whose premises rock is crushed or an exempt substance, usually a mineral, is extracted from a quantity of aggregate that has been transported there from its originating site.

Some businesses are not necessarily concerned with extracting and supplying aggregates to the construction industry, but supply other industries such as glass making or metallurgy. The Bill will assist those businesses where possible by exempting them from registration and minimising the administrative burden. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) asked whether that would be the case, and I can certainly give him that assurance. Those companies will need to demonstrate that they do not supply or otherwise exploit any aggregate for a purpose that is neither exempted nor relieved.

Customs and Excise is given powers to decide the boundaries of any premises for registration purposes to safeguard against avoidance of the levy by businesses that might otherwise locate taxable activity outside previously agreed boundaries. The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) asked several questions about how that will work. What is being described is very much the core, day-to-day activity of Customs; it is the sort of activity in which it excels. I agree with the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) about the quality of civil servants in the UK. There is nothing qualitatively new about what is required of Customs in the Bill. It is merely the circumstances that are different.

The obligation is on the taxpayer to register. There is not a de minimis level, but certain activities are exempt. If there were a de minimis level, the environmental cost of extraction would not be addressed equally by all businesses and the levy could be considered unfair, as I pointed out earlier. Everything set out in the clause is workable and straightforward. It presents no novel or insuperable difficulties for Customs and Excise.

I did not understand the hon. Gentleman's difficulty with subsection (6), which states:

"In particular, where it appears to the Commissioners that any person . . . intends to operate or use any premises . . . they may, if they think fit, register those premises".

That is entirely reasonable. If the commissioners read a prospectus, such as that to which he referred, that indicates that there may be some extraction of aggregates, they may, if they think fit, register those premises. I am not sure that he drew attention to any substantial difficulty.

8 pm

I do not think that identifying the individuals concerned will be especially difficult. A statutory declaration is already made for the requirements of the annual minerals raised inquiry. As the information is already gathered by the Government, we will have a pretty good idea of the organisations involved, so compiling the register will be relatively straightforward. The list drawn up for the purposes of the levy will be slightly different because of the exemptions, but compiling the list of who should be affected will not be difficult.

**Mr. Letwin:** Will my Mr. Jones issuing his prospectus for rock cutting to produce dimension stone appear to the commissioners to constitute grounds for his being registered?

**Mr. Timms:** If Mr. Jones is only producing dimension stone, no; if he intends commercially to exploit aggregate, which is a by-product of that process, yes. That is the straightforward position.

**Mr. Letwin:** The Financial Secretary's use of words was interesting: he referred to the position if Mr. Jones "intends commercially to exploit" an aggregate. However, that is not what Mr. Jones does; he wants to cut rock to produce dimension stone, which is exempt. That brings us back to the core question. If he also produces

"spoil, waste, off-cuts and other by-products",

he is taxable. If his intention is to operate the premises to produce cut rock, may it appear to the commissioners that he falls under subsection (6), despite the fact that his prospectus contains nothing about exploiting aggregates?

**Mr. Timms:** That is a matter for the commissioners. The issue is whether an individual appears in a register, not whether that individual pays tax. Does the hon. Gentleman assume that anyone thought fit to be included on the register would automatically pay tax? That is not so: the tax will be based per tonne on aggregate commercially exploited. If the individual involved commercially exploits—sells—aggregate produced as a by-product of his primary activity, that will be taxed, as it should be.

**Mr. Letwin:** Is the Financial Secretary saying that in the case of Mr. Jones and similar cases it is possible that someone who will never be taxed will nevertheless be registered and, presumably, inspected? Is it possible that people who never produce anything taxable and never intended to produce anything taxable but who appeared to the commissioners to be intending to produce something taxable will be subject to intrusive inspection?

**Mr. Timms:** It is certainly conceivable under the terms of subsection (6) that someone who is thought by the commissioners to be intending commercially to exploit aggregate will be included in the register but never pay tax because he does not commercially exploit aggregate.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton anticipated correctly that there would be a regulatory impact assessment. It is available for inspection—I think that it is on the web. The analysis set out in some detail therein indicates that the total set-up costs to the industry will be approximately one ha'penny per tonne extracted; and total recurring costs will be roughly equivalent to 0.3p per tonne extracted. Those are modest sums. I assure him that our aim in all the consultations with the industry as the regulations are drawn up will be to ensure that the burden imposed by compliance with the requirements is minimal.

The hon. Member for West Dorset appears to have explicitly repudiated the landfill tax. We are witnessing a significant change in the Conservatives' position on environmental taxation. Leading figures in past Conservative Governments believed that there was a role for environmental taxation and most people believe that the landfill tax has been a success. However, those who are in the ascendant in the internal Conservative party disputes of which we are currently hearing a great deal may well be of a different school and not believe that measures such as the landfill tax are appropriate. To the hon. Gentleman and all his hon. Friends who take a similar view, I say that people throughout the country think that there is a role for taxation in addressing environmental issues, and they strongly support measures such as the landfill tax and the aggregates levy.

It is unusual for me to be able to quote in support of the Government's actions the Council for the Protection of Rural England, but its position is clear. It strongly supports the proposed aggregates levy and the steps that we are taking to use the tax system to promote environmental benefit. The CPRE says that the aggregates levy will help to ensure that the price of primary aggregates

"better reflects the environmental costs of extraction"

and that it will help to achieve the Government's goal of prudent use of natural resources. It says that the environmental damage that the aggregates levy is designed to address is occurring now and urges the Government to introduce the levy as soon as possible.

Many people, including those who support the Conservative party, agree with that view. I urge the hon. Gentleman to be cautious about repudiating environmental tax measures introduced by the previous Government, because many feel that they were appropriate and that others, such as the aggregates levy, are needed.

**Mr. Letwin:** I am astonished and delighted by the latitude that has been allowed to the Financial Secretary and me to range way beyond the scope of clause 24. It would therefore be wrong of me to dilate at length now, but I want to respond to the general points that he has just made and then return to the points that relate more narrowly to the clause.

The principle of environmental charges—genuine charges that are not mishandled into pieces of taxation behind which lies a fiscal aim—is one thing. There is much to be said for making polluters pay through charges that are genuinely not abusable into fiscal measures. However, as the Government's actions in respect of the landfill tax clearly show, that is not the position when a Government enter power who intend to use every means of taxation at their disposal and to invent means of taxation not hitherto at their disposal. I again remind the Financial Secretary that he did not reduce national insurance contributions when he increased the landfill tax.

However, whatever else one thinks of the landfill tax, given that it was a tax—the thing to which I object—as opposed to a charge, it was at least fairly clear and transparent. That is a major difference between the landfill tax and the legislation before us now. It is a principle of taxation that it should be simple, clear and transparent, but this measure is not simple, clear or transparent.

**Mr. Timms:** The hon. Gentleman is shifting his ground. He told the House that he would not have voted for the landfill tax.

**Mr. Letwin:** I would not have done so because it was a tax and because I knew that a Government would come along who would use it as a tax, as the current

*[Mr. Letwin]*

Government have done. Had it been a charge, I would have supported it. That is a critical difference and one that the current Government have brought to light, even though they have been at pains to obscure it because they do not want to admit that in the climate change levy, the aggregates tax and a series of parallel threatened taxes, such as banking levies and the like, they intend to find new sources of revenue. That is not a reputable proceeding in terms of the environment. If the Government were serious about environmental charges or genuine environmental taxes, they would not have reversed VAT on fuel or produced the moratorium on gas-fired combustion in power stations. The fact is that they have not been an environmentally sensitive Government. On the whole, they have sought means of raising tax where they think that they can get away with doing so. That is the principle to which I object.

**Mr. Edward Davey:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be possible for the Government to hypothecate all revenues from the tax to a fund or to rebates? They could make it clear in the Bill that they have no intention to raise revenue from the tax.

**Mr. Letwin:** That is an ingenious suggestion, although my hon. Friends and I have not had time to reflect on it. The proposal may have occurred to the hon. Gentleman as an inspiration of the moment. It would involve a sort of Rooker-Wise amendment to environmental taxes, which would turn them by law into crypto-charges. We might be beginning to get somewhere with such a proposal, which could provide some common ground. I do not know whether it will do so, as we need to think about it, but I assure him that the Financial Secretary will not support an amendment that would introduce such a change. It would be more than his job is worth to do so. He would be out of Great George street before he could say "Jack Robinson", or, indeed, "Geoffrey Robinson".

**Mr. Tyrie:** He wants the money.

**Mr. Letwin:** Exactly. My hon. Friend is right: the Financial Secretary wants the money, and he wants a lot more of it later, when he wants to claim that he is doing something innocuous in relation to something for which legislation has already been introduced. In this case, it is called the aggregates levy, but there is also the climate change levy and so on. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) is lobbing a huge grenade into the Government's programme. I look forward to debating in Committee a series of amendments such as that which he proposes. In fact, if we put our minds to the proposal, we might spend most of the Committee stage debating it. I think that that would be much better than discussing most of the rest of the Bill.

I apologise for that intrusion on your good will, Mrs. Heald. Having responded to the Financial Secretary's goading, I shall return to his remarks about the clause. I am genuinely perplexed about the register. I did not understand how perplexed I was until I heard his remarks. I do not know why the register is being introduced, and he did not tell us why, although he suggested that it was entirely innocuous. He did not say that a person's inclusion on the register has no impact on whether he is taxed, although that was his implication. If that is genuinely the case, I suggest that the register is a bureaucratic apparatus that should be obliterated.

However, let me deal with the more charitable hypothesis that, despite the Financial Secretary's unguarded remarks, the register has a purpose and is not being introduced merely to create an extra clause. If that is the case, we must speculate on its purpose. I do not know about that, although I take it that the point of including people on a register is to get them into the Weberian grip of bureaucracy. Bureaucracies are about information, and that is what registers provide. Once people are on the register, they are in the hands of the bureaucracy. In other words, one is a datum on the bureaucracy's data sheets. It knows about us. What is the consequence of the bureaucracy's knowing about people? It comes to visit them. It inspects and looks into them. They are part of what it regards as the possibly taxable community.

8.15 pm

How does Customs and Excise operate in relation to people who are part of the possibly taxable community? It presumes that those who are on its registers and who enter into its data should be taxed. If they turn out not to be paying tax, it will send out into the highways and byways experienced, powerful-minded individuals who will come to find out why they are not doing so. That is what is worrying me, as I expect the Financial Secretary knows.

**Mr. Timms:** Can the hon. Gentleman give any examples of taxes for which there is no register of taxpayers?

**Mr. Letwin:** As a matter of fact, I do not know whether there is a register of income tax payers. If the Financial Secretary's implication is correct, however, he is rather arguing my way. If the point of registers is to tax people, and if registers are generally attached to taxes, his accusation that I was making an elision in supposing that inclusion on the register related to paying tax is false. If he is correct that taxes are generally accompanied by registers, I am right to suggest that inclusion on a register is generally accompanied by taxation. That is the point of being on a register. The point about a person being expected to be taxed is that Customs and Excise will presume that that person should be paying tax. If a person should be paying tax, Customs and Excise will come down like a ton of bricks if he or she is not doing so.

I shall return to Mr. Jones, who is doing his stone cutting and appears to the commissioners to be somebody who intends to do something that might be taxable, poor man, but then turns out not to produce any product that he recognises to be an aggregate. He is not doing anything that he recognises as commercially exploiting a material, but he will be visited by Customs and Excise, which will ask why no tax is being paid. Instead of cutting stone, Mr. Jones will be involved in weeks or months of intensive negotiation with various levels of Customs and Excise. Not least, he will perhaps eventually be involved with the commissioners, who do not even have to respond to him. If they do not do so, they are taken to have judged against him—a point to which we shall return later. The process will be a huge intrusion.

If none of that is true, and the Government do not intend to create circumstances in which there is a presumption of guilt—an assumption that people should be taxable once they are on the register—I do not see the need for the register. The Financial Secretary has not explained that need, unless the register is an attempt to create a presumption that somebody who is included on it should be paying the tax, so that the bureaucracy can visit, inspect and pursue. Of course, that is fine with regard to people who are genuinely liable for tax because they are carrying out the activities in question. However, introducing arrangements for somebody who merely appears to the commissioners to intend to carry out such activities seems part of a slippery slope towards an unintended tyranny.

**Mr. Timms:** I must respond to the hon. Gentleman's remarks, even though they were expressed in a somewhat amusing tone.

Of course, somebody who is included on the register can be issued with an assessment for tax, if that person is making taxable supplies. That is the purpose of the register. If the individual does not need to be registered, he can inform us of that fact. If Customs and Excise is satisfied that he is not commercially exploiting aggregates and does not intend to do so, he will be deregistered. That is extremely straightforward and conventional, and I think that the hon. Gentleman's concerns about slippery slopes to tyranny can be set to one side.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 24 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Schedule 4

AGGREGATES LEVY: REGISTRATION

*Question proposed,* That this schedule be the Fourth schedule to the Bill.

**Mr. Ottaway:** I shall make only a couple of points about the schedule. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) brilliantly exposed the flaws and weaknesses in the introduction of the register. The first few lines of the schedule, which are at the heart of the matter, state:

"An unregistered person who . . . has formed the intention of carrying out the taxable activities . . . shall notify the Commissioners of that fact."

My hon. Friend ruthlessly exposed the flaws in the use of the word "intention". Whose intention is required? The schedule refers to an "unregistered person", but who decides what the intention is? The Financial Secretary rightly looks puzzled, as this is a serious question. However, as any lawyer in his first year of law will know, the question concerns the difference between mens rea and actus reus—the difference between "Does he have the intent?" and "Is he deemed to have had the intent?" The Minister laughs, but I shall provide an analogy from criminal law. If a man sets out to kill someone, that is classed as mens rea, and he is charged with murder. However, if a man drives a car dangerously and accidentally kills someone, that is manslaughter, and is classed as actus reus. That is a fundamental principle of law.

Let us relate that to the aggregates levy. The question of intention is fundamental because the schedule provides for substantial fines. Someone can be fined up to 5 per cent. of the relevant levy. However, let us consider the other end of the spectrum. The Financial Secretary said that there was no de minimis provision—no minimum tonnage to qualify for the levy. Yet there is a minimum fine of £250. If aggregates are £12.50 a tonne, that fine applies to anyone who produces 20 tonnes of aggregates, which would probably be approximately the size of the Table before us. That is not much; as a by-product, it is insignificant.

Someone who produces something that is not taxable, but has a by-product, may have no intention of evading the aggregates levy. There may be a little mound of some substance around the place that makes him liable for a fine. I assume that that attracts a criminal record. The amount is not great, and the Financial Secretary is right to smile. However, there is an important point about intention; its determination is important.

My hon. Friends may wish to raise other points, but I want to discuss only one further matter, which relates to the Data Protection Act 1998. The schedule gives commissioners the power to publish specific information from the register. The interaction with the Data Protection Act is serious and could involve criminal activity. The commissioners could be guilty of that unless their actions complied with the Act. It would therefore be helpful if the Financial Secretary could give some idea of the way in which the information will be published, and deal with the serious points about criminality and intention.

**Mr. Tyrie:** I want to concentrate on paragraph 7, which is entitled "Publication of information on the register". Following the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), it is interesting that sub-paragraph (3) states:

"Information may be published in accordance with this paragraph notwithstanding any obligation not to disclose the information that would otherwise apply."

I presume that that is a waiver of the Data Protection Act 1998. If not, I should like to know what it means.

I shall comment on some of the points that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) made about the reason for the register. I agree that perhaps the tax deserves a register, but I am not convinced that it needs to be published. I should be grateful if the Financial Secretary explained the reason for its publication. I understand the reason for a register of companies, and why the public should be able to consult it. I notice that the Financial Secretary feels the need for some advice, and I look forward to hearing it; I shall keep going for long enough for him to receive it. Is the VAT register publicly available as a consultable document? I do not know the answer. Clearly, there should be a VAT register, but is it publicly consultable? Does Customs and Excise have the discretionary power to publish information on it? Do clause 24 and schedule 4 thus follow precedent?

What information should be published? Paragraph 7 states that the commissioners

"may publish . . . any information which—

(a) is derived from the register; and

(b) falls within any of the descriptions set out below."

In other words, the commissioners may publish only information that falls into both categories. Is that interpretation correct, or may they publish any information derived from the register, with (b) as an additional clarification? What is the limiting factor on the amount of information that may be published?

*[Mr. Tyrie]*

Why is the power to publish discretionary? The wording makes it clear that that is the case. Paragraph 7 states:

"The Commissioners may publish, by such means as they think fit, any information",

and so on. If some information is to be in the public domain, would not it be sensible to establish what information is to be placed there, provide a list and state that that will be done at a given time—perhaps once a year, or more frequently on the internet?

I do not follow the logic of the provision. As in so many measures introduced by the Government—and, occasionally, by previous Conservative Governments—the provision is unnecessarily wide. It grants a huge amount of power to the commissioners. I should be grateful if the Financial Secretary answered my points. Why do the commissioners need to publish? Why not list the information that is to be published? Why not remove the discretion from the commissioners? Does the provision follow a precedent set by the VAT register and others?

**Mr. Timms:** I do not understand the difficulty with paragraph 1, which is clear. If the individual does not intend to sell the aggregate, he is not required to register. If he intends to sell, he should register. That seems straightforward to me. I do not share the difficulty that the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) has with that.

Now let me deal with some of the other points. The names and business addresses of people who exploit aggregates commercially are already in the public domain. I refer to the statutory declaration that is already required. Customs and Excise will produce a consolidated list of those people whose details are already available, which should not give rise to any alarm.

8.30 pm

**Mr. Letwin:** Perhaps what the Financial Secretary has just said shows that I have entirely failed to understand the articulation of clause 19. Certainly either I have done so, or he has. Clause 19(1)(a) seems to make it clear to the ordinary reader that a quantity of aggregate is subjected to exploitation if

"it is removed from a site falling within subsection (2)".

Sites included in subsection (2) include

"the originating site of the aggregate".

There is nothing in the provision about selling the aggregate. If the concept of "removal" will do, the Financial Secretary has just given a misdescription of his own Bill and his own tax.

**Mr. Timms:** The position is as set out in clause 19. Normally, commercial exploitation will involve selling. There might be occasions on which that is not the case, but normally it will be.

**Mr. Letwin:** That really will not do. This is not some sort of general discussion about how to run a kindergarten. This is the law of the land, and if the Bill becomes law, it will say that a quantity of aggregate that is removed from a site is, ipso facto, commercially exploited. If it is thereby commercially exploited, it is prima facie the case that if someone intends to cut rock to make dimension stone, with a by-product that he never expected but which, nevertheless, exists under the definition of aggregate, and he removes it from the site simply to rid himself of the stuff, he is commercially exploiting it. That is not what the Financial Secretary said, and I do not think that it is what he intends to achieve. The problem of intention here is the mismatch between the Financial Secretary's intention and the words of the Bill.

**Mr. Timms:** The circumstances that the hon. Gentleman is seeking to construct, in which some unfairness would be perpetrated as a result of the measure, do not exist. Clause 19 sets out what constitutes commercial exploitation, and that is the way in which Customs and Excise will apply the requirements.

The reason why a register is needed is that customers of those in the aggregate industry have a right to know whether the person supplying aggregate to them—and possibly increasing the price accordingly—is registered for the purposes of the levy. Even without that provision, they would be able to ask Customs and Excise whether a particular person was registered, and Customs and Excise would tell them. That is the position that currently applies with the landfill tax, which, even if it was not supported by the shadow Chief Secretary, was introduced by the previous Government.

The time and manner of notification, and the information contained in it, will be prescribed in the regulations and will also be set out in a public notice prior to the commencement date. I say to the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) that that is an entirely conventional procedure, exactly following those relating to the landfill tax. Indeed, a large part of the wording in the schedule and in the other technical parts of the measure is taken word for word from the measures that deal with the landfill tax.

**Mr. Tyrie:** Perhaps some mistakes were made in the drafting of the landfill tax legislation—who knows? I do not know, because I was not around. Before the Minister finishes, will he answer the questions that I asked? Why has a discretionary power been given, rather than an order to publish the lists, if the reason given is that customers need to consult the lists to ensure that they are dealing with bona fide suppliers? Are there Data Protection Act implications, and does paragraph 3 act as a waiver to that Act? Why are we not setting out in the Bill what information is to be provided, rather than allowing the commissioners to make up their own minds what information to put into the public domain?

**Mr. Timms:** As I said earlier, much of the wording in the schedule was taken from the legislation dealing with the landfill tax. I imagine that similar circumstances will almost certainly apply in this instance, although I will check that and drop the hon. Gentleman a line addressing that point and the others that he has raised.

Let me say a little more about commercial exploitation, because some misunderstanding may be creeping in here. As the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said, clause 19(1) says that aggregate is subjected to exploitation if it is removed from a site. However, aggregate is commercially exploited only if the conditions in clause 19(3), too, are met. In all those circumstances a

person might be registrable, but if it is clear that no tax will be due, despite all that, Customs and Excise will not need to include the individual on the register.

**Mr. Letwin:** I am afraid that that does not answer the question either. The Financial Secretary should look at clause 19(3). Incidentally, it is not clear whether paragraphs (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) are, as it were, exclusive, but I assume that there is, in conceptual terms, an "or" after each paragraph. There is neither an "and" nor an "or" in my text.

**Mr. Timms:** In fact, there is an "and" at the end of paragraph (d).

**Mr. Letwin:** Indeed there is. Perhaps this is helpful. Is the Financial Secretary telling us that commercial exploitation of something that is exploited under clause 19(1) occurs only if all the conditions in paragraphs (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) of subsection (3) apply simultaneously?

**Mr. Timms:** Yes.

**Mr. Letwin:** That is genuinely helpful.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Schedule 4 agreed to.*

*Clause 25 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 26

SECURITY FOR LEVY

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Letwin:** I am sorry that we must return to some of the debate we have just had, but I am glad that we are doing so in that, following the Financial Secretary's helpful clarification, it is clear to me—after another look at clause 19(3)—that my point has not been answered.

Clause 26 reveals the next feature of the scene. Subsection (1) tells us that a person who is registered may be required by the commissioners to give security. It is not just that my poor Mr. Jones has to appear on the register. It is not just that—as was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway)—if he does not make the right noises, attract the attention of Customs and Excise and find himself on the register, he may pay a fine that may be 5 per cent. of what would have been his levy, or £250 if that is the lesser sum. It is not just that Customs and Excise can visit him, inspect him and presume him to be guilty—to be someone who should be paying tax, but is not. He can be required to give security: to lend Customs and Excise money, so to speak. That is the next purpose of his being on the register.

We discover from line 14, the second line of clause 26(1), that a person does not need to be on the register to be required to give security; he can simply be "required to be registered". Whoever drafted the clause had very much in mind precisely the case of my Mr. Jones. We are talking about someone who, it appeared to the commissioners, had the intention—who had not thought himself that he had the intention, and had not asked to be on the register, but has been required to be registered and must now give security.

We return to the question of what intention this person must appear to the commissioners to have had in order to find himself in the invidious position of being presumed guilty, inspected, fined if he does not go on to the register and, under clause 26, required to give security. The answer is that he must have had the intention of exploiting commercially. The Financial Secretary thought that he had found a way out of that by explaining—very helpfully—that, under clause 19(3), to be commercially exploiting, someone who is exploiting under clause 19(1), whose definitions of exploitation include simply removing aggregate from a site, must simultaneously fulfil the conditions of paragraphs (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) of subsection (3).

Let us have a look at those paragraphs. Is any of them, in layman's terms, a normal measure of exploitation—or, to put it another way, selling? That is the word that the Financial Secretary used—incautiously, because it betrayed his real intention, which, unlike the clause, was perfectly rational. The answer is no.

Let us look at subsection (3)(a). It is commercial exploitation if, as part of the phenomenon, the thing in question

"is subjected to exploitation in the course or furtherance of a business".

Clearly, my Mr. Jones is in the course or furtherance of a business and so will everyone else who is relevant be. Subsection (3)(b) says that it is commercial exploitation if

"the exploitation to which"

the thing

"is subjected does not consist in its removal from one registered site to another".

Mr. Jones is in no such position: he has only one site. Subsection (3)(c) states that it is commercial exploitation if the exploitation

"does not consist in or require its removal to a registered site".

Of course, that will not be the case because, again, he has only one site. Subsection (3)(d) states that it is commercial exploitation if the exploitation does not

"consist in or require its removal to any premises for the purpose of having china clay or ball clay extracted"—

that is not his business; it is not relevant. Subsection (3)(e) states that it is commercial exploitation if the exploitation is not such that

"as a result and without its being subjected to any process involving its being mixed with any other substance or material (apart from water), it again becomes part of the land".

Again, that is not the case with Mr. Jones and his dust.

Therefore, Mr. Jones can, I fear, be judged by the commissioners in their wisdom to be intending to be commercially exploiting some dust. I speculate; I do not know. The Minister does not know. He cannot tell me whether dust is included, but I think that it might be—some dust that comes about when Mr. Jones is engaged in the admittedly exempt process of cutting some stone to produce some rock to produce some dimension stone. He is not selling the stuff. He is not intending to sell the stuff. The Bill does not ask him to prove that he is selling the stuff, or otherwise. It makes no reference to selling. It must be the case that he fits within subsections (1) and (3) of clause 19, taking 19(3) to mean 19(3)(a) to (e) simultaneously applied.

My Mr. Jones could well fit in exactly that category. What does he have to do? He has to put down security under clause 26. He has to pay a fine if he does not register.

*[Mr. Letwin]*

He has to permit the Inland Revenue, presumably, to inspect his premises as someone who is registered. When it does, it will undoubtedly ask why on earth he is not paying the tax.

This is a poor situation. Again, I am more than happy to acknowledge my error if I have made one, but, as far as I could make out, the Financial Secretary genuinely thought, as a normal and intelligent person might have, that clause 19, with the various other clauses that we are discussing, including clause 26, would have the commonsensical effect of clobbering all those people in all those ways only if they were intending to sell something. However, that is not what the Bill does. It is very surprising that the Financial Secretary should come here and talk about selling when that is not what the Bill does, unless I have missed something else.

**Mr. Timms:** Clause 26 allows the commissioners to request a payment from a person where they think that that might be necessary to protect the Revenue. The provision is common to other taxes and duties under the care and management of Customs and Excise. The commissioners have the power to decide how much and in what manner such a security must be paid, and may apply penalties in the event that a requirement to provide security has not been complied with.

The security can take the form of a bank guarantee, a bond or indeed a cash deposit. It is a sensible precaution. We need the power to be able to protect the Revenue. We do not intend routinely to ask for security. The powers will be used by Customs only where they are necessary, and where there is a chance that levy that has been collected from customers will not be accounted for.

There is the availability of the commissioners' review and the independent appeal procedures, provided for in clauses 40 and 41. Any appeal against requirement, or the amount of security can be heard without payment or deposit of the disputed amount of security, so the usual safeguards are all in place. These arrangements appear elsewhere in the tax system. I hope that the Committee will not find difficulty with them.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 26 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 27 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Schedule 5

AGGREGATES LEVY: RECOVERY AND INTEREST.

*Question proposed,* That this schedule be the Fifth schedule to the Bill.

8.45 pm

**Mr. Ottaway:** Paragraph 10 of schedule 5 would impose a swingeing level of penalty interest at some 10 percentage points above the rate applicable under the Finance Act 1996 which, I imagine, is the base rate or something similar to it.

The situation is exacerbated by paragraph 10(5), which cuts out a number of the mitigating factors that might have been taken into account in terms of a failure to pay the levy. The swingeing rate is imposed when there seem to be perfectly good reasons for not paying the levy, such as insufficiency of funds. Paragraph 10(5)(b) deals with the question of losses, while (c) concerns whether or not the person has been acting in good faith. If someone acting in good faith fails to pay the aggregates levy and finds himself hit by the base rate plus 10 percentage points, that will be draconian. I would be grateful if the Minister could throw some light on the thinking on this point.

**Mr. Timms:** The schedule contains provisions for the recovery of debts, assessments and interest as a necessary part of the arrangements. It provides that the commissioners may, in certain circumstances, make an assessment of the amount of levy due and, having so notified the person concerned, recover the amount as a debt due to the Crown.

The schedule details the circumstances in which an assessment may be made and specifies other conditions concerning the operation of assessments, including time limits within which an assessment may be made. The power to make an assessment of levy due within the boundaries established by law is an important element of an effective control regime for any tax. It is entirely sensible that, where necessary—for example, because a registered person has failed to make any returns as required by law and thus has not paid the levy due—there should be a means by which Customs can act to recover the levy. The schedule provides an effective and reasonable means for Customs to use its best judgment to collect levy which is due but has not been declared, and it is an essential control measure to deter abuse.

Clause 27 and schedule 5 provide for penalty interest to be imposed in certain circumstances; for example, some failures to pay the levy by the due date. Again, this is a conventional arrangement. Penalty interest is compound interest, calculated—as the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) says—at the penalty rate of 10 percentage points above the ordinary rate. Generally, penalty interest is imposed on outstanding debts and is at a higher rate because it represents ordinary interest plus a penalty.

Again, I underline the fact that all these provisions are already in force in other regimes and, to my knowledge, are not causing any difficulties within them. I do not think that there are any exceptional circumstances here which mean that different arrangements should apply.

In all these matters, taxpayers have the right of appeal to an independent tribunal following a review by the commissioners. That is set out in clause 40. The interest is calculated daily but is added to the principal once a month. The rate of 10 percentage points to which I have referred is calculated on the rate for ordinary interest that is applicable under section 197 of the Finance Act 1996. This is a conventional arrangement and I hope that the Committee will find no difficulty with it.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Schedule 5 agreed to.*

*Clause 28 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Schedule 6

AGGREGATES LEVY: EVASION, MISDECLARATION AND NEGLECT

*Question proposed,* That this schedule be the Sixth schedule to the Bill.

**Mr. Ottaway:** Again, I wish to probe the Minister's thinking on what seems to be a heavy hand in the drafting.

I accept his claim that schedule 5 follows past precedents. None the less, I would be surprised if that were the case with schedule 6, which creates a new series of criminal offences in relation to evasion of the aggregates levy. That appears to be a massive overkill, given that the Crown can already prosecute for conspiracy to defraud or for the common law offence of cheating.

Paragraph 3 of part I is especially offensive, because it states that

"A person is guilty of an offence under this paragraph if his conduct during any particular period must have involved the commission by him of one or more offences under the preceding provisions of this Schedule."

That is tantamount to guilt by mere submission and could lead, in this case, to a prison sentence of up to seven years or an unlimited fine. The test of guilt must be much tighter, because we cannot have people subject to such penalties on the suspicion that they must have been involved in the commission of an offence.

**Mr. Timms:** The schedule covers procedures for evasion, misdeclaration and neglect, and specifies several offences and the related penalties. It deals, therefore, with the criminal offences and the sentences regime for the aggregates levy. Breaches of most of the requirements stemming from the law or regulations are covered by a civil penalty regime, but criminal sanctions are still needed for serious cases of fraudulent evasion of the levy and other serious offences. Effective punishment must be available for those who break the law or who seek to evade payment of the levy.

The schedule also provides for a civil penalty for fraudulent evasion of the levy. As is common practice in other tax areas, it allows Customs and Excise the discretion to deal under the civil penalty regime with an offence that would otherwise require prosecution as a criminal offence. That point may be of some reassurance to the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). The provision is an incentive for the taxpayer to co-operate with Customs and Excise once the fraud has been discovered and also prevents needless expense being incurred by prosecuting offences involving small amounts through the criminal courts. That allows some flexibility, which I hope that the hon. Gentleman will welcome.

I did not entirely follow the difficulty that the hon. Gentleman has with paragraph 3(1), because it is a straightforward statement that breaches of the provisions set out earlier in the schedule constitute an offence.

**Mr. Ottaway:** The Minister is going right to the point. The words are "must have": no evidence needs to be produced. There need only be suspicion, and in my judgment that is not good enough, when there are such heavy fines or a seven-year prison sentence.

**Mr. Timms:** I do not think that that is what is envisaged. The normal arrangements for evidence and court process will of course apply. I see no particular cause for alarm. If I am missing something, the hon. Gentleman might drop me a line and I will be happy to pursue the matter further. Again, I think that this is an entirely conventional arrangement.

*Schedule 6 agreed to.*

*Clause 29 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Schedule 7 agreed to.*

## Clause 30

CREDIT FOR AGGREGATES LEVY

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Letwin:** I shall limit myself to a minute and a half, to enable the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) to have his say.

The mechanism in the clause is probably the right mechanism for solving part of the problem that we will debate later in relation to pre-cast concrete. I see no reason why exports, and import substitution, which we will come to later, cannot be subject to exactly the same regime, regardless of whether we are dealing with raw aggregates or the fabricated material. I hope that, when we come to that debate, we can look back at this clause and see an exact parallel that will enable us to resolve the problem of pre-cast concrete and safeguard the jobs that are at stake. I will not dwell on the subject now, as we will have plenty of opportunity to debate it later, but I wanted to ensure that we have a hook on which to hang those remarks.

**Mr. David Heath:** There is the age-old question whether, in subsection (1), the "may" should be a "will". I believe that it should.

The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) referred to exports. There is a strong argument for using this mechanism for pre-cast concrete, which represents about 3 per cent. of UK sales, and 9 per cent. in the case of paving. There is clearly a problem.

It is hard to understand why the processes referred to in subsection (1)(c) are not listed, even in rudimentary form, especially as in clause 18(3) relevant substances are listed exhaustively.

Finally, under subsection (2)(c), it is hard to see why no interest is to be added if repayment is in the form of a refund, given that provision is made later in the clause for interest to be added to a credit. I ask the Minister to look at that anomaly.

**Mr. Timms:** We will be looking at the main points raised by the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) and for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) later.

*It being Nine o'clock,* THE DEPUTY CHAIRMAN, *pursuant to Orders [7 November and 9 April], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

*Clause 30 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 31

REPAYMENTS OF OVERPAID LEVY

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Ottaway:** Clause 31 should, in truth, be considered with clause 32. It deals with repayments of overpaid levy. It provides that when a person has paid an amount to the commissioners by way of aggregates levy that was not levy due to them, they should be liable to repay the amount. That amount is repaid only on the making of a claim.

*[Mr. Ottaway]*

It would be helpful if the Minister spelled out his thinking with regard to the clause. How does he see it working, and under what circumstances are people likely to pay a levy that was not due? Will it be as a result of overcharging by Customs and Excise, in which case it would be an error on its part? Will it be repaid with interest under those circumstances?

Under what circumstances does the Financial Secretary envisage that a claim will be made? What would happen, for example, if Customs and Excise realised that some poor chap had overpaid the levy without realising it? Is it under an obligation to repay the money? Under clause 31(2), that does not seem to be the case. Will the Minister consider what would happen in the event of an error being made of which the levee was not aware? There is a three-year time limit under clause 32, which we can perhaps deal with later, along with schedule 8. It would assist the Committee if the Minister could enlighten us with regard to these important administrative points.

**Mr. Timms:** The clause provides for the repayment of overpaid levy. It enables Customs and Excise to prescribe in regulations the form and manner of claims for repayment. The measures allows for adjustments once errors of this nature are identified. It is clearly a necessary component of any fair tax and, as with so many other measures that we have been discussing, is a replication of measures that apply widely across the tax system and work well.

It will not be difficult for people to claim repayment. The hon. Gentleman referred to clause 31(2). The procedure will be kept as simple as possible. Details will be published in a public notice prior to the commencement date so there should be no difficulty about how to do that. The system will be designed to be fair; Customs and Excise will require evidence of any overpayment that is claimed. That will be specified in regulations and in the public notice. There will, of course, be the right of appeal against an initial decision by Customs and Excise, as is conventional, in the form of a review by Customs and Excise and, if the party is still unsatisfied, by appeal to an independent tribunal. These established and familiar arrangements work well elsewhere, and I hope that the Committee accepts that they will do so in this instance.

**Mr. Ottaway:** I am grateful for that, but the Minister has not dealt with my central point. What would happen when the person levied—the payer—had not made a claim because he was unaware that he had overpaid? Would Customs and Excise be under a duty to repay or to notify the person on whom the levy had been laid? The point applies in several areas. I have often wondered what happens in the Inland Revenue. If, for example, the Minister had inadvertently overpaid tax, I am sure that he would expect the Revenue to notify him if it knew about it. The same should apply here. The point is unclear, and I wonder whether the Minister might think about it and return to it on Report.

**Mr. Timms:** I shall be happy to reflect on the point. I do not believe that the Bill contains anything novel by comparison with arrangements that apply elsewhere. The position on liability and responsibility is set out in clause 31(2), which compares with what happens elsewhere in the tax system. I have no doubt that if the commissioners became aware of overpayment, they would take steps to put it right.

It would be unusual for the commissioners to be aware that tax had been overpaid if the person who had paid the levy was not aware of it. I cannot think what circumstances might give rise to that, but if the hon. Gentleman wants to raise any variations on that theme, I shall be happy to think about them.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 31 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 32

SUPPLEMENTAL PROVISIONS ABOUT REPAYMENTS ETC.

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Ottaway:** Having just about heard an "Aye" out of the less than massed ranks on the Government Benches for the previous clause, I shall raise a point already alluded to in the previous debate. Does the three-year time limit stem from the knowledge of overpayment or from overpayment itself? If a chap had overpaid but did not become aware of it for a year, would the three years begin then or would it have begun at the date of overpayment?

My only other point relates to the terribly subjective reference to unjust enrichment in clause 32(2), which states:

"In the case of any claim for a repayment of an amount of aggregates levy other than a claim to a repayment to which a person is entitled by virtue of tax credit regulations, it shall be a defence to that claim that the repayment of that amount would unjustly enrich the claimant."

Why should that be a defence? What does the Minister have in mind in referring to unjust enrichment? He may be satisfied with enrichment, but not with unjust enrichment. What does he mean by unjust, and what precedents and criteria are being applied?

One assumes that the decision would be taken by the commissioners, and I hope that the Minister will confirm that there will be a right of appeal. Perhaps that appeal should be beyond the appeal procedure set out in the Bill.

We are well aware that the concept of unjust enrichment is set out elsewhere, but I should be grateful if the Minister could tell us to what extent it applies in this provision. Perhaps the Minister may draw some comfort from subsection (4)(b), which deals with the extent to which

"any enrichment of the taxpayer would be unjust".

Obviously, much thinking has gone into the nature of justness or unjustness. Perhaps the Minister could tell us which criteria would be involved.

**Mr. Timms:** The clause does indeed contain further provisions about repayment of the levy. The time limit of three years is set for claiming repayment of overpaid levy; that will be three years from the overpayment occurring, I think, but I may well want to return to that point before we conclude our consideration of the clause.

Non-payment of claims is provided for if that is considered to result in unjust enrichment. The circumstances that we have in mind are when an amount of

levy is due for repayment to the claimant, but another person has in fact borne the cost. In that situation, unjust enrichment would occur.

The time limit is to establish reasonable control over the levy. It is similar to other time limits in Customs legislation. The three years run from the making of the claim—that is set out in 32(1). The measure allows for repayment of additional costs incurred, if they are sufficiently quantified. That relates to a point made earlier by the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) on interest payable by Customs when levy has been overpaid. Interest is payable by Customs as long as an error by Customs led to the overpayment.

**Mr. Ottaway:** May I press the Minister on the point about the three years from the making of the claim? Once the claim has been made, what is the relevance of the three-year period? Can the claim relate back only three years, or do the commissioners have three years in which to make the payment? That would be ludicrous. The clause refers to an amount paid

"three years before the making of the claim",

so I repeat my question: does the three-year period start to run from the moment that the overpayment is made or in some other circumstances?

**Mr. Timms:** It is the former—it relates back.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 32 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Schedule 8

AGGREGATES LEVY: REPAYMENTS AND CREDITS

*Question proposed,* That this schedule be the Eighth schedule to the Bill.

**Mr. Ottaway:** Schedule 8 relates to aggregates levy repayments and credits and the reimbursement arrangements. As the schedule is detailed, long and extensive, it would be helpful to the Committee if the Minister could briefly set out his thinking on it.

**Mr. Timms:** I do not have a great deal to add to what I have already said on the subject. My remarks on clause 32 apply equally to schedule 8. I do not apologise for repeatedly making the point that all these arrangements are wholly conventional and reproduce arrangements that work well elsewhere in the tax system. We need provisions on repayments. Such provisions are set out in the schedule. They work well elsewhere, and I have no doubt at all that they will work extremely well in this measure.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Schedule 8 agreed to.*

## Clause 33

APPOINTMENT OF TAX REPRESENTATIVES

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

9.15 pm

**Mr. Letwin:** I should like to begin by asking the Financial Secretary to confirm that clause 33 replicates the standard VAT provisions. I wonder whether he can give us an idea of how far the clause will apply. That is relevant in the context of the debate that we shall have on the serious matter of job exports. So far as the Government are aware, what is the structure of the industry's non-resident holdings? Are there significant non-resident holding companies with significant subsidiaries that operate or—to revert to our earlier discussion—could appear to the commissioners to be intended to operate in a taxable domain in respect of the aggregates levy?

Has the Financial Secretary discussed the European Union aspects of the clause in relation to any such non-resident holding companies and their subsidiaries? Has he received legal advice on that? Is he aware of the legal challenges to the proposal and its effects currently being contemplated and mounted by various people in the domestic industry under EU law? What advice has he had about that? It would be helpful to understand those points, which relate to clause 33, although their importance will become evident when we debate clause 48—the substantive debate that we need to have in the time remaining this evening.

**Mr. Timms:** Clauses 33 and 34 are technical provisions, the purpose of which, in common with the other indirect taxes, is to provide special treatment for non-resident companies to protect the Inland Revenue. The great bulk of the provisions is based on those for the landfill tax, much of which was, in turn, drawn from the arrangements for VAT, as the hon. Gentleman suggests. However, the provisions are not intended to address non-resident holding companies; they are essentially intended to deal with importers who do not have a permanent base in the United Kingdom. Air passenger duty is an example of the need for such provisions.

I do not have the information that the hon. Gentleman requests, and I have received no representations about a legal challenge. Of course, EU state aid arrangements will need to be discussed, and those discussions will take place in the usual way.

**Mr. Letwin:** I am grateful to the Financial Secretary for that response. I am sorry, but I seem to have misunderstood the point that he made about the purpose of the clause. Is he saying that the purpose is to catch the importer who could otherwise avoid the import form of the levy?

**Mr. Timms** *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Letwin:** That clarification is very helpful. In that case, I shall ask a question different from the one I misguidedly asked in the first place. How will non-resident holding companies with substantial subsidiaries in this country be affected? Will the domestic subsidiary simply be treated as an ordinary domestic company for the purposes of the tax?

**Mr. Timms** *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Letwin:** I am grateful for that clarification. In that case, I have a further hypothetical question, because I do

*[Mr. Letwin]*

not imagine that there will be many imports of pure gravel. However, when an import qualifies for the levy because it appears in the taxable form of gravel and not as prefabricated concrete, I understand that it will be subject to the levy exactly as if it had been moved from a UK quarry. Under the terms of clause 19, it will be treated as if it had been commercially exploited. If that is the case, presumably there is a clear argument for parity of treatment between the domestic and the imported product.

I take it that no state aid issue will result from such parity, but does it not follow that an odd and negative state aid issue will arise in relation to an import that escapes the levy because it has been cloaked in the form of prefabricated concrete? If the same object is produced by a domestic subsidiary of a non-resident holding company, it would be subject to the levy because it is produced domestically. Has the Financial Secretary received any advice on that matter?

**Mr. Timms:** I have been involved in several discussions with Brussels about state aid matters, and I do not envisage any concerns being raised about the point to which the hon. Gentleman has drawn attention.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 33 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 34 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 35

GROUPS OF COMPANIES ETC.

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Letwin:** The Committee will be grateful if the Financial Secretary can confirm that the clause will lead to the same treatment for groups as in other indirect taxation legislation, such as that for VAT.

Will the Financial Secretary also say something about clause 35(2)? It states:

"Any aggregates levy with which a body corporate is charged in respect of aggregate subjected to commercial exploitation at a time when the body is a member of a group shall be treated for the purposes of this Part as if it were the representative member for that group (instead of that body) which is charged with the levy."

If we ignore the words "subjected to commercial exploitation" and substitute them with the word "sold"—which the Financial Secretary unguardedly used earlier and tried to apply to clause 19, even though it does not apply—clause 35(2) would be a standard provision. It would operate in the same way as any other legislation on indirect taxes, and quite rightly so. It would be a straightforward anti-evasion measure that was designed to prevent corporate reorganisations resulting in the evasion of tax.

To return to the issue of commercial exploitation, however, I persist in not understanding, among other things, how clause 19 will work from a sheer practical point of view, even if we leave aside the particular problems that would emerge from the case of Mr. Jones, about which I speculated earlier. Clause 35(2) exposes the issue beautifully and, under it, we must ask when commercial exploitation has occurred—and "when" is the all important issue. It is not enough to know whether commercial exploitation occurred; what matters is when it occurred.

Let me consider the matter in the reverse order of logic. I persist in believing that after we have completed the tests in clause 19(3), which determine whether the exploitation is commercial and which have, according to the Minister, to be taken simultaneously, we still have to ask at what moment that exploitation occurred. For that, we must look to clause 19(1), which tells us nothing about when that might have been—perhaps it is not meant to. I remember lecturing about such "if, and only if" clauses at Cambridge. They are jolly good for some logical purposes, but are of no use for temporal purposes.

It is clear that paragraphs (a), (b), (c) and (d) of clause 19(1) are followed by an implicit "or"—indeed, paragraph (c) has an actual "or" after it. If the Minister is using the method of statutory construction in which the "and" in clause 19(3)(d) implies that paragraphs (a), (b), (c), (d) and (e) have to be taken together, then the "or" at the end of clause 19(1)(c) must imply that aggregate is exploited if it comes under paragraphs (a) or (b) or (c) or (d).

Clearly such activities could occur at different times. If the quantity of aggregate is subjected to exploitation when it is removed from a relevant site, that will not necessarily happen at the same moment as the aggregate

"becomes subject to an agreement to supply it to any person",

as set out in clause 19(1)(b). Neither of those moments is likely to happen at the same time as the aggregate is used for construction purposes, as set out in paragraph (c). That is likely to be later on in the day; for all I know, it may occur at a different time from when the aggregate

"is mixed"—

except in permitted circumstances, on which we need not dwell—

"with any material or substance other than water",

as set out in paragraph (d). So there are three or possibly four moments, any one of which would qualify as exploitation: hence—as the tests in clause 19(3) have hypothetically been simultaneously satisfied—the aggregate is deemed to have been commercially exploited.

Clause 35 deals with groups of companies and with evasion. Subsection (2) states:

"Any aggregates levy with which a body corporate is charged in respect of aggregate subjected to commercial exploitation at a time when the body is a member of a group".

When is that time? Let us suppose that the body was a member of the group when the product was removed from a site falling within subsection (2), under clause 19(1)(a), but was not a member when it became subject to an agreement to supply it, or when it was used for construction, or when it was mixed other than in permitted circumstances and so on. What is the relevant time?

There might be a clear explanation of that, and it would be nice to know what it is. We have a series of tests for exploitation, none of which has anything to do with anyone's ordinary understanding of the term. In addition, they are connected with tests of commercial exploitation which have nothing to do with the understanding not just of an ordinary person, but of an extraordinary person—namely, the Minister. He thought that the crucial test is the time of the sale, but it is not.

We are left with a genuine question about the time. My guess is that we do not know the answer and will have to wait and see how the courts deal with the problem, which

may differ over the years. I leave that speculation on the table in the hope that I can withdraw it after the Minister has cast light on that interesting question.

9.30 pm

**Mr. Timms:** These are technical provisions. Their purpose, in common with similar measures on other indirect taxes, is to provide for special treatment for groups of companies to protect their revenue and facilitate the administration of the tax.

As the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) suspected, the clause is based on the arrangements for VAT, but it is not exactly the same because under VAT provisions Customs and Excise can insist on grouping as an anti-avoidance measure. That is not needed in the case of the aggregates levy. This is an entirely voluntary and facilitative arrangement. The clause says that two or more bodies corporate are eligible to be treated as members of the same group for the purposes of the Bill. The fact that the arrangements are not the same as those for VAT may limit the force of the hon. Gentleman's questions.

When we were discussing clause 33, I rightly repeated that the bulk of the provisions are drawn from the arrangements for the landfill tax, which were drawn from those for VAT. I ought to make it absolutely clear that clause 33 itself is based on the arrangements for air passenger duty, which was also introduced by the previous Government.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the timing of commercial exploitation. It is determined by whichever activity is the earliest of those listed in clause 19(1)(a) to (d). Clause 19(7)(a) makes it clear that, once commercial exploitation has taken place, it cannot take place again with the same aggregate.

**Mr. Letwin:** The Financial Secretary is very helpful. He said that we discover in clause 19(7) the deep truth that it is the timing of the first activity that applies. I see nothing in that subsection that serves the purpose, so to give him time to consider the matter, I shall read it out:

"For the purposes of this section a quantity of aggregate is mixed with a material or substance in permitted circumstances"—

that appears to deal only with subsection (1)(d)—

"if . . . the material or substance with which it is mixed consists wholly of a quantity of taxable aggregate that has not previously been subjected to commercial exploitation . . . and . . . the mixing takes place on a site which, in a case where it falls within subsection (2) above in relation to any part of the aggregate included in the mixture, so falls in relation to every part of it."

I see that that has the effect that mixing, which subsection (1)(d) is concerned with, does not itself constitute a basis for double taxation under the levy if the item in question has previously been taxed under the levy, that is, under paragraphs (a), (b) or (c). I cannot see how subsection (7) in any way tells us which is the relevant date if there is a conflict of dates between subsection (1), paragraphs (a), (b) or (c).

Last Thursday morning, in a rather unpleasantly spent hour, I went back and looked through clause 19(4), (5) and (6) for an answer to that question. For a brief, glorious moment, I thought that I might have found the answer in subsection (6), which says:

"For the purposes of this section a quantity of aggregate becomes subject to an agreement to supply it to any person"—

the reference to subsection (1)(b)—

"except to the extent that it is not separately identifiable at the time when the agreement is entered into . . . and . . . to that extent, at the time when it is appropriated to the agreement."

However, I then realised that that is limited to telling us about subsection (1)(b); it tells us nothing about the conflict of timing in paragraphs (a), (b) and (c). Secondly, it tells us nothing about timing anyway. It tells us only something about what is and what is not something subject to an agreement to supply.

I am bound to say that I cannot see anything in clause 19(4) or (5) that resolves the problem. Clearly, there is nothing in clause 19(1), and the Minister has already told us about clause 19(3), so we are left with clause 19(2), but that tells us exclusively about sites. I am at a loss.

**Mr. Timms:** I might be able to help the hon. Gentleman. I apologise for having given him the wrong reference. I should have referred him to clause 17(2)(c), which covers the point he seeks.

**Mr. Letwin:** I am grateful to the Financial Secretary. I may have misunderstood. I understand that clause 17(2)(c) has an effect that relates to the point about not subjecting something to double taxation under the levy. I shall explain shortly why I do not think that it solves the problem arising in respect of clause 19(1)(a), (b) and (c)—conflicts of time in relation to clause 35—although I may be mistaken about that.

Clause 17 states:

"For the purposes of this Part any quantity of aggregate is, in relation to any occasion on which it is subjected to commercial exploitation, a quantity of taxable aggregate except to the extent that . . . it is or derives from any aggregate that has already been subjected to a charge to aggregates levy".

That clearly states the excellent principle that something cannot be taxed twice. However, to return to 19(1)(a), (b) and (c), which are the cause of the problem in relation to clause 35, it could be that the quantity of aggregate involved in relation to the company which was, but is not, part of the group—the issue dealt with under clause 35—was at a certain time "removed from a site", at another time

"subject to an agreement to supply",

and at yet another time "used for construction", but at no time "subjected to a charge". It might not be subjected to a charge for some time to come, beyond any of those events.

I do not see how clause 17(2)(c), which appears to be a general prohibition on double taxing—and is admirable as such—handles the problem of the conflict of times that arises from a problem identifying, not the moment at which the thing was subjected to a charge, but the moment at which it became eligible to be subjected to a charge, which is a different matter altogether. I may be wrong about this and I shall be delighted if the Minister can assure me that the principles of statutory construction in some way determine that clause 17(2)(c) answers the question of which of the times set out in clause 19(1)(a), (b) and (c) is relevant for the purpose of grouping or ungrouping.

**Mr. Timms:** I think that it does. I was trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's argument about eligibility for liability for a charge. The point made in clause 19 is that

*[Mr. Timms]*

the aggregate becomes liable for levy in the circumstances set out therein, and the impact of clause 17(2)(c) is that it is the first of the "experiences" of a given quantity of aggregate that causes the liability to be incurred. That is the point at which the liability arises.

**Mr. Letwin:** I am grateful to the Financial Secretary for saying that. Under Pepper *v.* Hart, his comments may help the courts by providing some clue of what he is trying to achieve. I cannot see how on earth the wording achieves the effect that he describes, however. I say that not as a lawyer, but as an ordinary human being who is trying to be a legislator. However, he has clearly stated his intention, so I hope that that may guide the courts and provide a perfectly sensible resolution of the issue.

Let us assume that that is the intention—we must hope that it is also the effect—and consider what will happen if the degrouping to which the clause relates does not lead to avoidance of the tax. I think that the Financial Secretary said that the first of paragraphs (a), (b), (c) and (d) to clause 19(1) would apply before the degrouping. A degrouped company may have removed some relevant substance—in the technical terms of the Bill, it will be an aggregate—from the site, but it will have been covered by 19(1)(a) before the degrouping. Even if the company only later becomes subject to the agreement to supply—in layman's terms, the sale will therefore occur later—and the proceeds go to the degrouped organisation, will not the liability nevertheless arise in relation to the group and not the degrouped entity?

I cannot believe that that is what the Financial Secretary intends. I think that I understand the purpose of clause 19(1)(a), which is, incidentally, jolly odd. The provision is intended to try to allow Customs and Excise to exercise the maximum leverage. Indeed, that is the spirit of the aggregates levy. One does not have to prove that the material has been sold or that it has ever been used or commercially exploited in any terms that the Financial Secretary or I would ordinarily use as ordinary human beings. One has to prove only that the stuff was taken off the site and did not appear at another registered site. That is easy to prove; it is about the most objective fact that one can get at. I think that clause 19(1)(a) was drafted to make it as easy as possible for Customs and Excise to ensure that it gets the levy.

That intention gives rise to the oddities that I described in relation to Mr. Jones and his dimension stone cutting, but it also produces oddities in relation to grouping. The construction of the provisions shows that somebody has said, "How can I make dead sure that Customs and Excise can grab the items in question and tax them?" I do not think that that person has asked to a sufficient extent whether it is fair to add such provisions to the mix of criteria for eligibility for the tax. Nor has it been asked whether it would be reasonable to apply the test of clause 19(1)(a) in all the circumstances that may arise.

This is very complicated terrain, and I do not think that either the Financial Secretary or I have reached the bottom of the matter. Notwithstanding his brave remarks and his splendid Pepper *v.* Hart explanation of his intentions regarding 17(2)(c), I think that we have probably identified a lacuna in terms of the interaction of clause 35 and clause 19(1). My fear is that there are dozens of other lacunae and that my feeble intellect has not revealed them all in the short time that has been allowed to us. I am afraid that all sorts of similar problems will creep out of the woodwork as this horrible tax is applied. I think that the provision was constructed by somebody who was very attentive to the question of how to grab the tax, and that it was drafted far too quickly to enable a proper investigation of whether all the interactions had been identified so as to ensure fair and sensible results in all cases.

9.45 pm

**Mr. Timms:** The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) flatters me by suggesting that courts will pore over my words in the debate for years—indeed, centuries—to come. However, we are considering obscure circumstances that the courts will not study frequently.

The hon. Gentleman is right about the purpose of the element of clause 19 to which he referred. However, I do not believe that the problem that he fears will arise. If the party has moved the aggregate, it is commercial exploitation and tax is due unless we are dealing with an exemption. If commercial exploitation has occurred, and no tax is due, but a second, taxable commercial exploitation takes place, liability arises at that point.

I shall reflect further on the hon. Gentleman's points. I do not believe that there is a problem, but he is right that the subject is complex. It may therefore be appropriate to reflect further and ascertain whether there is a difficulty. If there is, I shall revert to the subject. I hope and believe that there is no difficulty, but the matter is worth further thought.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 35 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Schedule 9 agreed to.*

**Clause 36**

PARTNERSHIPS AND OTHER UNINCORPORATED BODIES

*Question proposed*, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Letwin:** Again, I begin by asking the Financial Secretary to confirm that the provision parallels standard clauses in previous legislation. How will that work in the case that we are considering? Representatives of the industry have told me that several people would be caught by subsection (1)(a) and (b). They include sole traders who busy themselves with a quarry; some of them carry out their business in partnership. I stand to be corrected, but I believe that subsection (1) has a wide application to the smaller end of the industry. That is not true of the great aggregates companies—the half dozen or so that comprise the great bulk of production—but of the tail, which must never be forgotten or ignored if we care about our economy. The tail includes many traders who would be caught by subsection (1).

It is therefore unsatisfactory that we are told only:

"The Commissioners may by regulations make provision for determining by what persons anything required to be done under this Part is to be done where, apart from those regulations, that requirement would fall on"

people who are caught by subsection (1)(a) or (b). The position would be less unsatisfactory if the Financial Secretary could give us some idea of the contents of the

regulations. The smaller businesses have no idea of them or their potential effect. That is bad enough for big businesses. Indeed, the levy's effect on big business is a large part of the problem. For small business, the worst thing will be uncertainty about the regulations, and not knowing what is about to hit it. I hope that the Financial Secretary will give us a clear idea of what the regulations will look like, and of how those who are unincorporated or carrying on a partnership, or both, will be treated.

In particular, it would be good to know what will happen in the odd cases, and how they will be dealt with. The Minister will, of course, tell us that such cases are very unlikely to occur and highly hypothetical. However, let us suppose that two people, both unincorporated, are knocking away at two parts of the same quarry. When we come to the interesting question under clause 19(1) of when the exploitation occurs or to the difficult questions about which substance we are concerned with when mixtures of substances occur in complicated ways and some materials are encased in others, how will we know which party involved is responsible for what? How will the regulations produced by the commissioners deal with such cases?

Those are not straightforward cases. We are dealing with complex processes, in which the levy forces a disentangling of substances and times from one another that is unprecedented and that has been unnecessary for other purposes. The regulations will, therefore, have effects that similar regulations relating to most other taxes would not be expected to have. Will the Minister, therefore, give us a clear guide as to what he expects the regulations to look like? Perhaps he might care to deposit a draft of them before the House, before the end of the deliberations in Standing Committee.

**Mr. Timms:** These provisions have a great deal in common with other indirect taxes, on which they are based. The wording is lifted directly from the provisions in the legislation for the landfill tax and for VAT. I do not have data about the number of businesses in this sector to which the provisions will apply. However, I do not accept—although this might be splitting hairs—that it is important to get the provisions right only if many businesses are involved. Even when only small numbers of people are affected, the provisions can have a considerable impact on them. It is therefore important to get them right, and that is the view that we take in this case.

Just as the clause is taken directly from the arrangements for landfill tax and for VAT, so I expect the regulations to look like the regulations that apply to partnerships and other unincorporated bodies in the case of landfill tax and VAT. I would advise the hypothetical individuals to whom the hon. Gentleman referred to look at those regulations. They can be pretty confident that these provisions will look rather like them.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 36 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 37 and 38 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 39

TRANSFER OF A BUSINESS AS A GOING CONCERN

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Letwin:** I do not want to detain the Committee long on clause 39. We have a major issue with clause 40, which we want to move on to, but I want briefly to ask a question. There is a perfectly reasonable requirement in clause 39—perhaps the Financial Secretary will confirm that this is in common with much previous legislation—that if one is going to hand over one's business to someone else, one has to tell Customs and Excise about it. I should put it another way: rather unfortunately, the clause allows the commissioners to make regulations that will have that effect. Let me make a general point, and say that throughout the Bill, as in a good deal of other legislation, there is reference to far too much regulation on the part of the commissioners—but that is an overall feature of indirect taxation, for which the Financial Secretary and his colleagues should not be blamed personally.

I am concerned about a specific matter. If the Financial Secretary will forgive me, I shall return to the hypothetical case of Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones did not think that he was in the business; he thought that he was in another business, which was exempt. The commissioners judged him to be intending to be in a business that would qualify.

Let us move the story on a bit. Mr. Jones had to register—if he had not, he would have been fined—and he had to deposit a security. As it turns out, that was for nothing, because Mr. Jones has never produced anything taxable. He has never produced anything that, on detailed inspection, could be shown to be an aggregate for the purposes of the Bill. I think that there will be many such cases: by the time it is found that those concerned are not caught by the legislation, they will have been subjected to a huge amount of intrusion.

Does clause 39 constitute the next intrusion? Let us suppose that poor Mr. Jones, having at last—or so he thinks—reached the end of all that unnecessary and unjustified intrusion by Customs and Excise, wants to sell the business because he is so fed up, or for some other reason. Will he then—because he has been registered under the regulations for which clause 39 provides—have to inform Customs and Excise that he has sold the business, so that the next person along the line may be subject to exactly the same unnecessary harassment, or will the regulations at least prevent that from happening if the person in question, although registered, has never had to pay any of this wretched tax?

**Mr. Timms:** The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) is right again. Clause 39 is a technical provision, securing continuity when a business is transferred from one person to another as a going concern. This is common practice in the case of other indirect taxes.

I do not know the answer to the hon. Gentleman's specific question, but perhaps I can drop him a line.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 39 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 40

REVIEW OF COMMISSIONERS' DECISIONS

**Mr. Ottaway:** I beg to move amendment No. 22, in page 33, line 33, leave out "confirmed" and insert "revoked".

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 23, in clause 41, page 34, line 2, leave out from "above" to end of line 3.

**Mr. Ottaway:** Clause 40 applies to

"any decision of the Commissioners",

and to powers to review any of those decisions and to appeal. Subsection (1) lists a number of matters relating to the commissioners' powers, while subsection (2) states:

"Any person who is or will be affected by any decision to which this section applies may by notice in writing to the Commissioners require them to review the decision."

The commissioners make a decision, but, under certain circumstances, a person who feels affected or aggrieved has a right of appeal and the commissioners look at the decision again—so far, so good.

10 pm

Under subsection (3), the appeal is allowed if the notice requiring the review is given before the end of the period of 45 days—again, so far, so good. The grounds for appeal are set out in subsection (5). The facts to be considered by the commissioners have to be new facts. The ground cannot be gone over again—again, so far, so good.

At that point, having considered the new facts, the commissioners can withdraw, vary or confirm the decision that has been reviewed. This is where the clause comes unstuck. When they have reviewed their decision, they may decide to withdraw, vary or confirm it. If they do not, within the period of 45 days beginning with the day on which the review was required, give notice to the person requiring it of their determination,

"they shall be deemed to have confirmed the decision."

Therefore, a chap appeals, he produces new facts and if, after 45 days, nothing is said, that is it. He is not informed. He is not told whether there has been an error or whether something has been missed out. If no one tells him anything, the original decision is confirmed.

It is clear what has gone on. The Minister has a busy life. He has an extensive Bill. I think that he has done pretty well tonight in dealing with all the points that have been raised, but he may have missed this point. The provision is designed to cover some official who perhaps fails to notify the person of the decision of the commissioners that the original decision stands. It does not deal with the point that there may be an error, that the commissioners may decide to vary their original decision and that, if someone forgot to tell the chap, that effect would be negatived because they would be deemed to have confirmed the original decision. The amendment changes the word "confirmed" to "revoked" to deal with that situation.

I draw the Minister's attention to the front cover of the Bill, which says,

"European Convention On Human Rights

Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer has made the following statement under section 19(1)(a) of the Human Rights Act 1998:

In my view the provisions of the Finance Bill are compatible with the Convention rights."

The Chancellor is a busy chap. I suspect that he has not spotted that particular line because, if ever there was a blatant breach of the European convention on human rights, this is it.

If I, any of my colleagues or Labour Members were to raise a point of order with you, Sir Alan, they would expect you to respond. They would not expect you just to sit there, thinking that, if you said nothing, it should be assumed that your original decision stood. They would want a response. Anyone who has an appeal wants to hear what the outcome of the review is.

This is a flagrant breach of natural justice. It involves not only the European convention on human rights, but principles of natural justice going back to the origins of the British legal system. People are entitled to an explanation of the reasons given by the commissioners.

**Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): Will my hon. Friend comment on clause 40(4), which states:

"it shall be the duty of the Commissioners to give written notification of any decision to which this section applies to any person"?

Does my hon. Friend think that that in any way contradicts the argument that is being advanced?

**Mr. Ottaway:** My right hon. Friend has picked up an important point. What's good for the goose should be good for the gander; if there is written notification in subsection (4), why can we not have it in subsection (8)? That is the inconsistency, and I am pretty sure that there has been an error.

There are two strands of thinking. The first is whether this is a breach of the European convention on human rights; the second is whether it is a breach of a long line of judicial review cases that oblige authorities to give reasons. It is right that I should explore both avenues.

Article 6 of the European convention provides anybody with the right to a fair trial. The convention refers to a criminal case, whereas what we are discussing does not, although someone who does not pay the right levy will be a criminal. None the less, article 6(1), which refers to civil rights—it is not just a question of criminal cases—states:

"everyone is entitled to a fair and public hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law. Judgment shall be pronounced publicly".

That article, which has been incorporated by the Government into English jurisdiction, sets out in some detail the circumstances in which that should happen.

The Financial Secretary has to say why everybody else is entitled to have a public judgment but, under the aggregates levy, there is no right to public judgment. The learned work "Human rights Law and Practices", edited by Lord Lester and David Pannick—two distinguished authors—sets out the criteria for a reasoned judgment, stating:

"It is a requirement of a fair trial in both civil and criminal matters that a court should give reasons for its judgment.

For recent consideration of the duty to give reasons both at common law and under the Convention see *Stefan v. General Medical Council . . .* where the Privy Council referred to 'the possible reappraisal of the whole position (in relation to the duty to give reasons) which the passing of the Human Rights Act 1988 may bring about', and commented that the provisions of article 6 'will require closer attention to be paid to the duty to give reasons, at least in relation to those cases where a person's civil rights and obligations are being determined'."

I do not think that we could have a clearer exposition of what is the law and why the proposal is in breach of it.

The book states:

"The extent of the duty to give reasons may vary according to the nature of the decision"

and sets out a number of cases, such as Ruiz Torija v. Spain and Georgiadis v. Greece. This concerned a

"violation where court found applicant guilty of 'gross negligence' without particularising matters said to constitute such negligence."

The book also refers to a series of cases that set out the need for a reasoned judgment.

That is not the only work that supports my argument. "A Practitioner's Guide to the European Convention on Human Rights" by Karen Reid states:

"Article 6, paragraph 1 has been interpreted as obliging courts to give reasons for their decisions though this does not require a detailed answer to every question."

So the courts do not have to go into great detail, but an answer is required. The guide continues:

"The Convention organs' resistance to constituting a fourth instance leaves in practice little scope for attacking the adequacy of the reasons given in judgments. There has been no development under Article 6 as in the context of Article 8, 9 and 10 that decisions must necessarily be supported by relevant and sufficient reasons."

No mention is made of the argument that there is no need to give reasons, although the commissioners could note that there is no requirement for the reasons given to be sufficient.

The guide continues:

"Lack of reasons in a decision was taken as an aspect of procedural safeguards . . . In that case, the Bar Council's procedure was open to criticism in two respects: lack of public hearing and the lack of precision in rules or case law as to the meaning of the 'exceptional circumstances' condition required for reinstatement to the Bar."

It went on to criticise the Bar Council for not giving its reasons.

I hope that the Committee takes my point that the case law on the issue is well established. On the issue of reasoned judgment, the work "Human Rights and the Courts: Bringing Justice Home", which has a foreword by Lord Irvine of Lairg, the Lord Chancellor, no less, states:

"Article 6(1) provides a general obligation on courts to give reasons for their judgements. This is so that, in the spirit of a fair trial, both the defendant and the public at large may know the basis of the decision."

There is a clear body of case law and authorities that suggest that the commissioners are obliged to give their reasons and that their judgment should be pronounced publicly.

The reason for such requirements is to curb the power of the state. It is not acceptable for commissioners to be able to hear an appeal and say not a word. They are obliged to say something of their reasons and must not act with impunity or indiscriminately. Individuals' rights must be clear. If the Government cannot accept the amendment, I hope that they will give it serious consideration. Today, we have discussed many issues of varying importance, but this issue is important and the Minister should give it due consideration—as he usually does.

**Mr. Edward Davey:** I rise briefly to support the amendments. The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) made a powerful speech, including long and detailed references to human rights legislation and commentators thereon. My point supports the substance of his argument more prosaically, because clause 40 reveals—yet again—how the Government always try to tilt the balance of tax legislation in favour of the state and against the taxpayer.

In clause 40(3), for example, the taxpayer has only 45 days to request a review. If a taxpayer misses that date, the right of appeal is gone. However, if the commissioners miss the 45-day deadline, it does not matter, and their original decision is deemed to have been upheld. The imbalance is obvious: a requirement is placed on the taxpayer, but no such requirement is placed on the commissioners. That is unjustified. It gives the commissioners an incentive for lethargy, but they ought to be required by legislation to act competently.

10.15 pm

Let us reflect on the fact that this is a new and complicated tax. We do not yet know how complicated, because even Ministers and civil servants do not know yet exactly what the status and shape of the new regulations will be. It is asking a lot of the industry to get to grips with such complicated legislation—and ever-changing regulations, no doubt. This will be virgin territory even for tax advisers. Surely the balance should be the other way, giving the taxpayer a better chance of getting to grips with the legislation.

**Mr. Bercow:** We are all enthused by the hon. Gentleman's position on the subject, as well as by the juridical exegesis by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). I do not in any way cavil at the perfectly sound points that the hon. Gentleman has made, but what assessment has he made of the limited scope of the commissioners' discretion in modifying financial liability under subsection (9)? Is it too limited, not limited enough, or about right?

**Mr. Davey:** From my detailed study of the subsection, my instinctive reaction would be that it is not limited enough. That is the problem: there are not enough limits on the commissioners, who are given the benefit of the doubt, while the taxpayer is not. I would be surprised if the taxpayers charter, which is much talked about but less kept to, would allow such legislation if it were properly applied to the clause. That is why the amendments have some validity.

The Government could think of other ways of dealing with the problem. Perhaps they could decide that the 45-day period given to the taxpayer to request a review should be lengthened, allowing fuller consideration of whether such a review would be worth while. That might be a sensible compromise. I am not sure whether Conservative Members would agree, but the Liberal Democrats would consider that a good alternative.

The Government have said in justification of the levy that it is not a revenue-raising measure. We question whether that is the case, but to stay faithful to that view, they should not put such a limitation on the taxpayer. They should say that there is no need for restrictive anti-avoidance measures and give the taxpayer the benefit of the doubt, extending the period and allowing some flexibility.

*[Mr. Davey]*

I wish that the Government would both accept the amendment and extend the period for the taxpayer. That would prevent the tax from becoming even more burdensome than it will already be.

**Mr. Jack:** I seek clarification from the Financial Secretary. Subsection (4) says that when the commissioners first encounter an appeal, there is to be written notification of any decision that they reach—but if I have understood the matter correctly, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South was right to say that if someone challenges that first set of decisions, they simply get a decision without reasons. That is an inconsistency.

This is important, as the Financial Secretary will appreciate, because decisions do not necessarily stop with the commissioners. In subsection (1) are listed the areas that can be the subject of challenge. Some of those refer to the way in which other parts of the tax will operate. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) rightly drew our attention to the fact that this is a new and untested tax. Subsequent court proceedings could follow from this secondary area of challenge, in which there is no need for a written description of a decision. Yet in the first instance there is a requirement for a written decision.

In these days of transparency and openness, I worry greatly about not having such information available for public scrutiny. For example, there is a case of a judge-made decision that affects every Member of the House, yet the reasoning behind it does not appear in the public domain. I refer to the case of Lord Levy, whose tax affairs appeared in the public prints. When that was challenged, the judge was supposed to have said that anybody in public office was fair game when it came to publishing such details. However, no reasons were given as to why that decision was reached. We have no idea, individually or collectively, how vulnerable we are to private information entering the public domain.

People may wish to challenge for a second time the various ways in which the tax operates, yet any decision that may arise concerning this novel form of taxation is without explanation. That is dangerous, particularly if someone subsequently takes the matter on through the courts, and, possibly, to the House of Lords.

**Mr. Timms:** I think that I can give some reassurance on these points, particularly to the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). The provisions have been designed to meet in full the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer was therefore able to sign the statement on the front of the Bill with complete confidence.

These are important provisions. We have referred to them a number of times already because they are mentioned at various points in the Bill. Under different parts of the legislation, the opportunity of review, and then appeal, is available.

The key point, which the hon. Member for Croydon, South missed—or at least, did not refer to—is that there are two stages to the process. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) picked that up. There is the review, dealt with in clause 40, and there are the appeals against reviewed decisions, dealt with in clause 41, to which amendment No. 23 refers. I do not think that that amendment has been mentioned in the debate, but it is grouped with amendment No. 22. There may have been a misunderstanding about how those two elements relate to each other.

I make the point again, as I have done frequently throughout the debate, that these provisions are in keeping with those relating to other taxes such as the landfill tax, introduced by the previous Government. In practice, Customs and Excise will respond to all requests for review. However, the provision that failure to reply will be taken as confirmation of the original decision is, in reality, a safeguard. If that provision were not in place, it would be possible for Customs and Excise to delay giving an answer to a review—although I am sure that it would not do so—thereby delaying the appeal, which is the next stage in the process to which taxpayers have access.

Under the Bill, if Customs and Excise did not respond within the 45-day period, there would be a full appeal to a tribunal, as set out in clause 41(1)(a), which is in the interests of the taxpayer.

**Mr. Letwin:** I am grateful to the Financial Secretary. Perhaps he was merely being witty, but surely he recognises that our amendment would provide a safeguard, and that, unlike his safeguard, ours would be a real one. It would ensure that the commissioners had to produce an answer or end up revoking their original decision. There would then be no need for a tribunal, with all the expense to which that would put the taxpayer.

**Mr. Timms:** The amendment is pretty meaningless. An assessment will be made and a review requested, normally on the grounds that the amount of money required should be reduced. The hon. Gentleman suggested that the decision would then be revoked, but what does that mean? Would the taxpayer have no liability? "Revoked" is not an appropriate word in this context, as it does not give a satisfactory outcome to the process. I do not agree that the amendment is helpful or in the interests of the taxpayer.

**Mr. Davey:** In the process described by the Minister, the tribunal could go ahead with no indication from the commissioners as to why they took their original decision. The process is therefore flawed, because we need a cut-off point by which the commissioners should give their justification so that the tribunal can go ahead on the basis of that reasoning.

**Mr. Timms:** It will be in the interests of Customs and Excise to give its reasons so that the tribunal can consider them. That is why Customs and Excise will, in practice, respond within 45 days. The measure as drafted clearly protects the interests of the taxpayer by ensuring that there is no delay in proceeding to the appeal, at which the tribunal can consider the matter. That is completely consistent with the Human Rights Act.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) queried the appropriateness of the 45-day period within which a request for a review must be made. A balance must be struck, but the Bill gets it about right, and reflects arrangements elsewhere in the tax system. The period of 45 days—a bit more than six weeks—is enough to enable research to be undertaken, but not long enough for people to become complacent or dilatory. A person need not necessarily deposit all the grounds for

review within the 45 days in every case. If a case were complex, Customs could take a sympathetic view, while still guarding against the frivolous attempts to delay proper administration of the tax that occur from time to time.

**Mr. Jack:** Will the Minister address my point? Subsection (4) deems it necessary for a written decision to be given in the first instance. Subsection (5) reminds us that new information may be considered in a second or subsequent challenge to the first decision. In spite of that, however, when a decision is reached at the later stage, nothing is required in writing. Why is there that difference?

**Mr. Timms:** In practice, there would be written notification of the decision. My reading is that written notification would, in fact, be required. I shall reflect on the point, and if I am mistaken, I shall come back to it—but I think that written notification *would be given in* practice, as it should be.

I hope that I have persuaded the Committee that this measure is in the interests of taxpayers and protects their position. It is wholly consistent with the Human Rights Act, and I hope that the Opposition will not press it to a vote.

10.30 pm

**Mr. Letwin:** I do not know whether my hon. Friends were persuaded by the Financial Secretary—[HON. MEMBERS: "No."] He certainly did not persuade me. In response to my intervention a few moments ago, he said that the whole idea of maintaining the principle that if the commissioners delay, their decision is revoked, was "meaningless", because one would not know what to do with a provision that forced one to revoke a decision.

Let us consider the decisions in question—those specified under subsection (1), paragraphs (a) to (l). It is clear what is going on. In paragraph (a), we are told that the decision might concern

"whether or not a person is charged in any case with an amount of aggregates levy".

That means that the commissioners would have decided that a person is to be charged with a certain amount of aggregates levy.

A provision specifying that if after a certain number of days the commissioners had said nothing, that would effectively confirm their decision, would mean that the person would be charged with the amount. He would then have to hire some lawyers to go to a tribunal and engage in great expense to take on the august machinery of government. However, if the amendment were accepted—so that if the commissioners said nothing, they would implicitly have revoked their decision—the meaning is equally clear: the person would not be charged with an amount of aggregates levy in that case. That is perfectly clear.

Subsection (1)(b) relates to a decision on

"the amount of aggregates levy charged in any case and the time when the charge is to be taken as having arisen".

If the commissioners had made a decision about the amount of aggregates levy charged in any case, and that decision was revoked, the person would obviously have no liability. That is a strong incentive for the commissioners not to allow the matter to lie fallow for 45 days—otherwise they would effectively quash the decision to raise a certain tax.

The effect of the amendment is clear, as is the effect of the drafting of the current provision: again, the commissioners could say nothing and rely on the fact that the poor old company or individual would have to hire lawyers and go to a tribunal. It would be tedious to go through paragraphs (c), (d), (e), (f), (g), (h), (i), (j), (k) and (l), but if the Minister wants me to do so, I am prepared to continue.

**Mr. Timms:** I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not want to go beyond paragraph (b), because at that point his argument collapses. It would be wholly inappropriate for a notice along the lines of that paragraph—the amount of aggregates levy to be charged in a particular case—to be revoked. Where would that leave everybody? How much money would be *outstanding? Nobody knows.* Under the clauses that we have dealt with already, the liability to the levy stands; only the decision would be revoked. The meaning of that would be unclear. The amendment would give rise to a wholly unsatisfactory situation that is without precedent in the tax system; it makes no sense at all.

**Mr. Letwin:** I shall go on past paragraph (b), if only to disprove what the Financial Secretary says—but as he referred to paragraph (b), I shall return to that first. What he says is clearly wrong. It is clear what would happen if the decision were revoked. Customs and Excise would be precisely nowhere; there would be no levy. The commissioners would have to start all over again. It is perfectly possible for them to do that. The Financial Secretary is right when he says that the law would still apply, so any liability duly arising would still duly arise; it would be for Customs and Excise to start again and recalculate it. That is an incentive for the commissioners not to sit on their hands and wait for the 45 days to pass. That is perfectly reasonable.

The Financial Secretary thinks that problems will arise for me beyond paragraph (b), so let us consider paragraph (c), which deals with decisions on registration. We had an extremely long discussion about registration a few hours ago. It is clear that the commissioners have to make certain decisions—for example, whether it appears to them that an individual has an intention to produce something that qualifies as an aggregate for the purposes of the levy. Under amendment No. 22, if such a decision had been made, someone had sought a review, and the commissioners had not made a decision in 45 days, the decision to force a registration would be null and void and the commissioners would have to tell Customs and Excise to start all over again, or else desist.

Again, that would be a perfectly workable arrangement under amendment No. 22. Under the Bill, the difference is that the luckless individual would have to take his case to a tribunal, which would involve him in costs. There is no need to go through paragraphs (d), (e), (f), (g), (h), (i), (j), (k) and (l), but I say again that I am more than willing to do so if necessary. It is perfectly clear that there is a difference.

The Financial Secretary has said one thing that is absolutely true: unfortunately, similar provisions have repeatedly appeared in legislation. However, I am

*[Mr. Letwin]*

astonished that a person of his integrity and intelligence rests behind the cloak of that dreadful argument. The fact that we have got something wrong for many years does not mean that we are justified in getting it wrong again.

**Mr. Bercow:** Does my hon. Friend agree that the Financial Secretary's reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) seemed positively Wodehousian? Was he not implying that in practice, notification would be given, and that it was very important that it should be given? Indeed, so important was it that notification should be given, that apparently the clause should not require it to be given.

**Mr. Letwin:** My hon. Friend is entirely right, as he so often is. The Financial Secretary offered a case of what one can only call PG Tips, and he has been doing so consistently this evening. *The general structure of his* argument has repeatedly been that he is trying to create a perfectly sensible outcome; he thinks that he is dealing with a tax that will be levied when the stuff is sold—but actually, he is not. That is not what the Bill states, but that does not worry him, because he is sure that sooner or later, someone will do something reasonable. He used that argument again in response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), saying that the fact that the tax would be reasonably administered was a good reason why we did not need to worry about whether the Bill ensured that it would be reasonably administered.

It is clear that with subsections (7) and (8)—which, in essence, represent the provisions that amendment No. 22 would change—we are dealing with a problem that has persisted in our legislation, and the time has come to put a stop to it. There is no basis at all for commissioners to be able to decide not to bother to produce a review, in the certain knowledge that only those who are very rich and powerful will be able to challenge that decision at a tribunal. That is the wrong way to structure our tax law, and now we have a good opportunity to change it, especially with a tax that is likely to be subject to greater review than almost any other, because it is so complex, so arbitrary and so difficult to enforce.

**Mr. Tyrie:** I can only reinforce what has just been said by asking the Financial Secretary a couple of questions. First, if a decision is deemed to have been confirmed under subsection (7), but it is appealable under clause 41(1), as he said in his defence, why are not the commissioners at least required to explain that decision? Why should they simply be able to go ahead when the decision has been deemed to be confirmed without having to give any reason at all? I can find no justification for that, and the Financial Secretary certainly has not given any this evening.

The second question is pertinent to what my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) has just said. Does not the Financial Secretary realise that the current proposals leave the man who has the liability with a huge hill to climb if he wants to challenge the assessment? Either he accepts the decision, or he has to pay all the expense of fighting the case at the tribunal, and he must do so without knowing what those on the other side feel is their case. He has no idea whether, unbeknown to him, the commissioners have a good point. They may be right but will not have bothered to explain their case, so perhaps that man should not go to appeal and waste all that money in a tribunal. However, he will have no way of knowing whether his judgment is correct because the commissioners will not supply him with the necessary information.

It is eminently sensible that explanations should be provided. They will not be provided under the Bill as it stands but I hope that, after a moment's reflection, the Financial Secretary might say that it is possible that he has not got the clause absolutely right and that he will return with a minor amendment to improve it.

The Financial Secretary may be right to say that amendment No. 22, which would replace the word "confirmed" with "revoked" in subsection (8), is not perfect. However, surely it is not beyond the wit of man to include a sentence that would force the commissioners to supply an explanation for their decision within a given time.

**Mr. Timms:** I certainly did not intend to sound Wodehousian in my remarks: I think that I have made the case very fully. If the concept of revocation were to be adopted, as the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said, things would return to square one. Another assessment would be raised and the process would start all over again and that would cause further delay and uncertainty for taxpayers. That is certainly not in their interest.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) rightly said that the word "revoked" is not perfect. Although I would go further than that, I can agree with him on that point. The current wording is certainly preferable.

In response to the hon. Gentleman's question, it is clearly in the commissioners' interests that the decision should be made and communicated, and that is what will happen in practice. It is in the interests of taxpayers that there should not be any unnecessary delay before matters move to appeal. That should take place expeditiously, and arrangements in the Bill will allow that to happen.

**Mr. Ottaway:** My hon. Friends have made a perfectly genuine and feasible case, but the Financial Secretary has failed to address their good arguments. However, we have only an hour and a quarter of the debate left and many clauses and amendments remain to be considered. We feel strongly about this issue and we hope that the Financial Secretary will reconsider our arguments. However, under the circumstances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

*Clause 40 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

**Clause 41**

APPEALS AGAINST REVIEWED DECISIONS

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Letwin:** I do not intend to detain the Committee long on this point but, following the previous debate, the Financial Secretary should tell us whether the Government are willing to consider how smaller operators in the industry will be attacked by the tax. They will go through the processes outlined in these clauses, will not

receive the courtesy of an answer from the commissioners and will have to go to tribunal. How will their costs be dealt with?

10.45 pm

We are dealing with a serious problem of justice involving people who, by the definition of the case, have not had an answer. As my hon. Friends explained, those people will not know the grounds on which they have not received an answer. They will be put to expense and, presumably, might have to bear the expense of others. What defence does the Minister envisage they will have against the possibly disastrous effects of those costs on their business?

**Mr. Timms:** I make the point again that the arrangements are precisely those that apply elsewhere in the tax system—in most instances under provisions introduced by the previous Government—and they work well. I see no reason why they should not do so in this case. They have been structured in a similar way to those that apply to other indirect taxes.

It is part of the normal relationship between the taxpayer and tax collector to engage in meetings and correspondence to resolve disputes. It is incumbent on the taxpayer to resolve disputes and satisfy the relevant authorities that revenue is secure, accounts and records are accurate and proper duty of care is exercised. That formal review stage exists to resolve disputes. It is not intended to be burdensome or to impose additional costs on the taxpayer. The arrangements work well elsewhere and will work well in these circumstances.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 41 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 42 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 43

ADJUSTMENTS OF CONTRACTS

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Ottaway:** I have a small point to make. I am grateful to the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors for highlighting a concern that has no doubt been drawn to the Minister's attention. The clause deals with contracts that are in existence at the commencement date. On subsection (2), the institution states:

"While we appreciate that this provision must be read with the wide definition of 'agreement' set out in clause 48(1), we remain concerned that certain arrangements reached before the commencement date may not be covered by the clause."

The implication is that there is a hangover after commencement date. It continues:

"The kind of arrangements which we have in mind are: options to extend either the leased area or the term/duration of a mineral working lease . . . options or conditional contracts to acquire interests in mineral working land, conditional on the grant of planning permission . . . way-leave agreements in respect of haulage of minerals extracted from third party land".

I hope the Minister gets the message that several agreements relating to leases, land and long-running mineral rights might overlap the commencement date. The RICS believes:

"All of these arrangements fall within normal commercial dealings",

the implication being that they are quite common. In its opinion, they should

"be brought within the scope of the provision."

I am not making a political point. The Conservative party does not want more people to be covered by the tax, but it seems that a loophole exists. How does the Minister intend to deal with that?

**Mr. Timms:** The clause provides for the adjustment of contracts in two types of case to take account of agreements made prior to the commencement date of the levy, and to allow for the levy to be accounted for after the commencement date, where that is appropriate. Where an agreement is made to supply aggregate before the commencement date, any levy due after that date will be payable not by the supplier of the aggregate, but by the recipient. Where an agreement regarding the use of land is made before the commencement date, the cost of the aggregates levy may be ignored in calculating the turnover or the price of the land.

We are aware of the point that has been raised by the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. Our initial view is that there is not a problem, and that the clause can deal with concerns that will arise. As the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) raised the matter, I will reflect on it further. If we conclude that we need to take action to tackle it, we will do so at a later stage.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 43 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 44

DESTINATION OF RECEIPTS

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Tyrie:** I want to raise a brief point that caught my eye as I was reading the clause. I cannot work out why on earth

"All money and securities for money collected or received for or on account of aggregates levy shall . . . if collected in Great Britain, be placed in the general account of the Commissioners kept at the Bank of England",

but,

"if collected or received in Northern Ireland, be paid into the Consolidated Fund".

That is incomprehensible. I have no doubt that the Minister will say, as he has in response to every other point made this evening, that the practice has been used in all legislation for the past 200 years, but I do not recall seeing a similar provision in other legislation.

While I am giving the Minister a moment to think about that, I point out that it would be extremely helpful if he could explain to us the so-called explanatory notes. The note for the clause says:

"This clause provides for the destination of all monies collected or received for or on account of aggregates levy in Great Britain, and in Northern Ireland."

Just a paragraph of explanation would have saved us the time that we are taking up in the Committee.

**Mr. Jack:** My hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) has aroused my interest in the clause, because I am intrigued by the fact that money collected or received in Northern Ireland shall

"be paid into the Consolidated Fund of the United Kingdom in such manner as the Treasury may direct."

The mind boggles at the prospect of Treasury Ministers daily pondering imaginative ways in which the money collected in Northern Ireland might be paid into the Consolidated Fund. I am sure that there is a completely rational, logical explanation for the wording, and I would be grateful if the Financial Secretary explained what is likely to be the normal way in which the money should be paid, why it is necessary to have the variation on a theme that Ministers may direct alternatives to the norm and what they might be.

**Mr. Timms:** My answer to the points made by the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) is precisely as he anticipated. In common with all the other provisions that we have been discussing, the clause is entirely in line with—and, in this case, lifted word for word from—provisions for other indirect taxes. I was rather hoping that the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), drawing on his experiences as a Treasury Minister, might shed some light on the matter, but sadly he did not. The money will be placed in the Bank of England or, in the case of Northern Ireland, the Consolidated Fund. That is in keeping with the treatment of moneys received from other taxes and duties.

**Mr. Bercow:** I am grateful to the Minister, who is always very courteous, for giving way, but I am afraid that his response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and the Committee simply will not do. My right hon. Friend rightly drew attention to the quizzical attitude, at least among Conservative Members, about the expression, "in such manner". Seeking to justify his position on the basis of past legislative precedent, is the Minister arguing that that apparently permissive element of the clause, allowing different mechanisms to be deployed, has, to adapt Bagehot, in the past been only a dignified rather than an efficient part of those earlier statutes, or is he arguing that differential application has applied? If so, will he give us chapter and verse on that point?

**Mr. Timms:** My point is that the arrangements have worked perfectly well at many points throughout the tax system. If the hon. Gentleman can draw the House's attention to instances of problems arising from the arrangements, he should do so.

**Mr. William Ross:** I do not know how far back the provision dates, although I suspect that its genesis can be found in 1920. However, we have come a long way from the Government of Ireland Act 1920, and since that time, several attempts have been made to set up devolved institutions in Northern Ireland, and devolved institutions have successfully been set up in Wales and Scotland. If the provision has for a long time applied to Northern Ireland, why does it not now also apply to Scotland and Wales? If it does not apply to Scotland and Wales, there can be no good reason for its continuing to apply to Northern Ireland. Given that we now have uniform systems in the three devolved regions, is it not time that all parts of the kingdom were treated exactly the same in terms of the collection of taxes?

**Mr. Tyrie:** This is probably—almost certainly—a minor matter, but we are not absolutely sure. The Minister does not know and nor do I. Will he undertake to drop me a line giving an explanation?

**Mr. Timms:** I shall be delighted to drop the hon. Gentleman a line.

**Mr. Letwin:** I hope that it will not be regarded as churlish if I follow up a point that is necessarily retrospective. This year's Finance Bill, like last year's, contains many clauses—other than those that deal with the aggregates levy—in respect of which the notes on clauses are genuinely helpful and explanatory. However, it is symptomatic of the way in which the aggregates levy has been presented that, in addition to the drafting of the provision being—perhaps necessarily—dense, the notes on clauses are a masterpiece of the gnomic. There is nothing that explains anything that cannot be seen on the face of the Bill—indeed, I venture to say that they are a genuine waste of paper.

I imagine that that regrettable situation is rooted in the same cause as the provisions as a whole—namely, that the measure has been produced on the trot and as a result of some late decision taken, much to the industry's surprise, suddenly to implement the aggregates levy. Presumably, there was stuff sitting on a shelf somewhere ready for production after the announcements made in previous Budgets, and when someone suddenly said that the provision was to be introduced, it was taken down at high speed. That is the charitable explanation for the fact that the notes on the clauses dealing with the levy, unlike those on many of the other clauses, tell us nothing. It might also be the charitable explanation for the fact that, even though it was the only new tax that he was introducing, the Chancellor did not mention it in this year's Budget statement.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 44 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clauses 45 and 46 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Schedule 10 agreed to.*

*Clause 47 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

**Clause 48**

INTERPRETATION OF PART

11 pm

**Mr. Ottaway:** I beg to move amendment No. 26, in page 38, line 25, at end insert—

'except that, when any tangible moveable property which would not be regarded as aggregate for the purposes of this Part is imported, it shall be aggregate to the extent determined in regulations by the Commissioners.'.

**The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mrs. Sylvia Heal):** With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 24, in page 39, line 35, at end insert—

'"United Kingdom" means the United Kingdom except Northern Ireland.'.

**Mr. Ottaway:** The amendments go to the heart of the consequences of the aggregates tax, which will lead to the exportation of jobs overseas.

Amendment No. 24 would exempt Northern Ireland from the tax. I have no doubt that my Friend the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) will have something to say about that. Aggregate is taxed in its basic form when it is used for commercial exploitation in this country. It is also taxed in its pure form when it comes into this country to be used for that purpose. However, it is not taxed when it is imported in products such as pre-cast concrete. We are concerned that pre-cast concrete will be made in the Republic of Ireland and then imported easily into Northern Ireland without liability in respect of the aggregates levy.

Pre-cast concrete is only in small part cement, but it contains a large proportion of aggregate, so the House should be under no illusion but that a substantial amount of aggregate is involved. The same applies to ready-mixed concrete, which has a life of about an hour and a half, so its range of movement is about 20 miles by road. One can therefore assume that the entire 20-mile strip along the Northern Ireland border will become an aggregate-free zone, as pre-cast and ready-mixed concrete is imported from the Republic.

Amendment No. 26 seeks to draw attention—I confess that it does so fairly deviously—to the importation of asphalt from Normandy. As I said, ready-mixed concrete has a shelf life of about an hour and a half. Asphalt has a life of about 36 hours, and is rather like ready-mixed and pre-cast concrete, as it comprises a small amount of bitumen that glues together a large amount of concrete. It is used for making roads. We are advised that it is perfectly feasible for asphalt to be made in northern France and shipped into this country with substantial savings. Indeed, we are told that that already occurs.

The Financial Secretary said earlier that the transport costs would offset the impact of the levy, but that will certainly not be the case in Northern Ireland. He hinted that he would say something about Northern Ireland, and I hope that he will do so. We are also advised that if sufficient quantities of asphalt are imported from northern France, it will be far more economical to use such materials than to pay the tax in this country.

**Mr. David Heath:** Although the amendment rightly deals with imports to the United Kingdom, does the hon. Gentleman accept that exactly the same arguments apply to exports of concrete products? There is a double effect in relation to such products, as not only the levy but the transport costs to which he referred must be paid. That causes a distinct competitive disadvantage.

**Mr. Ottaway:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. If I remember correctly, the matter to which he refers was dealt with in an amendment that will not be considered because of this stupid guillotine business to which we have been subject. There is no credit when aggregate is exported in pre-cast concrete products.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) will have much to say about these matters, and I hope that the hon. Member for East Londonderry will also make some comments. As time is short, I shall sit down and make way for others to speak.

**Mr. Letwin:** I begin by clarifying in slightly more detail than my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) the reason for the construction of the amendments and by elucidating their drafting. We were bound to table them in their current form because of the absurdities of today's timetable. The issues that they cover could not be debated before 7 pm; we did not have time to debate important issues that relate to clause 17. We therefore had to find a method of debating them at the end of the proceedings and thus benefit from the excessive amount of time that had been allowed for boilerplate clauses. Consequently, as my hon. Friend put it, slightly oddly, amendment No. 26 would amend an interpretation.

The amendment refers to the definition of aggregate. It states that aggregates should be construed in accordance with clauses 17(1) and 18,

"except that, when any tangible moveable property which would not be regarded as aggregate for the purposes of this Part is imported, it shall be aggregate to the extent determined in regulations by the Commissioners."

"Tangible moveable property" refers to items such as those to which my hon. Friend referred. They include pre-cast concrete and asphalt. We do not want the commissioners to determine the matter, as the amendment would provide.

It was almost impossible to include our intentions in an amendment to an interpretation. That is a ridiculous way in which to proceed with such an important matter. We would have liked to debate a new clause which set out our intentions properly. However, the Government decided to timetable the proceedings, and we have therefore had to use the device in the amendment. I hope that the Financial Secretary will not stoop to claiming that a problem arises from the odd casting of the amendment. That is his responsibility, not ours. We do not stand by the amendment's words; if he wants to take away the point and include it in another provision, that is fine. We are trying to protect many jobs, and I shall discuss that shortly.

The same points apply to amendment No. 24. It is obviously bizarre to define the United Kingdom as

"the United Kingdom except Northern Ireland."

I hope that my Friend the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) will not interpret it to mean that the Conservative party has taken leave of its senses and supposes that Northern Ireland is not part of the United Kingdom. At this stage of our proceedings, as opposed to the stage when we should have debated the point, during our consideration of clauses 16, 17 and 18 or of a new clause, there is no way of introducing an exemption for Northern Ireland. My hon. Friends would support such an exemption. Again, I hope that the Minister will not quibble with the method of solving the problem, because his timetable motion created the need for it.

I want to explain the reasons for the problem. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) rightly pointed out that we are dealing with a symmetrical problem of export and import. We are also tackling the problem of competing with imports—import substitution—and the ability of our exports to compete with home-produced items elsewhere in the word—export substitution.

The amendments deal with only half the problem, as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said and my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South acknowledged. It is clearly our intention, and it ought to be the Government's intention, to deal with the whole problem.

*[Mr. Letwin]*

The problem is acute, but I get the impression from the responses that we have received from the Financial Secretary throughout the evening that he does not think that that is the case. He is not given to the practice, to which some Ministers and other hon. Members are occasionally given, of making things sound as though they are all right when he does not think that they are. I have, therefore, a real worry that he is being completely honest when he says that he does not think that there is a problem. I think that he is wrong, and if he is convinced that there is no problem, it is unlikely that he will change the text, however wrong it is.

I hope that I can begin to open the Financial Secretary's mind sufficiently, so that the discussions with the industry to which he referred will be treated by the Government not in the spirit of an annoying delegation that needs to be batted away, but a genuine inquiry to discover whether the industry passionately believes, as I do, that there will be a real problem, and whether the industry is probably right because it has done its sums.

**Mr. Edward Davey:** The point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) about exports could be dealt with if the Government extended the list of relevant substances. They could add to the list the requirement that aggregates used in manufactured products should become a prescribed industrial process. The Government could, therefore, find a way of getting round the problem by providing a new regulation, as they are empowered to do in the Bill. I still think, however, that, in relation to the hon. Gentleman's amendment, the problem would not be addressed through that prescribing process.

**Mr. Letwin:** The hon. Gentleman may be right, and there may also be other means of achieving the desired effect within the scope of the Bill. While we are at it, there may be other means of achieving what we are trying to achieve more elegantly, as I have mentioned. I hope that the Government will see that my remarks are aimed at the essence of the measure, rather than at mere accidents of phrasing.

Why is Northern Ireland a particular problem? First, there are lots of small quarries in a highly competitive marketplace. As I understand it, the average sale price of concrete in Northern Ireland is such that the effective sale price of the aggregate is only about £3 a tonne, which is rather less than twice the proposed tax. The tax will, therefore, impose a huge mark-up on the aggregate component cost of concrete in Northern Ireland.

The second reason Northern Ireland is particularly exposed is that it is very close to southern Ireland. There is, no doubt, already a problem due to exchange rates. I do not want to engage in hyperbole, and I do not claim that the entire Northern Ireland concrete industry will suddenly relocate to southern Ireland overnight—that is not so. However, on a rather longer time scale than overnight, such relocations might persistently occur. Northern Ireland is not a part of the United Kingdom that has had particularly good luck with employment. According to estimates provided by the industry, about 4,000 jobs could be affected. The Province can ill afford to lose those jobs.

Nothing that the Financial Secretary has said so far suggests that the transport cost argument—which has been his main argument to counter assertions that there is a real problem here—would apply in Northern Ireland. I shall come to the case of mainland Europe in a moment. However, in the case of Northern Ireland and southern Ireland, there will be opportunities for the relocation of production to places only slightly further away from the scene of their deployment than is already the case in Northern Ireland. In many cases, merely moving south of the border will involve a very small distance, and we see no reason to doubt the assertion that it will be possible to wipe out large parts of the Northern Ireland industry.

11.15 pm

In the context of mainland Europe, the Financial Secretary, as I have said, relied on transport cost arguments. We understand that there are considerable opportunities for coastal quarry exports from, for example, Norway. There is no reason why such coastal quarries—in Norway or, indeed, Holland, Belgium or France—cannot be used to meet UK, particularly southern UK, pre-cast concrete requirements. Shipping is a perfectly feasible means of transport and, especially when demand for the product is close to our coast, we may see a significant switch.

If the Financial Secretary is saying that the industry has not provided him with an adequate cost breakdown showing the economics of such an exporting of jobs, it would be helpful if he stated that in terms. I am sure we can arrange for the industry to present him with costed examples showing that there is a real problem. As I said earlier, I think that the Government already accept the logic of protecting against the exporting of jobs. That is why they have provided for raw aggregates, when imported, to be subject to the levy. There cannot be an objection in principle.

There is a possibility that the Financial Secretary is right, and a possibility that the industry is right. Let us suppose that the Financial Secretary applies the levy to the import of pre-cast concrete and other fabricated substances, and disapplies it to the exporting of those substances. If he is right, it will make no difference: nothing will be lost, and nothing gained. If the industry is right, he will have saved between 4,000 and 10,000 British jobs. Why take the risk? What possible reason is there for neglecting to make some slight drafting changes to the Bill, if the possibility is either that no damage will be done or that great good will be done, with no downside risk? I cannot for the life of me understand why the Financial Secretary should resist that argument.

We are not talking just about the problem of pre-cast concrete, or, indeed, that of asphalt. I am sorry to harp on about dimension stone, to which I referred at length when giving the example of Mr. Jones. The fact is, however, that dimension stone itself will be exempt, but all the waste and secondary aggregates will not. As I said earlier, we do not really know what will count as not being exempt, but clearly a lot of stuff that comes out when the rock is cut to make the dimension stone will not be exempt.

United Kingdom dimension stone will be competing with dimension stone from other European Union countries that do not suffer from the same disadvantage. The production of dimension stone in those countries

is presumably accompanied by roughly the same by-products, which can be sold without the disadvantage of the aggregate levy—or in the case of France, if I remember rightly, a levy of about 5p rather than £1.60 a tonne. Our dimension stone industry, which is not a big part of the industry as a whole, is headed for the rocks—if I may use an infelicitous metaphor.

The UK limestone industry will be crippled. I understand that it can take up to six tonnes of feed material to produce one tonne of industrial-grade limestone. As the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome pointed out, scalping must remove all the weak and impure stone as part of the process. All those scalpings will be subject to the tax. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned in his speech on the initial amendment hours and hours and hours ago, if that scalping is taxed, a place for it will have to be found. If it is left in the quarries, the limestone extraction from those quarries will become uneconomic and virtually technically impossible, so it will have to be moved. If it is moved, it will be taxed and that will render the economics decidedly disadvantageous.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned that simply as a disadvantage for the industry and it is, but it is not just that, because there is cross-elasticity: there will also be a severe competitive disadvantage for our industry—the imported variety will not face the tax. In addition, exporters of the material will be at a severe competitive disadvantage.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): I have been listening to my hon. Friend's case with much sympathy. Can he explain why the Government want to increase the cost of construction, to put jobs at risk in an industry in which I worked for many years, and to make this country less competitive than those countries that are close to us and part of the economic community? It seems nonsense that the Government emphasise the importance of competitiveness and then reduce the competitive nature of the UK construction industry.

**Mr. Letwin:** I think that the only honest answer to my hon. Friend in relation to the question about competition is that this is, as we said at an earlier stage in the proceedings, a comedy of errors. I do not think that the Government intend that result, or the sequence of results that we have been describing. I think that they have simply produced these provisions at too great a rate without full and proper consultation with the industry and have missed a major set of points, or, at best, so to speak, they have missed the danger that these circumstances will arise. Therefore, there is not a reason, there is only a cause for the problem—and the cause of the problem is negligence. However, there is an opportunity, as my hon. Friend will surely agree, for the Government to make up for that. They just need to correct these serious lacunae. That will not make the tax perfect. It will still leave a tax that we would far rather were not on the statute book, but at least it would resolve a problem of between 4,000 and 10,000 jobs potentially leaving this country. The Government have the opportunity to solve that problem.

Speciality aggregates have not been mentioned so far in our debates. The Government may be resting under the misapprehension that they have solved the problem in relation to speciality aggregates. They may think that, because the export is exempt from the tax, all is well, but the lesser-quality secondary aggregates that are produced at the same time as the speciality aggregates—we face the same problems here as in many other cases—will not be exempt. The average cost of the production of speciality aggregate will again be greater than the cost encountered by international competitors.

We see that pattern over and over again. It is either that the substance itself, in the case of pre-cast concrete or asphalt, is not being properly exempted when it is imported or exported; or it is that something is being exempted, but some other things that are produced when the thing that is exempt is produced are not being exempted and are raising the average cost of the production of the so-called exempt item. Therefore, across a wide range of products, and hence a wide part of the industry as a whole, UK jobs, completely needlessly, are being put at risk.

I go back to the question to the Financial Secretary: why take that risk? If I am wrong, nothing will be lost by making the changes to exempt those items. The fiscal effect on the Financial Secretary's own logic will be zero because he will not reduce NICs by a slightly smaller amount. In the first year—unlike all subsequent years—I agree that there will be a neutral effect. Meanwhile, he may be protecting British jobs. If I am right, he will be. This is a bet that he can make with sublime confidence, and he ought to be making it now. Otherwise, if we come back in a year or two and discover that large parts of the British industry have been wiped out needlessly, he will not be forgiven.

**Mr. William Ross:** I am deeply grateful to the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) and his hon. Friends for tabling amendment No. 24 which—albeit not very elegantly—intends to disapply the tax to Northern Ireland, for the very good reason that Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK that faces competition across a land frontier.

We all know that the one outstanding feature of aggregates is that they are heavy stuff; we are looking at one tonne per cubic yard. They are also not of very high value. If there is a tax and the material has to be carted around the country for any great length of time, the price rapidly goes up. In terms of direct competition with producers in the Irish Republic—some of whom already operate across the frontier—we will tip the balance decisively in their favour.

The Financial Secretary said that the distance that a lorry can travel economically into Northern Ireland is about 15 miles. The industry in Northern Ireland thinks it is considerably further, and I agree. The one thing that the Government have left out of their calculations is the vast difference in the cost of fuel between Northern Ireland and the Republic, which means that someone can pick up a load in the Irish Republic and travel a long way with it—much further than the Government believe.

There are large deposits of sand and gravel in the Province and in the Republic, many of which are exploited. Some firms own gravel pits on both sides of the frontier and operate, as commercial advantages dictate, across it. In some cases, the stuff is taken a long way: for example, from the Limavady district to Belfast, which is 60 miles.

The situation will get a great deal worse, because the people concerned are experienced in the field on both sides of the frontier. They know exactly where the

*[Mr. William Ross]*

financial advantage will lie. They can close their operation in Northern Ireland down to a low level, produce the vast majority of the material in the Republic, take it across to Northern Ireland and sell it there. They will still make their money and will have no problem with tax.

The Financial Secretary will try to tell me that if the material is imported, the tax can be charged. There is a slight difficulty with that. He will recall that, earlier this year, I asked him:

"how much aggregate, broken down by type, was (*a*) imported to and (*b*) exported from the United Kingdom by (i) land transport and (ii) sea transport, indicating his estimates of the value of such materials, in the current year and each of the previous three years.

The Minister replied:

"Data on exports and imports of aggregate are published annually in the British Geological Survey's United Kingdom Minerals Yearbook. It is not possible to break this down between land transport and sea transport."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2001; Vol. 364, c. 516W.]

In plain terms, that answer means, "I don't know how much aggregate is crossing the frontier into and out of Northern Ireland." If aggregate is put on a ship, one has some idea of how much is involved, but if it is put on a lorry, it cannot be traced in these days of open frontiers across Europe; so we face a decided disadvantage.

11.30 pm

If the Financial Secretary does not know the figures—and he cannot in this case because the records are non-existent—he will be proceeding blindly, but the industry in Northern Ireland knows what the inevitable consequences of the tax will be for the industry in the Province. I shall spell those consequences out to the Financial Secretary.

For a start, only a certain amount of primary production will take place in Northern Ireland. The sand and gravel will be produced there, it will cross the frontier where it will be manufactured into a concrete product, and then it will come back again. The jobs in the concrete industry will migrate from the Province to the Republic. The industry will need to move only 100 yards across the frontier, set up its equipment to manufacture pipes and concrete beams, and 4,000 jobs in Northern Ireland will disappear in a short time. Once they are gone, and even if the tax is removed in two or three years' time, it will be too late and the damage will be done. Once folk have built up their operations in the Republic, they will have no good reason to bring them back to Northern Ireland.

When I raised the matter with the Financial Secretary earlier, he said that other countries in the European Union were introducing the tax. The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) mentioned France; if several EU countries introduce the tax, it will have to be the same to maintain a level playing field. Dublin certainly has no intention of introducing any tax because it is to its commercial advantage to capture as many jobs as possible, and devil take the hindmost—in this case, Northern Ireland.

This is a serious issue that could have a tremendous effect on the cost of building a house. A normal-sized house takes 80 tonnes of building sand. Those of us who are not involved in the industry might think that that is a heck of a lot of sand, but all the walls need plastering and the mortar contains sand. Added to that is the hard fill, and 200 or 300 tonnes could be needed per house, depending on the site. Aggregate is also needed for the concrete bricks or blocks. People complain about the price of houses, but this hidden tax will shove up the price by £2,000 or £3,000 because everybody will work on a percentage all the way down the supply chain.

This is a mad tax that will do no good to the country at large, and if applied to Northern Ireland it will do much damage. Of course, aggregates can be replaced in some cases. Bricks can be made out of clay, and that is done in Northern Ireland. Clay tiles can be used for roofs. Most of the tiles used in Northern Ireland are imported from Great Britain, and they are no cheaper for being put on a boat and taken across the Irish sea. In fact, they are much pricier than concrete tiles. Many people prefer a slate roof, but few can afford such roofs nowadays. Asbestos is cheaper but carries environmental concerns. We surely have environmental concerns about asbestos nowadays.

Pipes used to be made of clay. Now the smaller diameters are made of plastic, but beyond a certain size the only materials with the necessary structural strength are concrete or steel. We make a lot of concrete pipes in Northern Ireland, and certainly some very large ones. Concrete is a useful and effective material, and we are cutting the feet from under people who make it. That is completely wrong.

We make large concrete beams for bridges. The hon. Member for South Antrim (Dr. McCrea) has a firm in the constituency where he lives—the owner is my constituent—that exports very large concrete beams. It can do so only because of the low cost of the material in Northern Ireland. The only alternative material is steel, and I am not sure that that is considered all that environmentally friendly these days.

There are at least seven relatively large firms making concrete products in my constituency, and there are several one, two, three or five-man operations giving employment in the area. They will all be forced out of business if the tax goes ahead. I fear that the Government intend to plunge ahead with this tax throughout the United Kingdom. They will not only do a great disservice to Great Britain but create a disaster in Northern Ireland. That is why, although I would normally be horrified by such amendments, I see good reasons for this one.

I hope that the Minister will listen. He told me earlier that the tax was neutral and would be redistributed, but it will not necessarily be redistributed to the areas from which it is levied—it will be distributed far wider than that. The areas where many of the relevant activities take place tend to be isolated, with relatively few employment opportunities. Such activities provide employment, as well as a vital material for the whole construction industry.

However we look at it, all we are going to do is increase the cost of constructing buildings, roads and bridges. What on earth is the benefit supposed to be? The Government went down this road without thinking it through. The more people examine the proposals, the more concerned they become. I hope that that increasing concern will be felt by Treasury Ministers, even if they

are not prepared to say it now. Perhaps they will carefully consider the peculiar and difficult circumstances that the tax will create for the producers of Northern Ireland.

**Mr. David Heath:** I strongly agree with the points made by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin). The amendment is very convoluted, as he readily admitted, but its intentions are good.

The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) touched on the commercial effect of substitution in the domestic market and the consequent lack of competitiveness for companies competing against imports. That will be a significant factor in the pre-cast concrete industry, as other fabrics will be used, without any clear environmental benefit.

The Government are guilty of muddled thinking. They have exempted some industries that require aggregates in their production processes, for no reason except that they were the ones that they first thought of. They appear not to have considered the position of the pre-cast concrete industry at all. They are prepared to accept that there may be substitution with steel and with clay, particularly for roofing products and paving materials. What is the environmental advantage of stopping aggregates being dug and increasing the digging of clay? I say that there is none.

Profitable companies will be seriously compromised by this measure without further thought from the Government. I urge them, even at this late stage, to think very carefully about what they propose.

**Mr. Timms:** Let me first respond to the points of the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) about timetabling. It has been made clear to him, and it should also be made clear to the House, that if the usual channels on his side had last week sought a change to the order of the discussions this evening, we would willingly have made that change.

**Mr. Letwin:** I have checked with my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) as to the exact order of events. We requested that we debate clause 16 alone among the aggregates tax items, followed by clause 79 and some new clauses. That was rejected, despite this request having been communicated by the usual channels, at the highest level, and despite a subsequent conversation between the Financial Secretary and me.

When that request was rejected, this timetable motion was brought forward. In our anxiety, we did not at that stage notice that our original proposition had been rejected. However, the effect of the timetabling, with time slots up to 7 pm, 9 pm and midnight, was to shove all the important parts of the aggregates tax discussion into the first three hours. There is no reason on earth for the Government to have done that, except by mistake. I take the Financial Secretary's honest word for it that it was not intentional, but it was clearly an error. I admit that we were in error in not spotting that it should have been corrected, but the fact is that this was done not by us but by the Government.

**Mr. Timms:** The hon. Gentleman rightly and generously accepts that the responsibility for the matter lies on his side, and that it could have been put right if the usual channels had taken steps to do that.

**Sir Robert Smith:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Timms:** No, I will not give way again on this. It is important that the House recognise the reason for the difficulty that the hon. Member for West Dorset and his right hon. and hon. Friends have faced tonight.

**Sir Robert Smith:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Timms:** No, time is getting on, and I need to address a number of points.

The hon. Members for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) and for West Dorset suggested that there had been some haste about the process. I assure the House that that is not the case. The draft clauses were first published two years ago, in April 1999. Following extensive discussion and consultation, a second set of draft clauses was published in June last year—these clauses have not been put together in haste. The whole process has been one of careful consideration, consultation and modification, and this is a well designed measure as a result.

We could have some fun with the wording of amendment No. 26. The hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) disowned the wording. He said that he and his right hon. and hon. Friends had tabled a new clause on the subject. Presumably we can expect to debate that at a later stage in our proceedings. However, the wording of amendment No. 26, which allows the commissioners to deem anything, effectively, as aggregates for the purposes of the levy, would not command wide support.

11.45 pm

To help to maintain a level playing field for UK aggregates companies, any import of aggregate that would be taxable if it had originated in the UK will be subject to the levy on first sale or use in the UK. Under European Union law, we are bound not to tax imported products to a greater extent than domestic ones. That means that any aggregate that would normally be taxable in the UK will be taxed on first sale or use in the UK after importation from another country. Similarly, any imported material that would not normally be taxable if it had originated in the UK will not be subject to the levy.

Concern has been expressed that the levy applies to imports of aggregate in aggregate form. There is concern that the UK's pre-cast concrete sector will be damaged by the importation of tax-free processed products. We have considered that issue in detail. Officials have met the British Precast Concrete Federation, and I shall meet representatives of the federation next week. As a result of a great deal of reflection, we have concluded that we do not expect a significant impact on that sector because international trade in its products is limited by weight and transport costs.

Imports currently represent only 1 per cent. of total pre-cast concrete industry sales because of the substantial cost of shipping pre-cast concrete.

**Mr. Tyrie:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Timms:** Given the lateness of the hour, I shall not.

*[Mr. Timms]*

There are substantial barriers to international trade because of the costs of shipping pre-cast concrete from Norway, France and elsewhere. Such imports as exist are largely in high-value products, the proportionate prices of which would be affected only slightly by the addition of the levy. Our considered view is that there will be no problem.

We are prepared to continue to examine the issue in the run-up to the levy's introduction, and I shall hear the industry's concerns next week. No figures given in the debate have made me question the conclusion that we have drawn so far, but I shall listen carefully to what the industry has to say.

The suggestion made in the debate that 4,000 to 10,000 jobs might be at stake is simply absurd. The pre-cast concrete industry should have the same incentives for efficiency and increased use of recycled aggregates as others will experience as a result of the levy. The aggregates sold for that purpose should contribute to the sustainability fund that will be available to help communities to address the problems arising from quarrying.

The hon. Member for West Dorset told the Committee that he would not have voted for the landfill tax introduced by the previous Government. Even now, some members of his party want the Government to take steps to protect the environment, as we are doing. His party does itself no favours in its current troubled circumstances by lurching to the right in the way that he has done tonight, by repudiating an environmental tax measure introduced by the previous Government.

Amendment No. 24 addresses issues in Northern Ireland, and the hon. Member for East Londonderry made several important points. We have listened carefully to arguments about the implications of the aggregates levy for Northern Ireland. The industry there will be generally protected because imports of aggregate will be subject to the levy and exports will be relieved. Opportunities to smuggle aggregates into Northern Ireland will be pretty limited because of the bulky nature of the products involved and their low value. Customs operational staff have much experience of dealing with such matters. I am confident that, combined with the legitimate quarrying industry, Customs will combat the potential for smuggling across the Northern Ireland land border.

The main concerns expressed relate to the impact on the pre-cast concrete sector. That merits careful consideration. I point out to the hon. Member for East Londonderry and to the Committee that, at this stage, I have seen no convincing evidence—facts and figures—to suggest that there will be a significant impact on Northern Ireland firms; international trade in those products is limited by weight and by transport costs.

We are nevertheless prepared to continue to assess with the Northern Ireland Executive the implications of the levy. The Executive have raised concerns about that and have done some work. We shall be happy to continue that assessment during the run-up to the introduction of the levy, and to consider evidence submitted by the industry on the issue. There may be an issue that we need to address, but at present there is no convincing evidence of it. I ask the Committee to resist the amendment.

The measure is important and will bring significant environmental benefits in its wake—by ensuring that the price of aggregates reflects the environmental costs incurred in obtaining them; by increasing the price advantage for recycled aggregates; and by contributing to a sustainability fund that can be used to address the problems caused by quarrying in affected communities. I urge the Committee to resist the amendments.

**Mr. Ottaway:** The Minister's response to the arguments was wholly unsatisfactory. Powerful arguments have been made about the damage that will be caused to the British economy and to the British aggregates sector. In those circumstances, we shall divide the Committee.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 137, Noes 255.

**Division No. 189]** **[11.52 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barcow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Kay, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Mallins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'bry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick

Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Stephen Day and**
**Mr. Owen Paterson.**

**NOES**

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Cassale, Roger
Catton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Heal ey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Macteggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malahber, Judy
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffd Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Sloate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Waring, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*

Woodward, Shaun
Wooldas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Kevin Hughes and**
**Mrs. Anne McGuire.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Clause 48 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Clause 49 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

To report progress and ask leave to sit again.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

*Committee report progress; to sit again tomorrow.*

## Overseas Nurses

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

12.8 am

**Mr. Paul Burstow** (Sutton and Cheam): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the recruitment of overseas nurses to the United Kingdom. There is no doubt that we need to recruit nurses and midwives from overseas. Indeed, the demographic time bomb planted by the previous, Conservative Government means that there is a serious shortage of home-grown nurses and midwives. With something like one in four nurses on the register of the United Kingdom Central Council of Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting aged over 50 and the average retirement age at about 55, the shortage of nurses is likely to get much worse before it gets better. Over the next four years, it is estimated that the shortfall of nurses will range between 20,000 and 60,000. It could be even more, depending on how the independent sector develops in the next few years and what implications the new standards for care homes and other institutions will have for additional staffing requirements.

Last year, 10,000 overseas nurses were recruited to this country and registered with the UKCC. I want to make it clear from the outset that I very much welcome the contribution that those nurses and midwives make to this country's health care system, whether in the independent sector or the NHS. Nursing is an international profession, and nurses should have the right to broaden their experience by working in other health care systems.

My purpose in this debate is to highlight two concerns and to try to offer solutions. First, there is growing evidence that for some overseas nurses who come to this country to do a job and provide support and care in our health service, particularly in the independent sector, their experience is one of exploitation. Secondly, despite clear requests from a number of developing countries not to recruit their nurses, the UKCC's figures reveal an accelerating rate of registration of nurses from those countries.

I shall deal first with the exploitation of overseas nurses. There is growing evidence from Unison and the Royal College of Nursing of appallingly poor employment practices in this country. I stress that the problem appears to be concentrated largely in the independent sector and, on the evidence that I have seen, particularly in care homes. Unison tells me that even before arriving in the UK, nurses from the Philippines and other countries find that the recruitment agency that they use to find jobs in this country charges them to be recruited. On top of that, if the recruitment is ultimately to an NHS trust, the trust is asked to pay the agency as much as £1,500 per nurse. The nurses themselves can pay nearly double that, and may be asked to sell their homes, land and other property to finance their move to the UK.

In some cases, agencies charge nurses for UKCC registration guidance, which is free. That is appalling exploitation, and it clearly breaches the Department of Health's guidelines. In some horrific cases, employers go even further, holding on to passports, work permits and UKCC registration cards. They offer misleading and even intimidating immigration advice, such as saying that nurses cannot change employer and will be deported if

they do. In addition to those practices, overseas nurses suffer restrictive contract terms and conditions that are less favourable that those of their UK counterparts. They are paid less than UK nurses in the same institutions.

Worse still are misleading contracts. The RCN has examples of cases in which nurses have been sent contracts for prestigious specialist acute hospitals in London, but when they arrive they are carted off to work in an elderly persons' care home. They do not necessarily have the experience of providing geriatric care that is needed for that job. That is a cause for concern. It exploits not only the nurses but those who are receiving care. Both parties lose out. Finally, it takes some overseas nurses an unacceptably long time to secure their registration. They find themselves stuck in limbo, working without registration, particularly in the independent sector, and as a result there is even more pressure on them and they are further exploited.

My second concern is the criticism by the World Health Organisation and several Governments of developing countries that the UK is damaging their health care systems through its recruitment of health care staff. Last year, almost one in five new overseas registrations were from South Africa and the West Indies. The Minister will know that there are serious shortages of nurses and midwives around the world. That was the subject of a seminar organised by the World Health Organisation last November that examined the problem of nurse shortages not only in the UK but throughout the world, in developed and developing countries.

One of the factors identified as driving the problem is the demographic time bomb ticking away in many developed countries' nursing systems—not only our own, but those of countries such as Canada, the United States of America and Australia. In a statement about the shortages, WHO says:

"Skills drain, where nurses are recruited into developed countries from developing countries, exacerbates the situation. For example, the number of overseas nurses coming to the UK has risen by 48 per cent. in 12 months."

In a report on the globalisation White Paper published last month, the Select Committee on International Development states:

"At the same time, the Secretary of State for Health has also acknowledged that the Department of Health is not responsible for the actions of private recruitment agencies".

It quotes the Secretary of State telling the Committee:

"Sadly, I do not run the nursing agencies that are responsible for such conduct".

The Committee added:

"However, we do not believe that we should rob developing nations of the medical and clinical staff that they desperately need . . . Throughout the NHS, Trusts, desperate to fill vacancies, turn regularly to private agencies to supply. We recommend that the Government, in its response, provide the Committee with details of how guidelines can be extended to cover the activities of private recruitment agencies."

In her evidence to the Committee's inquiry, the Secretary of State for International Development confirmed that private nursing agencies cannot be prevented from recruiting overseas nurses from developing countries that are experiencing acute shortages. However, she said:

"It would be immoral, would it not, if all the nurses and all the doctors were recruited by the National Health Service, leaving none of those skills in countries like Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica and so on."

Those comments were made despite nursing recruitment from the West Indies almost doubling in one year.

Given the high rates of registration from developing countries, the NHS self-denying ordinance not to recruit actively from such countries is clearly not sufficient. It leaves a loophole through which nursing agencies can drive a coach and horses. The UK is the only country that has a director of international nurse-recruitment. That role has the potential to be very positive and I welcome the establishment of the post. It could and should be used to stamp out poor practice and ensure ethical standards of recruitment, but that would require a more ambitious approach on the part of the Government. I shall propose some potential solutions that I hope that the Minister will consider. I believe that we need an ethical recruitment policy that covers not only where we recruit nurses, but how we recruit them.

First, I join Unison in calling for action to tackle the exploitation of overseas nurses by establishing some sort of taskforce comprising representatives from the Department of Health, the Department of Trade and Industry—which has a clear interest in terms of the registration of employment agencies generally—the Home Office, the Overseas Labour Service, the UKCC, the RCN, Unison and independent sector organisations, and others. The taskforce should work to ensure that consistent practice is adopted throughout the entire UK health care system—not only in the NHS, but across the piece. That is not least because of the fact that in our care homes, more than 53 per cent. of all placements are state funded. Public money is being used to pay for the nurses who come to work in those homes and who, all too often, are exploited. It is appropriate that the state is involved in ensuring that good practice and standards are applied.

Secondly, the Department of Health should issue clear instructions to trusts that no agency that charges the individual nurse who seeks to be recruited to work in the NHS should be used. It is one thing to charge the NHS for the use of its service, but quite another to charge the individual nurse for it as well.

Thirdly, the Department should implement a kitemark scheme for nurse agencies, so that the NHS is in no doubt that agencies are in compliance with NHS guidance on recruitment. Those measures would go some way toward addressing the International Development Committee's proposals that guidance should be made broader to include the independent and private sectors.

In conclusion, overseas nurses make a valuable contribution to our health care system. However, there is undoubtedly growing concern not only about the exploitation of nurses, but about the way in which this country is doing harm to developing countries, which have told us clearly that we should not actively recruit from their health care systems because of the damage that that is causing. Recruitment of overseas nurses is not a new phenomenon; what is new is the sheer scale of the recruitment that is taking place and the dramatic increases in the numbers that are being recruited. Given the worldwide shortage of health care professionals, overseas recruitment cannot be a long-term solution to the UK's nursing shortage. At best, it is a sticking plaster and a stop-gap measure while we establish the extra training places and grow our own nurses so that we can fill the vacancies in the NHS. I hope that Ministers will not

*[Mr. Paul Burstow]*

lightly dismiss the Government's responsibility to ensure ethical recruitment practices and zero tolerance of exploitation of health care workers in this country.

12.21 am

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Denham):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on obtaining this debate on the recruitment of nurses from overseas. It gives me an opportunity to set out the Government's position on the expansion of the nursing work force in the NHS and the role that international recruitment can play in that process. I want to speak about the Government's plan for investing in NHS staff, and to describe the contribution that international nursing recruitment has made and will continue to make to the delivery of high quality clinical services to patients. I hope that in doing so, I can deal satisfactorily with the hon. Gentleman's major points.

NHS staff are a precious resource. They are what makes the health service tick. The biggest constraint that the NHS currently faces is no longer a shortage of financial resources, but a shortage of human resources. It is doctors, nurses, therapists and other health professionals who, together with support staff, keep the service going day in, day out. The massive improvements set out in the NHS plan will, over time, bring an end to years of underfunding and the consequent low morale among key health care professionals.

It is important to understand that the decisions made in the early 1990s, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, are one of the reasons for the shortfall in the number of nurses. Those decisions drastically reduced the number of student nurses in training. Overall, the number of available training places fell by 28 per cent. When we were elected, it was clear that too few nurses had qualified, and would qualify, as fully trained registered nurses in the next few years. There had been serious damage to the overall nursing work force, which in turn posed a considerable threat to the standards and safety of care afforded to patients.

In addition to saying that such cuts must never happen again, we have established plans to expand the number of health care professionals. They include plans for 20,000 more nurses, as set out in the NHS plan. The recruitment and retention strategy that has been developed to achieve that target will include improved retention of staff, return-to-practice programmes, more training places, and international recruitment.

We have already made progress. Between 1997 and 2000, the number of qualified nurses in the NHS increased by more than 17,000. From September 1999 to September 2000 alone, there was an increase of 6,300 nurses. We will build on that, and increase the number of nurses by 20,000 by 2004. In addition, we expect that by 2004, as a result of the increased number of training places, more than 45,000 new nurses and midwives will come out of training, alongside 13,000 therapists and other health professionals.

So there is an increase in the number of nurses coming into the NHS, and it will continue in future. That is backed by an expansion of nurse training places. By 2004, 5,500 more nurses, midwives and health visitors will be trained each year than are being trained today. In itself, that is an improvement on the position when we were elected, but it takes three years to train a nurse, and a further two years to achieve an experienced and qualified intensive care nurse. That is one of the reasons why we want to attract returners to the profession. Almost 7,000 qualified nurses have returned to the NHS since February 1999, and another 2,000 are preparing to return.

While we await the benefits from the increased number of student nurses, and attract returners to the NHS, international recruitment will provide an invaluable resource, bridging the gap during the years of training, education and gaining clinical expertise.

The NHS has a long history of recruiting from abroad, and there are already many networks throughout the world for good co-operation and exchange of health care personnel. International recruitment by NHS organisations has been especially useful in areas where recruitment has proved difficult or where new developments require new or extra staff.

It is essential to ensure that effective and appropriate international recruitment is perceived as a direct benefit not only to NHS patients but to the employing organisation, the individual nurse, colleagues in the rest of the team and the recruit's home country.

Let me give a couple of examples that are relevant to the hon. Gentleman's constituency. They show that we acknowledge some of the problems that he raised. The Epsom and St. Helier NHS trust has undertaken international recruitment, mainly by recruiting nurses from the Philippines and Finland. In October 2000, the trust asked three commercial international recruitment organisations to advise on the number of nurses who could be appointed to the trust on short-term contracts of between six months and two years. The purpose was to ensure that the trust could provide 102 extra beds in preparation for the winter. The trust selected the recruitment organisation BUPA, which provided nurses from the West Indies and South Africa. In response to concerns raised by the trust about recruiting from those areas, BUPA reassured it that the nurses had already been selected and were "on its books" before the publication of the Department of Health's guidance for international nursing recruitment in November 1999.

The nurses arrived at the end of 2000, and I understand that they provide high standards of care to patients. The regional recruitment and retention co-ordinator has subsequently worked directly with the trust to ensure that international recruitment is managed according to the guidance. The trust has also appointed a senior nurse for recruitment and retention. Although international recruitment allowed considerable expansion of services to patients throughout the winter, nurse recruitment now focuses on the local labour market.

St. George's Hospital NHS trust, which is also in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, discovered that a Filipino nurse was asked to pay a £1,000 fee directly to a commercial recruitment organisation in the Philippines. St. George's, in my view rightly, decided that it would not use that organisation again.

**Mr. Burstow:** The Minister is right that St. George's was correct to cease using that agency. However, would it not be better for the Department to issue clear instructions to trusts to do likewise in all cases?

**Mr. Denham:** I want to speak about the policies that are already in place and the further policies that we will

introduce to deal with the problem. I shall briefly explain the current system, whereby nurses come to work in the United Kingdom. First, they must register with the United Kingdom Central Council for nurses, midwives and health visitors. During the year that ended in March 2000, there were more than 17,000 applications to the UKCC, of which 1,416 were admitted to the professional register from the European Community, and just under 6,000 from countries outside Europe. In the previous year, there were fewer applications.

It is important to stress that the successful applications to join the UKCC register do not necessarily represent nurses in employment in the UK. They include people who have never taken up employment here—those who take up temporary work, for example, in the working holiday arrangements, as well as those who take up full-time employment in the NHS and the independent and voluntary sectors.

As the NHS has expanded the number of nursing posts in line with developing services for patients, the opportunities for international recruitment have increased. That development formed the basis for the publication of the guidance on international nursing recruitment in the NHS in 1999. It made it clear that international recruitment should be cost-effective, based on good practice, and undertaken only on an ethical basis. The guidance specifically states that NHS employers should not actively recruit from developing countries that are experiencing nursing shortages. The only exceptions to that policy are nurses who seek an opportunity for development as part of a recognised programme approved by the relevant Government authorities in the country concerned, and employers who consider an unsolicited application directly from an individual potential recruit.

The hon. Gentleman asked about applications to the UKCC since 1999. When the guidance was published in 1999, some NHS employers would already have had international recruitment campaign commitments and established contracts with commercial recruitment organisations. Inevitably, there was a time lag between the publication of the guidance and its impact on the international recruitment policies of individual local NHS employers, and I gave the hon. Gentleman an example of that. This meant that nurses may have taken up their job offers in the UK up to a year after being appointed.

As the hon. Gentleman recognised, in January the Department of Health appointed a director of international recruitment to oversee the application of the guidance. The job of the director will be to co-ordinate the international recruitment efforts throughout England's eight regions, ensuring consistent standards and cost-effective best practice in employment. She will also develop agreements between Governments, ensuring international co-operation and the recruitment and exchange of health care professionals. Finally, an extremely important part of her remit is to ensure that developing countries are protected from targeted recruitment, and that the NHS does not actively recruit from, for example, the Republic of South Africa or the West Indies.

The director of international recruitment is working with the leaders of the professions and with other Departments to ensure that international recruitment in the NHS not only meets the Department's guidance but tackles service priorities and complies with NHS quality standards. The Department's guidance is intended to ensure that international recruitment fulfils its proper role in staffing the NHS, and that it is done on a proper, ethical basis.

There is cause for serious concern that some commercial agencies have targeted developing countries for international recruitment. The Department has been working with NHS employers and reputable commercial recruitment organisations to produce a code of practice that reinforces the requirement that international recruitment must never be carried out against the interests of host countries. A wide consultation involving NHS employers, professional bodies, trade unions and, specifically, commercial recruitment organisations is nearing completion. The Government will expect all recruitment organisations to adhere to the code of practice. In addition, I believe that the independent and voluntary sectors will wish to join forces with the NHS to ensure that agencies who engage in unscrupulous or poor practice are forced out of the market.

The code will require NHS employers to have proper plans in place to decide which countries they may recruit from, and which they must not target. The code will also state strict rules for commercial recruitment organisations that have contracts with the NHS. That means that in future, NHS employers will not contract with agencies that actively recruit from developing countries such as South Africa and the West Indies. It is worth pointing out that we are, I believe, the only developed country—indeed, the only country in the world—that has a policy on international recruitment that reflects ethical considerations, as well as those based on value for money and good practice. That is a significant achievement for Britain.

We must not forget that health care professionals have always been a highly mobile and marketable work force. Many professionals, including nurses, travel abroad of their own volition, some coming to England and many to other parts of the world. The NHS needs to respond appropriately to applications from such individuals. The Royal College of Nursing has expressed its concern about policies that infringe nurses' freedom to work where they like. The RCN has recommended that guidance should not stop individual nurses from coming to work in the UK should they wish to do so. Our guidance endorses that approach.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned exploitation in the private sector, and I have already said that we believe that the development of the code of practice in conjunction with the reputable organisations in the field will do much to raise standards right across the spectrum of international recruitment, whether to the NHS or to the independent sector, and to put a considerable degree of pressure on the independent sector to abide by similar standards.

I would need to look in detail at the points raised by the hon. Gentleman, and he may wish to write to me. Several of the instances that he mentioned certainly sounded, at first hearing, like clear legal breaches and not just poor conduct. They sounded, to me at least, like abuses of some of the work permit regulations, and I would be happy to consider whether what is needed is simply more effective enforcement, or whether wider measures need to be addressed. Clearly, we do not wish to see exploitation of nurses coming to work here from overseas. I too acknowledge the valuable role played in

*[Mr. Denham]*

the NHS by those who have come here in recent years. We wish to ensure that theirs is a positive and valuable experience.

I want to mention the success of our Government-to-Government agreement within Europe—the Anglo-Spanish programme. The pilot programme in the north-west of England followed an agreement reached with the Spanish Government, enabling the NHS to employ some of Spain's surplus nurses and doctors. Currently 87 nurses from Spain are working in the NHS, and about 35 more are working in the private sector. The programme is being rolled out to London and the south-east, and we hope to recruit a further 500 nurses from Spain as soon as is practicable.

Many NHS employers have established mutually beneficial links with countries that are developing their health care systems. We are keen to encourage schemes enabling staff from many countries to benefit from spending two or three years in the NHS. The contribution that such staff make is often outstanding, and goes a long way to promote personal development, as well as the nursing profession as a whole.

I hope that I have described adequately the effective measures that we have in train to tackle the issues raised by the hon. Gentleman, and made clear the important role that international recruitment will play in ensuring that the NHS and its patients have the staff that they need. I hope that I have also made clear the Government's commitment to expanding the training and supply of nurses, so that we shall no longer be in the position that we have been in during the past few years as a result of the cuts in nurse training made under the previous Government.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes to One o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Tuesday 24 April 2001*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### Kyoto Protocol

1. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths** (Edinburgh, South): What further representations Her Majesty's Government are making to the US Administration on the ratification of the Kyoto treaty. [157180]

4. **Jane Griffiths** (Reading, East): What discussions he has had with the Foreign Secretary regarding President Bush's recent statement on the Kyoto protocol. [157184]

10. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): If he will make a statement on the future of the Kyoto protocol. [157190]

**The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott):** As the Prime Minister has said, we continue to believe that the Kyoto protocol provides the best framework to deal with climate change. The President of the United States has said that he accepts the need for global action to combat climate change, but he has declared that he opposes the Kyoto protocol. He has ordered a review of US policy on climate change and the next round of talks has been deferred from May to July to allow the US more time to prepare its position.

We obviously want to hear the views and ideas of the US Administration, but for our part, we think that the Kyoto protocol is the right way forward. At meetings in New York last week, Ministers from the European Union and around the world reaffirmed their overwhelming support for the Kyoto protocol.

I have discussed the issues with the Foreign Secretary and he has raised climate change with the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell. My Cabinet colleagues and I will continue to raise climate change in discussions with our US counterparts. I hope that we can find agreement on a way forward in July.

**Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** Is my right hon. Friend aware of the Kyoto protest rally that will take place on 5 May at the American embassy and of the campaign to get Coca-Cola, which funded the toxic Texan, to persuade him to change his mind on Kyoto? Will he confirm that it is vital that everyone who cares about the future of the planet does everything possible to get US policy back on track?

**Mr. Prescott:** I am aware that a number of protests have taken place since the President declared that he was against the Kyoto protocol. Protests and discussions have taken place not only internationally—I have referred to the meeting that took place in New York last week—but in America itself. Debates, discussions and protests will no doubt take place, as will the one on 5 May to which my hon. Friend referred. They will undoubtedly be taken into account in the presidential review.

**Jane Griffiths:** Will my right hon. Friend join me in being much encouraged by the talks that took place at the weekend and by the united front that has been presented by all countries except the United States? Will he also join me in hoping that the fool on Capitol Hill changes his ways before it is too late?

**Mr. Prescott:** I am well aware of the extent of the protests against the President's statement on the Kyoto protocol and a number of measured statements have come out of the United States Administration since then. As the Americans have asked to delay the meeting of COP 6—the sixth conference of the parties—until July, we should wait to hear what they have got to say. The President has called a cabinet discussion and review on the matter, so I hope that we will know more in July.

**Mr. Rendel:** Given that the Climate Change Bill, which has been introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), would do no more than put on a statutory footing the targets for $CO_2$ emissions that were set out in the previous Labour party manifesto, will the Secretary of State ensure that no Labour Member will oppose the Bill's Second Reading on Friday?

**Mr. Prescott:** The Government have made it absolutely clear that, in playing an active part in the Kyoto negotiations and in bringing to the House policies that would observe those objectives, we will fulfil our policy commitments. That does not mean piddling on the side as Liberals tend to do on such matters.

**Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): On the position of the United States on climate change, President Bush has suggested that there may be an enhanced role for nuclear power to help in the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. What efforts are the Deputy Prime Minister and his Department making to enthuse others in the British Government about the contribution that nuclear power can make in the United Kingdom further to help to meet our Kyoto targets?

**Mr. Prescott:** It is clear that, in the discussions at COP 6 and since Kyoto, the question of nuclear energy has been highly controversial in European nations and in developing countries. The overwhelming opinion is against the involvement of nuclear energy. As it forms part of the energy requirements of several countries, it is best to leave it out of such judgments. Decisions have not yet been taken.

**Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that President Bush's decision has

nothing to do with the American economy—America is ideally poised to take advantage of renewable technologies—and everything to do with the money that was used to fund the Republican party's presidential election victory? Will the Deputy Prime Minister assure me and the House that this Government will never bow to such financial pressure? Will he also join me in saying that he will boycott all American products from companies that support the rejection of the Kyoto protocol?

**Mr. Prescott:** I hope that the hon. Gentleman makes that point to the Welsh Development Agency, which is constantly over there asking for American investment in Wales. However, I take his point. We have set out our programme and, as I understand it, the climate change levy was somewhat controversial in certain business sectors. We have shown courage in getting on with our policy and in meeting the commitments that we have given. I wish the hon. Gentleman good luck with his policy.

**Mrs. Jackie Lawrence** (Preseli Pembrokeshire): On the environment, my right hon. Friend will be aware that former Tory MP Tony Marlow and his long-term partner Jill Chambers are about to trial genetically modified crops at Mathry in my constituency. Is my right hon. Friend aware of the concern that that is causing locally and will he agree to meet a delegation from my constituency to discuss those matters?

**Mr. Prescott:** I note what my hon. Friend says.

**Mr. Archie Norman** (Tunbridge Wells): We share the Deputy Prime Minister's support for the Kyoto protocol, but does he recall the comments of his spokeswoman before his trip to the United States? She said:

"this is a crucial chance . . . the first meeting on climate change since the talks at The Hague."

Does he also remember his intemperate attack on the US Administration when he said that its exports would be made to suffer and Anglo-American relations should be put into "deep freeze"? Was that all just macho man bluster? While in the United States, whom did he meet at a senior level of the Administration to discuss the matter? Exactly what sanctions did he have in mind?

**Mr. Prescott:** The problem with the hon. Gentleman is that he believes too much that is put in the press. As I understand it, the same papers went on to say that discussions on the Kyoto agreement would not take place at the United Nations conference when, in fact, they took place on every day—on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday. The hon. Gentleman is reacting to those press reports and took the chance to make a statement, but he is wrong. We got on with the Kyoto negotiations.

**Mr. Norman:** I note what the Deputy Prime Minister says about the press and it might be useful if I quote from it. It reported:

"'There will be a chance for bilateral talks' said a spokeswoman for Mr Prescott."

*The Times* said:

"Mr Prescott has issued a warning that American firms would see their European exports suffer if they persisted in rejecting Kyoto."

The truth is that the answer to my question is yes, it was all bluster—the same bluster that led to the fiasco of the Hague talks. The right hon. Gentleman's own officials said afterwards that he had no scheduled meetings with the US Administration and it was all a public relations exercise. When he looks back on the past four years, will he reflect on the facts that the Kyoto protocol is in disarray; the Hague talks collapsed as a result of his actions; Britain's carbon emissions are rising; and the Americans regard his contribution as ridiculous? Such diplomatic ineptitude might go down fine in old Labour, but it does not do much for our relations on climate change.

**Mr. Prescott:** The hon. Gentleman continues to prove my point: he puts too much faith in press reports. I did not have a meeting with the Administration, nor did I seek one when I visited Washington. The meeting that I had was set up to talk to the Secretary of Transportation about the aviation deal. That is precisely what I said I would be doing. I did not have a meeting with the Administration because they had made it clear that they did not know what their policy was. Why should I have a meeting to find that out? Would it not be better to wait until July, which is precisely what I am doing? As to whether I have been inept, in my four years in government I am proud of playing a major part in bringing about the Kyoto agreement. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will find things to be proud of in his political life, but he certainly has not yet.

## Cycling

2. **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): What action he plans to take to make cycling safer. [157181]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Robert Ainsworth):** The Government's road safety strategy, "Tomorrow's roads: safer for everyone", sets out our strategy to make cycling safer. It embraces measures that cyclists can take to protect themselves, including wearing cycle helmets, training and making it safer to cycle on the road through engineering measures. Further measures to educate drivers will also be of benefit.

**Mrs. Campbell:** I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he commend Cambridge university for its innovative park and cycle scheme that is due to open on Thursday? It offers not only secure cycle parking, but a safe and easy route to cycle into the centre of Cambridge. Does he agree that that is a commendable scheme that should be copied by others?

**Mr. Ainsworth:** A great deal of good work on cycling has been done in Cambridge because it has a far higher proportion of cyclists than elsewhere in the country. Much of the town's work over the years is to be commended. Many of its initiatives have improved cycling safety in the city and set good examples for others to follow.

**Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot): I hope that the Minister will acknowledge the splendid example set by my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin)

and the bicycling baronet, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), both of whom have done much to promote cycling.

Apparently, flashing lights on cycles are illegal, and one is supposed to have a steady light. However, a flashing light is much more readily seen by motorists, particularly in wet conditions. May I urge the Minister to change the regulations in that respect?

**Mr. Ainsworth:** I congratulate anybody who tries to encourage more people to cycle. I am not sure how the 10-minute journey cycled by the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) contributes to that cause, but I am sure that it is having an effect. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) chose not to mention his bowler-hatted cyclist colleague on the Back Benches.

There are minimum standards for cycle lights, and there is nothing to stop cyclists having flashing lights in addition to steady lights that meet those minimum requirements. I shall look into the matter, and if we believe that a change would improve safety, we will consider it.

**Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): All Tory cyclists are well known flashers, as the Minister knows. Is it not safest to cycle in a dedicated cycle lane, instead of using the little yellow lines that simply attract motorists to try to knock down cyclists such as me as I come to Parliament? Will the Minister talk to Westminster city council about having dedicated cycle lanes in the centre of London? We are the worst city in the world for cycling and it is a disgrace that that Tory council will not give London cyclists lanes to ensure that they can travel round the centre in safety.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** As part of local transport plans we now expect local authorities to produce and update, a cycling strategy, which will include measures to make cycling safer. My hon. Friend knows that we have provided £8.4 billion in the local transport settlement, so there is no excuse for local authorities such as Westminster to continue to neglect that matter.

## Congestion Taxes

3. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): What recent discussions he has had with local authorities regarding the introduction of congestion taxes. [157183]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill):** Through the charging development partnership, my Department is engaged in continuing discussions with a number of English local authorities about the role that congestion charges may have in relieving local traffic problems and promoting wider travel choice through improved public transport services and facilities. As the hon. Gentleman is no doubt aware, his county council of Hampshire, which I was pleased recently to designate a centre of excellence for integrated transport planning, is a member of the charging development partnership, and last year was allocated £300,000 to carry out several studies into the implications of road pricing and workplace parking charges, to assist its decision making on those matters.

**Mr. Swayne:** The Minister will be aware that not all local authorities can match the standards achieved by Hampshire county council. Will he assure the House that he will refuse any application to implement such a charge unless the local authority can demonstrate a clear and appreciable improvement in public transport prior to the application?

**Mr. Hill:** I am happy, if slightly surprised, on this occasion to agree with the hon. Gentleman on both points. Any proposal for a charging regime is subject to the final approval of the Secretary of State, and one of the criteria that he will examine is whether there are already clear commitments to, and achievements in, improving local transport.

**Ms Hazel Blears** (Salford): As chairman of the all-party motorcycling group, I am delighted that the Government, through the motor cycle advisory committee, have acknowledged the significant contribution that motor bikes and powered two-wheelers can make to reducing congestion and pollution. I appreciate that this is a matter for local authorities, but will the Minister encourage local authorities to consider exempting motor bikes and powered two-wheelers from congestion charges?

**Mr. Hill:** I am grateful for that characteristic intervention from my hon. Friend, Blears the bike. The Government appreciate warmly the contribution that motor bikes and powered two-wheelers can and do make to the reduction of congestion and pollution on our roads. I am sure that local authorities contemplating charging regimes will want to bear in mind those important considerations.

**Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): Is this not another example of the Government's vendetta against the motorist? Not only do we have the highest petrol price in Europe as a result of the Government's policies but, in the London scheme, a motorist who has to travel in every day could end up paying £1,250 a year. Residents, including many who are council tenants, could end up paying a charge of £130 for owning a car, whether or not they use it. Is not the Minister ashamed that, yet again, Labour has broken its pledge of no new taxes?

**Mr. Hill:** The hon. Gentleman does his best to make his point. In all seriousness, not only is congestion a cause of immense frustration to the travelling public, but it costs the economy billions of pounds every year. Every study has concluded that congestion charging is the most effective way to cut congestion, but essentially it will be for local authorities to make their own decisions. As I have indicated, the Secretary of State will have the final say and will look for evidence of local consensus and robust plans for local transport improvements. We have stipulated that, at least for the first 10 years, all proceeds of congestion charging must be ploughed back into local transport improvements.

## London Underground

5. **Mr. Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): If he will make a statement on the future of the London underground. [157185]

**Mr. Prescott:** The Government are fully committed to the public-private partnership, which will produce £13 billion over the next 15 years to refurbish and modernise the London underground—more long-term investment than ever before. The PPP will mean better safety and better value for money; it will guarantee that London Underground stays in the public sector.

In that context, I regret the fact that Transport for London has initiated legal proceedings against London Underground. I understand that the board of London Transport expects to meet on 2 May to consider its decisions on preferred bidders, with which it plans to conclude negotiations for the two deep tube contracts once legal proceedings have been resolved.

**Mr. Gapes:** Does my right hon. Friend agree with me and my constituents, who are increasingly frustrated by delays, which have continued for many years, in getting an adequate level of investment for our public transport in London? Is it not time that we just got on with the job of investing the resources that are needed in London instead of engaging in petty posturing, which is happening in some quarters?

**Mr. Prescott:** The essential issue for the underground, as everyone who has looked at the problem knows, is long-term investment. Previous Governments, both Labour and Tory, have all been involved in giving inadequate resources to the London underground; those resources were even cut every two or three years. One cannot plan long-term investment in the underground by having an uncertain safety and investment programme. Our Government are addressing themselves to long-term investment which will bring in that £13 billion and will not be subjected to the cuts that Governments tend to impose on capital programmes once they are in office and face economic difficulties.

**Mr. Peter Brooke** (Cities of London and Westminster): After four years, what do Londoners have to do to achieve genuine activity and improvement on the London underground?

**Mr. Prescott:** First, voting Labour is a good proposal, as Londoners will shortly do in increasing numbers. In the past four years, we have averaged £500 million of investment in the underground each year, while the record of the previous Administration was £360 million. We shall point out that comparison to Londoners when talking about our major and substantial contribution to long-term investment in London Underground.

**Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Canning Town): Does my right hon. Friend accept that he is engaged in a public relations war with the Mayor of London, and that he is losing the war? To what does he attribute that failure, and what does he expect to have to do to win the PR battle?

**Mr. Prescott:** I hope that the battle will be fought on the substance and the facts, rather than on public relations, although I agree that taking advertisements at £15,000 a time in the *Evening Standard* is one way of going about it. If I suggested doing that on Parliament's budget, the Mayor and his team would be the first to say that it was wrong. I have no intention whatever of doing that, but I have published a statement of the facts and made it available to the *Evening Standard*, which refused to print it. That is one of the difficulties, but I shall continue to make my case.

**Mr. Bernard Jenkin** (North Essex): When will the Deputy Prime Minister admit that the PPP represents four wasted years of failure? What does he have to say to Peter Bishop of the London chamber of commerce, who yesterday said:

"London's transport system is failing on every front";

or to the chairman of British Airways, who said yesterday that London faced being "left standing" by cities with a superior transport infrastructure; or to London First, which complains of

"continued political interference and lack of leadership"

over key projects?

How many major transport projects has the right hon. Gentleman's Department initiated in London since Labour came to office? Has he the courage and honesty to admit that the answer is not one? Are not Labour's four wasted years on the wretched tube PPP the crowning failure of the Government's record on transport in London?

**Mr. Prescott:** To be fair, I would have to include the investments started by the previous Administration. It takes a considerable time for the effects of those to be felt. That is an answer to those who say that we are not getting an improvement in London transport: it is a long-term process. The extension of the docklands light railway—*[Interruption.]* I am not saying that that did not take place, but the fact that such investments have been made belies the statement that nothing is being done for transport in London—

**Mr. Jenkin:** What have you done?

**Mr. Prescott:** What we are proposing—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Let the Minister answer the question.

**Mr. Prescott:** The charge is made that nothing is being done for London transport. An awful lot of money has been poured into London transport for such projects as the docklands light railway and the Jubilee line, which we had to continue to finance. We must now make sure that London Underground gets guaranteed long-term investment—not the sort of policy promoted by the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), which would mean that the subsidy for the underground would have been reduced to £161 million, and by this year to zero. That is the priority that the Conservatives give to London Underground. We are looking to a £13 billion investment.

As to the Tories' position on the underground, one moment they want to privatise it, then they want to nationalise it, and once it is nationalised, perhaps they might put it back into private ownership. That is typical of the Tories: they never take a long-term decision.

### Mobile Telephone Masts

6. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): What recent representations he has received on the criteria for granting planning permission for the erecting of mobile telephone masts. [157186]

**The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. Nick Raynsford):** Our Department has received a range of representations on planning arrangements for telecommunications over the past year. On 16 March, I announced a series of important changes to the planning system on the siting of mobile phone masts which significantly strengthen public consultation requirements.

**Mr. Amess:** Why have the Liberal-supported Labour Government not yet acted positively on the recommendations of the Stewart report? Will the Minister explain to my constituents how, in a heavily populated, tiny urban area, these monstrosities are being erected all the time? Local residents protest, the council tries to intervene, the matter goes to appeal, yet the masts stay up. Can we have some action from this rotten Liberal-supported Labour Government?

**Mr. Raynsford:** The hon. Gentleman is carried away by the flights of his own fantasies. I can assure him that the Government have acted on the Stewart recommendations. We have acted by strengthening the public consultation arrangements, and by ensuring that all base stations meet the international exposure guidelines; we have set in train an audit of base stations, starting with schools; we have set up a national database with details of base stations; and we are launching a new £7 million joint industry-Government research programme. Those are all actions undertaken by the Government to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded while we facilitate the continued roll-out of a mobile phone network on which 40 million people in this country depend.

**Mr. George Stevenson** (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that the changes that he mentioned with regard to strengthening public consultation will remove the anomaly whereby a proposal for a mast of 15 m in height only requires prior approval from a local authority, whereas a proposal for a 20 m mast is subject to full planning permission?

**Mr. Raynsford:** Under the new arrangements that we have announced, all applications for ground-based masts will be subject to a consultation period of 56 days, which is the period for all normal full planning applications. For masts under 15 m in height, there will be continuation of the prior approval procedure. Under that procedure, if the local authority does not reject the proposal within the 56 days, consent is deemed. In every other respect, the procedure will be the same as that for full planning approval.

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): Does the Minister accept that, although the improvement of consultation measures is welcome, it does not bring radio masts into the normal planning permission regime? People throughout the country are asking why their local councils are incapable of enforcing the views of local people and communities because of the planning regime. That may have been good enough for the get-rich-quick 90s, but it is not good enough now. When will the masts be brought under proper planning control?

**Mr. Raynsford:** Our procedures ensure that the public have as full an opportunity to comment on any new mobile phone mast application as that which they have under the full planning procedures, as the hon. Gentleman will be aware. The only difference is that if the local authority fails to reach a decision by the end of the 56-day period, consent is deemed. I hope that the hon. Gentleman would want all local authorities to deal with planning applications expeditiously, as we do. Provided that they do so, there is no difference.

**Mr. David Lepper** (Brighton, Pavilion): I welcome the announcements that my right hon. Friend made in March, as, I am sure, do others. However, when he lays the final regulations that relate to those announcements, will he take into account the experience of my constituents in Mitre House, a block of flats in my constituency? My constituents found that they and the local council were powerless to prevent the erection of a mast on the roof of the building. Nothing less than full planning permission would satisfy the need for proper consultation.

**Mr. Raynsford:** I assure my hon. Friend that under the arrangements that we have announced, roof-based masts will also be subject to the 56-day procedure. Currently, a separate 28-day procedure applies in respect of such masts, so there is a significant improvement. The doubling of the consultation period should ensure that my hon. Friend's concerns in respect of his constituents' views about such proposals are dealt with satisfactorily.

**Mr. Damian Green** (Ashford): I cannot believe that the Minister is convincing even himself with this flannel. Clearly, he is not convincing any of his colleagues. On 31 July last year, he said that he was

"minded to introduce a requirement for full planning permission."

He reneged on that statement, and his alternative proposals were rightly shredded by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, which had a Labour majority. The Committee pointed out that he planned to

"entrench the unpopular and confusing prior approval regime"

and

"entrench existing perverse incentives to operators to put up masts below an arbitrarily chosen height limit".

Does he agree with his colleagues on the Committee that his policy is perverse, unpopular and confusing?

**Mr. Raynsford:** As I recall it, the Trade and Industry Committee described our proposals in its most recent report on the subject as a carefully crafted compromise. That is exactly what they are. *[Interruption.]* I hope that the hon. Gentleman will listen. They are a compromise because there are two conflicting pressures. There is concern among a very large number of our citizens who want to use mobile phones and want good reception. There are 40 million users. Equally, there is concern about

the adverse environmental and amenity impact, and about health matters. We have considered those concerns carefully and sought an appropriate compromise. I should like to quote the views of a particular person on this subject. He said:

"people need reassuring and the planning guidelines do need changing. I don't think we need to smother the thing in bureaucracy and red tape, and mobile phone companies have to have the ability to put up the masts."

I agree with those comments entirely. They come from the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman), and I am sorry that he has not persuaded his colleague of the sense of his approach.

## Bus Travel

7. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): What plans he has to encourage travel by bus. [157187]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill):** We are encouraging bus travel by a combination of policy and fiscal measures. They include: strengthened powers for local authorities under the Transport Act 2000 to improve the quality of bus services; statutory requirements to ensure that buses are fully accessible; guaranteed half-fare reductions for elderly and disabled people; a major boost to capital investment through local transport plans; and enhanced funding for rural and urban buses. That accounts for some £230 million over the next 3 years—a 35 per cent. increase on the subsidy paid by local authorities in 1997.

**Mr. Grogan:** Will the Minister congratulate all those in Selby district who are involved in implementing the half-fare bus pass scheme, which comes into force there, as in the rest of the country, on 1 June? More than 6,000 pensioners have applied for it already. The pass is valid not only in Selby but for destinations throughout North Yorkshire and parts of West Yorkshire. Given the huge success and popularity of the scheme in rural areas, is there not a case for considering whether such bus passes should be valid not only in pensioners' home areas but throughout the country?

**Mr. Hill:** I am delighted to hear of the welcome for the concessionary fares scheme in Selby; it is reflected throughout the country. Indeed, 7 million elderly and disabled people stand to benefit from the introduction of the guaranteed statutory half-fare travel concessions.

My hon. Friend's second point was about the interchangeability of concessionary passes. That subject has frequently been raised with the Government, and we have asked the Confederation of Passenger Transport UK to consider it. We look forward to receiving its recommendations in due course.

**Mr. Don Foster** (Bath): Does the Minister agree that if we are to encourage bus travel, it must be reliable, and decent travel information should be provided? Will he therefore explain why, since November 1999, when the Secretary of State set a target for reducing bus cancellations, they have rocketed to four times the target figure? Why has the Department published only a summary of the report that it commissioned about its plans for improving travel information? Is it because the full report points out that many of the proposals are unrealistic? Will the Government publish the full report, with realistic proposals to reduce bus cancellations and improve transport information?

**Mr. Hill:** Obviously, the report is available to the hon. Gentleman; he has his own arcane means of acquiring such documents. I do not dispute that some cancellation figures have worsened, but they need to be set in the context of overall growth in the use of buses, especially in south-east England. All the signs are that the long decline in bus use which resulted from privatisation and deregulation under the previous Administration is coming to an end. We are confident of achieving our 10-year transport plan target of 10 per cent. growth and more passenger journeys.

**Mr. Jonathan Shaw** (Chatham and Aylesford): Does my hon. Friend know that later this year, pensioners in Medway will be able to travel for a 20p flat rate fare? Will he join me in welcoming that? It is not surprising that, while Liberal Democrat councillors were able to support Labour councillors in Medway, the Tories voted against the proposal.

**Mr. Hill:** I am not in the least surprised to hear of that Conservative opposition to an extremely positive measure. One of the great satisfactions of the half-fare concessionary scheme is that, for the first time, senior citizens and disabled people in Conservative-run local authorities will be able to benefit from half-fare concessionary schemes. Because of the rural bus grant, some rural bus services—2,000 nationwide—are running for the first time in Conservative-controlled areas. That is a commitment to the countryside that the Opposition never contemplated in their 18 years of misrule.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): However attractive concessionary fares are—and I support concessionary fares for the disabled and the elderly—does the Minister accept that, whatever resources the Government put in to bus services, they will be inadequate to provide an acceptable quality of service in the more remote rural areas, and that the people who live in those areas will have to rely on their own cars? Does he accept that in many areas of the country, sufficient buses are not available to provide people with the quality of life that we all expect?

**Mr. Hill:** I certainly accept that bus services are not extant in many areas of the country. That is why recently, in Cornwall, I was delighted to announce the parish transport fund initiative, which will provide £15 million for parishes to originate their own transport schemes. Those could take the form of shared car schemes, of hiring in bus services for villages that have heretofore not been served by them, or of new taxi schemes in those localities. The announcement has been widely welcomed by the parishes, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take the message about this opportunity back to his own locality.

**Ms Rosie Winterton** (Doncaster, Central): I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that many companies are considering ways of persuading their employees to make more use of public transport, especially buses, for getting

to and from work. Will he support those companies, and will he discuss with Treasury Ministers whether financial incentives could be made available—for example, to enable companies to make season ticket loans to their employees?

**Mr. Hill:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that suggestion. The Government are, of course, open to any proposal that serves to enhance the provision of public transport services. I know that many companies run their own coach services, which play an important role in a public transport context, although they are run specifically for the companies' own employees. The Commission for Integrated Transport has considered the issue of fuel duty rebates in connection with coach services, and I know that it will certainly take such matters into its future remit.

### Council Tax Benefit Subsidy (Worcestershire)

8. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): If he will make a statement on the council tax benefit subsidy payable to Worcestershire county council. [157188]

**The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Ms Hilary Armstrong):** Council tax benefit subsidy is paid by the Department of Social Security to billing authorities. Therefore, as a major precepting authority, Worcestershire county council does not receive council tax benefit subsidy.

**Mr. Luff:** That disingenuous answer from the Minister covers up the truth, as she well knows. She knows that her Government have monstrously cut the subsidy payable to Worcestershire, and that the roots of the huge increase in council tax—*[Laughter.]* I am sorry that Labour Members find a 45 per cent. increase in council tax in Worcestershire over the past four years a laughing matter. It is not a laughing matter at all. The roots of that increase lie in the incompetence of the Lib-Lab pact that runs Worcestershire, and in the Government's rigged funding for all shire counties. Is not the cut that the Minister knows her Government have made in council tax benefit subsidy a stealth tax on a stealth tax, which the very poorest can least afford?

**Ms Armstrong:** The hon. Gentleman is clearly very disappointed that more people in Worcestershire are now working, and are therefore not eligible for council tax benefit. The amount going to all districts in Worcestershire is £12.8 million. That is not a reduction. There is a slight decline in the percentage, because there is a decline in the number of people out of work and benefiting from the subsidy. The hon. Gentleman rails about council tax, and he is right: in Tory counties, council tax is higher than in any Labour county.

### Planning (Chelmsford)

9. **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford): If he will make a statement on the impact of his planning criteria in the Chelmsford local authority area. [157189]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Beverley Hughes):** The Government's policies are designed to promote more sustainable patterns of development, reconciling the need for new development with the need to conserve the countryside and the character of our cities, towns and villages. It is for Essex county council, in its replacement structure plan, and Chelmsford borough council, through its borough local plan, to ensure that policies in national and regional planning guidance are taken into account in their areas.

**Mr. Burns:** Is the Minister aware that people living in the village of Boreham, in the Chelmsford local authority area, are appalled at the thought of having 2,000 houses imposed on them by Liberal Democrat-controlled Chelmsford borough council—part of the overall amount of housing that the Government are inflicting on Essex and the south-east? Is the Minister also aware that there is bitter resentment of the fact that 2,500 of the 12,500 houses that Chelmsford must take are intended not to meet Chelmsford's housing needs but to relieve pressures in the south of the county? People in Boreham—in my area—are asking why the Thames gateway cannot take the 2,500 houses which, although they are being inflicted on them, are needed because of the increased employment and industrial building in the Thames gateway that the Government require.

**Ms Hughes:** The hon. Gentleman will know my responses to those questions, because he asked them during an Adjournment debate not long ago. He will also know that the question of the land allocated for housing in his constituency is still open to consultation—and that in the regional planning guidance just published by the Government, the annual housing figures for Essex as a whole during the first five years of the relevant period are lower than they were in the 1994 regional planning guidance. Furthermore, he will know that the previous Government directed three councils in Essex to increase their housing numbers, and imposed 20-year figures through their regional planning guidance procedure. Ours, by contrast, is a bottom-up process, involving redistribution of housing on a regional basis.

The people of Chelmsford will know that the Tories' policy on these matters is in complete disarray. On the one hand—as we saw today, when they launched their bus—they propose a Nimbys' charter, giving every local authority the right to veto and to renege on its housing responsibility. On the other hand, the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) told *Show House* magazine only a few months ago:

"We all live in the real world. I've been involved in development myself and I recognise that unfortunately it is inevitable we will lose some countryside . . . We're not in any sense anti-housebuilding, we're the friend of housebuilders".

### Rail Freight

11. **Mr. Jim Dobbin** (Heywood and Middleton): What progress he has made in transferring freight from road to rail. [157191]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill):** Our policy is to help to establish an integrated, sustainable freight distribution system to support economic growth and bring social and environmental benefits. Our 10-year transport plan sets out our long-term plans for rail freight. We have already provided over

£100 million in grants to move freight from road to rail or inland waterways; we have issued guidance to local authorities to facilitate more use of rail for freight; and we have established a Strategic Rail Authority with a duty to promote rail freight.

**Mr. Dobbin:** Does the Minister accept that there is an imbalance in a process that allocates the equivalent of about £7 billion in Government funds to the road haulage industry over 10 years, and £3.4 billion to rail freight? That makes it difficult for rail freight to compete. The Treasury should consider creating a level playing field; that would help the funding process, and would also help the Government to achieve their environmental and economic targets. It would enable much more freight to be transferred from road to rail.

**Mr. Hill:** I recognise my hon. Friend's powerful commitment to the expansion of rail freight. The Government fully support that objective where it provides value for money.

There is good news. My hon. Friend will recall that on 5 April the Rail Regulator published his provisional conclusions on rail freight charges. His proposals halve access charge revenues paid by freight operators to Railtrack, and bring greater transparency to the charging regime. Over the next five years, the bill for that income reduction will be about £450 million. As part of the announcement on Railtrack earlier this month, the Government have agreed to fund that through the Strategic Rail Authority. That is in addition to the massive £4 billion in public and private funding set out for rail freight in the 10-year plan, and represents a significant further contribution to the Government's objective of achieving 80 per cent. growth in rail freight traffic by 2010.

**Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): The Minister will be aware of my personal interest in Railtrack and FirstGroup, and will probably have received representations from the Potter Group of Melmerby in Vale of York, which is particularly anxious for its businesses at Selby and Ely to benefit from rail freight grants. Would the Government see fit to extend such grants to smaller operators such as the Potter Group, rather than to big players such as English Welsh and Scottish?

**Mr. Hill:** I am genuinely grateful to the hon. Lady for drawing my attention to the opportunities. The Government are eager to take up any opportunity for the extension of rail freight facilities. The grants vary in scale. They range from £60 million recently allocated to a major port rail freight development in Bristol, to less then £1 million. I will take the hon. Lady's words away and look at the opportunities that they represent.

**Mr. David Watts** (St. Helens, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that the development of a north-west direct freight line to Europe is crucial to the well-being of the north-west? Will he assure me that he will do all he can to promote that development, and that he will help with parliamentary time to ensure that a Bill gets through the House to make the scheme viable? *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Hill:** "Before the election," my hon. Friends mutter. If my hon. Friend is talking about the re-use of the Woodhead tunnel, the Government are enthusiastic to see that development. In much of my transport life over the past quarter of a century, I spent the whole of my time campaigning for that reopening. I am aware that it is part of the Northern Spirit franchise bid, which is now before the Strategic Rail Authority.

I think that my hon. Friend was alluding to the Central Railway proposal. The Strategic Rail Authority is carrying out a review of the scheme. Until we know the result of that, it would be inappropriate for the Government to comment on the company's proposals, and in particular its request for a hybrid Bill.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): Does the Minister accept that the wrong way to drive freight on to rail is by having the highest fuel prices in Europe? Is he aware that freight companies in the west midlands are filling their lorries up in Belgium, Holland and France? Does he know that diesel in Britain is twice the price of diesel in Croatia, for God's sake?

**Mr. Hill:** I cannot imagine what the hon. Gentleman has against poor little Croatia, but the costs of motoring and road haulage need to be taken in the round. Innumerable costs are imposed on our continental counterparts, including social costs and toll road costs, which are not imposed on British road hauliers. Taken in the round, there is a level playing field in that regard.

**Angela Smith** (Basildon): May I draw my hon. Friend's attention to the proposed development for a new container port in my constituency, which has the potential to create up to 10,000 new jobs? Although that has been welcomed by many people, there is still some concern about the amount of extra traffic, particularly freight traffic, that it will generate. Given that there is already a direct rail link from the site to the main rail network, will my hon. Friend consider meeting the company concerned, and Railtrack, as proposals progress, to ensure that as much freight as possible travels by rail?

**Mr. Hill:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As Britain's shipping Minister, as well as a junior transport Minister, I am well aware of the proposals for major new port installations. Of course I will be happy to meet the promoter of the scheme. I will have the opportunity to look at those matters more thoroughly tomorrow morning when I visit Thurrock district council.

## Second Homes

12. **Mr. Andrew George** (St. Ives): What recent assessment he has made of the operation of the council tax system with respect to second homes. [157192]

**The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Ms Hilary Armstrong):** In the rural White Paper, which was published in November 2000, the Government proposed, subject to consultation, to give local authorities discretion to charge the full council tax on second homes. We are currently preparing a consultation paper, which we intend to issue later this year.

**Mr. George:** I am grateful to the Minister for that reply, but is she satisfied that, after four years of this Government, my constituency still contains communities

where homeless people live cheek by jowl with those who are the owners of second homes? Does the Minister agree that it is no longer acceptable that £200 million of taxpayer's money should be spent on subsidising the second homes of wealthy people when many thousands of rural folk do not even have their first homes? If so, why do the Government not get on with the task and introduce legislation now, instead of issuing consultation papers? Four years on, let us see some action.

**Ms Armstrong:** As I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, the Government have a statutory duty to consult. There are many reasons why some homes will remain empty. We want to make sure that we give people incentives to bring back into use homes that have been empty for a long time. We also want to look at the problem of homes that are empty because of this year's flooding. We want to be sure that the exemption scheme can be administered by local authorities, so that issues of local importance can be dealt with. For that reason, the consultation process must go further than the issue of second homes. At present, the exemption regime extends beyond second homes. We must get that matter right, so that all local authorities have the exemptions that meet the needs of people in their areas.

**Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): Surely the Minister knows that such a scheme has operated successfully in Wales for many years. Can she not get on and do something about this matter? We all know that the consultation that she announced to change the council tax funding formula has been delayed again and again. Is it not time that she either took action or left office and let us do so?

**Ms Armstrong:** I am always grateful for advice from the hon. Gentleman, who was so successful in persuading the previous Conservative Government to act that his party judges his seat to be one of the most vulnerable in the country. The Government will get on with doing things, and we will make sure that we take people along with us. That is why we will consult—to ensure that we produce legislation appropriate for the introduction of the necessary changes.

**Mr. Dafydd Wigley** (Caernarfon): Does the Minister accept that the council tax system that operates in Wales remains a fairly blunt instrument when it comes to controlling the over-development of holiday and second homes in some communities? Given the Minister's commitment to give local authorities the maximum freedom in such matters, will she consider creating a new planning category for such homes? That would give local authorities control over granting or withholding planning permission if there is to be a change of use.

**Ms Armstrong:** The right hon. Gentleman goes way beyond the question. As he knows, Welsh local authorities can exercise discretion over council tax in their areas, but the planning regime is a different matter. The rural White Paper contained announcements on council tax, but not on planning. We are concerned that all local authorities should be able to act in the interests of the residents for whom they have responsibility. That is why the Government have been moving forward the agenda for local authorities in England. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will push the Welsh Assembly to do the same in Wales. As he knows, I have no responsibility for that.

## M6 Motorway

13. **Mr. Stephen Day** (Cheadle): What plans he has for widening the M6 motorway. [157193]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill):** I should point out that after years of confusion and delay under the previous Administration, work has now started on the Birmingham northern relief road. That road will relieve congestion on the M6 motorway through Birmingham between junctions 4 and 11.

However, I presume that the hon. Gentleman's primary concern is with the section of the M6 between Birmingham and Manchester. That transport corridor is at present the subject of a multimodal study that is looking into capacity problems and possible solutions, including scope for modal shift. Widening the M6 is certainly one of the options being considered. At this juncture I cannot comment further, as the study has yet to report

**Mr. Day:** The Minister gives no comfort whatever to my constituents, either about the M6 or about other schemes such as the Manchester airport eastern link road and the Poynton bypass, all of which the Government have put away into multimodal transport study schemes. People in the area want action. Congestion is solved by building the roads that have public support. Will the Minister please get them built?

**Mr. Hill:** If the hon. Gentleman and his constituents feel so passionately about these matters, I am rather surprised that they were not carried further forward under the previous Government. [HON. MEMBERS: "They were."] I am aware that there have been—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Let the Minister answer. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) should know better.

**Mr. Hill:** I am aware that there have been proposals at various stages of development for the widening of the M6 between junctions 11A and 19, and for the A556(M)/M6/M56 link, which have been remitted to the multimodal study. Work on phase 2 of the study is well under way, with a number of options under consideration including road schemes, metrolink, railbus, use of road space, and freight and transport charges. The steering group is engaged in consultations with local authority members to inform them of the initial results and to seek views and guidance on the development of the preferred strategy, which, as I have indicated, will be reported to the Government in due course.

## Points of Order

3.31 pm

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The House will know that on 10 April the Prime Minister held a 15-minute telephone conversation with Motorola's president, Chris Galvin, in an attempt to stave off the closure of the Motorola plant in West Lothian. You may know, Mr. Speaker, that Motorola has now confirmed that it is to close the plant, with the loss of 3,000 jobs. Has the Prime Minister or any other Minister come to you wishing to make a statement to the House?

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Speaker:** I shall call the constituency Member of Parliament the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) on that point of order.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is in sorrow that I ask how any of us can understand—I wonder whether it is for reasons of devolution—the fact that there is neither a statement nor a private notice question on Motorola, where 3,200 people lost their jobs this morning. It is beyond comprehension.

**Mr. Speaker:** I am very sorry that so many people are facing job losses in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. However, it is not a matter for the Chair as to whether a Minister makes a statement.

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If a Minister did ask to make a statement on this devolved issue, would you allow him to do so?

**Mr. Speaker:** Will the hon. Gentleman please repeat his question? I was distracted.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** I asked whether, if a Minister did request to make a statement on this devolved issue, you would allow him to do so.

**Mr. Speaker:** Of course I would not stop a Minister making a statement—I would not dream of doing so.

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As someone who was born within a few miles of the Motorola plant, I know that your expression of sympathy for the area will be much appreciated. I am glad of your clarification, because although I would be delighted if the Scottish Parliament were responsible for all these matters, there are a number of aspects, not least those relating to social security and the Prime Minister's intervention, that could properly have been raised by the constituency Member of Parliament if a Minister had deigned to make a statement.

**Mr. Speaker:** That is a not a point of order. However, no one is more experienced in finding the time and means to raise a matter such as this before the House than the hon. Member for Linlithgow. I am sure that he will make every endeavour to see that it is debated or that a Minister comes before the House.

## Protection From Smoking (Employees and Young Persons)

3.34 pm

**Mr. David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require employers to reduce or eliminate the exposure of their employees to passive smoking in the workplace; to protect children and young persons from such exposure in public places; and for connected purposes.

The Government's Advisory Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health has confirmed without equivocation that passive smoking causes cancer, heart disease and respiratory diseases. A seminal report on passive smoking and heart disease, published in 1997 by the *British Medical Journal* concluded that

"the effect of environmental tobacco smoke is not trivial, as is often thought. It is a serious environmental hazard and one that is easily avoided. The evidence on ischaemic heart disease warrants further action in preventing smoking in public buildings and in enclosed working environments."

My purpose is to respond to that recommended action. The Government have made great strides on their public health agenda. In late 1998, they published an excellent White Paper, "Smoking Kills", which observed that around 2,500 people die each week from illnesses directly related to smoking. Included in that horrifying figure are a sizeable number of people—the passive smokers—who contracted their illness from environmental tobacco smoke.

Passive smoking seriously damages the health and welfare of non-smokers. While the voluntary approach to reducing or eliminating dangerous exposure to noxious and toxic fumes has worked in numerous places, it has failed in many others. It will continue to fail unless the Government take action along the lines suggested in my Bill.

The House clearly believes that all employees deserve protection from the harmful effects of passive smoking while they are at work. Some 155 right hon. and hon. Members have supported early-day motion 173, on smoking in the workplace, which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). Those signatories noted

"the recent survey of the Office for National Statistics showing that 89 per cent. of the public favour restrictions on smoking at work",

and that

"three million non-smokers are frequently or continuously exposed to second hand smoke at work".

The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 already requires employers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of their employees so far as is reasonably practicable. More than a quarter of a century after that Act's passage, however, and despite the progress made in recent years, the legal obligations and expectations placed on employers remain as hazy as the air that many of their non-smoking employees have to inhale.

The Government seem to have responded to that uncertainty. Within the range of measures to drive down tobacco fatalities, the 1998 White Paper encouraged the approach taken by the Health and Safety Commission in producing a draft approved code of practice—an ACOP—on smoking in the workplace. That code would at last enable the 1974 Act to bear down on passive smoking,

but the Government have appeared slow to introduce it. The purpose of part I of my Bill is to require its introduction without further delay.

It is surely not unreasonable or impractical to require employers to do all that is reasonably practicable to comply with the 1974 Act, which so many of them seem slow or unwilling to do when it comes to passive smoking. In addition to possible prosecution under the 1974 Act, employers may be exposed to passive smoking legal proceedings through personal injury actions under common law. In addition, they can face proceedings through employment and contract law at industrial tribunals.

My Bill would provide employers with guidance on compliance. In essence, it would provide a series of defences against unpredictable legal actions brought under ambiguous and loosely defined law. We might expect widespread support for that from employees, the general public, the medical profession and lobby groups such as Action on Smoking and Health, and it is unsurprising that many employers are themselves beginning to call for measures of the type encapsulated in the Bill, not only to show that they comply with the existing law, but because there are wider benefits for them.

One such benefit is employee welfare. Firms already take care to provide appropriate working temperatures, comfortable work stations, adequate lighting and so on. The provision of clean air would be a further expression of a desire to improve working conditions. Improved productivity is another benefit. American estimates indicate a typical minimum productivity gain of 3 per cent. from a smoke-free place of work. There are further benefits from reduced cleaning costs and fewer fire risks: smoking causes one in eight accidental work fires. All in all, an approved code of practice on passive smoking at work will save money and increase profitability, so it achieves the triple target of making economic sense, as well as being environmentally imperative and socially desirable.

I turn briefly from part I to part II—moving from addressing the effects of passive smoking in the workplace to tackling its impact in public places. Most people think that more should be done to restrict smoking in public places. In restaurants, for example, the seven in 10 people who do not use cigarettes should not—if they do not wish to—have to breathe in smoke from the three who do use them. However, as the "Smoking Kills" White Paper observes, it is a question of balance; if a smoker wants to spend an evening in a bar or pub with friends who smoke or who do not mind other people's smoke, so be it.

As with an approved code of practice for workplaces—many of which are of course public places—the key to a better code for public places is what is reasonably practical. No code can force employers—such as those in the licensed hospitality trade—to do things that would cause them serious financial pain, or even drive them out of business.

The Government are to be congratulated on agreeing with the hospitality trade the broad principles of a public places charter. The charter envisages increasing provision of facilities for non-smokers, a written policy on smoking—available to customers and staff—and a range of sensible, practical improvements to ensure that consumers are better able to choose whether to eat, drink or socialise in smoky atmospheres. The charter is welcome as far as it goes, but it is really the continuation of a voluntary approach, aimed at keeping legislation at bay—compliance levels are still low.

Part II envisages much tougher targets and tighter time scales, requiring those who provide services in public places to recognise non-smoking as the general norm where children and young people are important parts of their clientele. At present, the serious effects of environmental tobacco smoke on the young include childhood induction and exacerbation of asthma, bronchitis and pneumonia, middle ear infection and chronic respiratory symptoms.

In view of that litany of the health effects of passive smoking on the young, we really must take more vigorous action on their behalf. A major public health objective must be further measures to restrict smoking in indoor environments frequented by the young. That is precisely what my Bill aims to do.

We appear to be in the run-up to a general election and manifestos—like spring—are in the air. In my home area of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, a health promotion alliance has written a "Smoke Free Manifesto" as part of its campaign for that most basic right—the right to enjoy clean air, free of tobacco smoke. Two of the key ways of meeting that goal are to introduce more no-smoking policies in offices, factories, schools and other workplaces, and to introduce more no-smoking areas in public places such as leisure facilities, restaurants, buses and shopping centres.

The Government have indicated their broad support for an ACOP in workplaces and for consumer charters in public places. My modest measure aims to add thrust and teeth to the Government's warm words. Bryan Ferry was only partly right: smoke gets not only in your eyes, but also in your hair, on your clothes, in your lungs and bloodstream and on to your death certificate. It is especially important for us to protect innocent bystanders at work and play—passive smokers—from that tragic tobacco toll. I therefore commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Taylor, Mr. Kevin Barron, Mrs. Liz Blackman, Mr. Ian Davidson, Mrs. Janet Dean, Dr. Ian Gibson, Dr. Brian Iddon, Mr. Gordon Prentice, Mr. Andrew Reed, John Robertson, Dr. Phyllis Starkey and Dr. Howard Stoate.

### Protection From Smoking (Employees and Young Persons)

David Taylor accordingly presented a Bill to require employers to reduce or eliminate the exposure of their employees to passive smoking in the workplace; to protect children and young persons from such exposure in public places; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 8 June, and to be printed [Bill 86].

# Orders of the Day

## Finance Bill

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

(Clauses 1 to 3 and 16 to 53 and Schedules 4 to 11)

*Considered in Committee [Progress, 23 April], pursuant to Order.*

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

### Clause 1

RATES OF DUTY ON HYDROCARBON OIL

3.45 pm

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): I beg to move amendment No. 27, in page 1, line 18, leave out "£0.4582" and insert "£0.4392".

**The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 28, in page 1, line 20, leave out "£0.4582" and insert "£0.4392".

**Mr. Salmond:** I take great pleasure in moving amendment No. 27 and in speaking to amendment No. 28, both of them proposals tabled by my hon. Friends and me. This matter, too, may be relevant on Friday 8 June, unless the Government choose to accept the amendments and to change course on a very important issue that affects large areas of the country, but especially Scotland—the fifth largest oil producer in the world—which suffers from the highest petrol prices in Europe.

During yesterday's debates on the Finance Bill, I was struck by the Treasury team's complacency in the face of a world economic environment that is moving into much stormier waters than the benign conditions enjoyed over the past four years. Given that the Treasury team, and the Chancellor in particular, were so quick to claim the credit for the past four years, they will, no doubt, also want to accept the responsibility for the economic difficulties that we are approaching.

Earlier today, I saw the Chancellor making a speech, and he said that he was not complacent. He sounded pretty complacent to me, and I should have thought that the Treasury team would do well to understand that, although they may still have boom conditions in the south-east of England, they now have bust conditions in Bathgate.

We also discuss the Finance Bill against the background of the Minister for the Environment yesterday making the point about the impact on the rural economy. Although these amendments would have an impact on every petrol consumer in the country, they are also designed to benefit the rural economy, which is hit first and foremost by high fuel prices. Yesterday, the Minister for the Environment told the House that the current estimate of losses caused to the rural economy by the foot and mouth outbreak amounts to some £140 million every single week, against which the Government's package of £200 million, as he claimed it to be, looks devastatingly inadequate to stem the economic impact on those important areas of the country. I make that point because the rural economy is hurt first and foremost by high and rising oil and petrol prices.

It is obvious that the Government's transport strategy—eventually unveiled only a few months ago by the Deputy Prime Minister—has still to make any serious impact on making alternative means of transport available to people in the rural economy. It is also obvious that, although oil and petrol prices are high across the country, in the rural economy, especially in the highlands of Scotland, we have the highest petrol prices of all. For a range of reasons, although the amendments would help every motorist and every petrol user, and hence every person who depends on goods purchased—fuel is a significant component of the costs—they are also designed to help the hard-pressed rural economy in particular.

Under amendments Nos. 27 and 28, the duty would be reduced on ultra-low sulphur petrol and diesel by 2p a litre—about 10p a gallon. That would be in addition to the small but welcome reductions announced by the Chancellor in the Budget.

It is time for the Treasury team to come clean about what they believed a couple of years ago petrol prices were likely to be in 2001. Two years ago, we in the Scottish Grand Committee debated a range of matters that affect petrol prices, and the late Donald Dewar made a clear statement about what the Government's expectation then was on the price of oil:

> "The oil price is likely to stay at about $10 to $12 a barrel at least in the foreseeable future. Therefore we are worlds removed from the oil prices and production levels of the mid-1980s."—[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 1 February 1999; c. 8.]

We can take it from such an authoritative source that that was the Government's expectation just two years ago.

At that time, the Chancellor of the Exchequer assumed that oil revenues would be £1.2 billion in the current financial year. In fact, the latest forecast is for oil revenues to be £5.9 billion, rising to £6.2 billion next year, and £5.4 billion and £5.7 billion in the two years after that. Even that forecast was based on the assumption that oil prices would be much lower than those prevailing at present. Two years ago, the Government expected oil prices to be roughly $10 to $12 a barrel, but the price is now $27 a barrel. The Chancellor has benefited massively in terms of the exploitation of Scottish resources and filling the Treasury's coffers, so it is entirely reasonable for these modest but important amendments to seek a further concession for consumers at the pumps.

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument, but in the name of transparency, does he not agree that it would be helpful if the proportion of the purchase price of petrol that is represented by tax and excise duty were displayed at the pump or on the bills that customers receive?

**Mr. Salmond:** I very much agree with that. As the hon. Gentleman knows, three quarters of the price of every gallon of petrol or diesel is made up of the various levies imposed. They include the specific fuel taxes and VAT. One important factor is that, as the price of fuel increases, the VAT obtained from every gallon of petrol also increases. Although I agree with the hon. Gentleman that such information should be displayed on every petrol pump—that would be excellent for the transparency of fiscal policy—I suspect that the Treasury team would be not too keen on the idea.

The Scottish National party produced a helpful pledge card and we distributed 500,000 of them last September during the fuel tax protests in Scotland. I would willingly

send such a pledge card to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). If he would like to distribute SNP publicity in England, I would be very pleased—as long as he promises not to advertise the fact too much.

The hon. Gentleman made a fair point about transparency, but I suspect that the Treasury team are desperate, despite the rising price of oil, to prevent people from realising that 75 per cent. of the price of every gallon or litre of petrol is made up of Treasury charges of one kind or another. That fact clearly places responsibility where it belongs: on the Chancellor and his Treasury team.

Two years ago, the Government expected a very different oil price environment and they have benefited massively from Scotland's resources pouring into the London Treasury. The Government expected the current price of petrol to be considerably lower, and that fact gives the lie to the suggestion that we sometimes hear—including from the previous Government—that the fuel price escalator and the approach taken to the price of petrol are entirely due to international obligations and the Kyoto summit. If the expectation that the price of a barrel of oil would be $10 had been realised, the price of petrol would obviously be much lower than it is. But it is not, and the Government have reacted incredibly slowly. It was only the pressure of the massive fuel price protests last September that led them to make any significant concessions at all and to fine-tune their fiscal position to take account of reality and the price that people paid at every petrol station in the country.

The Treasury team would do well to recognise that, when the fuel price protests were under way, the country of England was so anxious that, if we believe the opinion polls, even the Conservatives, for a very brief period, looked like a tenable option for voters. Such was the public anxiety—and people would have to be extremely anxious to turn to the Conservatives—that pressure was brought to bear on the Government when the average price at the pumps was 80.9p a litre. The average price today is 78.9p a litre, with price rises expected in the next few weeks. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the Government will have to fight the election campaign with the price of petrol approaching £4 a gallon and a public who are extremely sensitive to the issue. Although it might be against my electoral interests to argue that the Government should accept the amendments, they would be wise not to take for granted the public's tolerance of current petrol prices and the increases in the pipeline.

We know that last September the Prime Minister telephoned the oil companies to persuade them not to increase prices at the pumps, and there was a small delay. We saw again today the limitations of the Prime Minister's telephone calls when it comes to affecting major policy decisions. I dare say that the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister—the man who has suggested, against the backdrop of a major industrial closure in Scotland, that it is appropriate to slash public expenditure there—are probably on the telephone to the oil companies pleading for the increases to be delayed until after 7 June. The public will not be fooled, because they do not find it acceptable that we have the highest petrol prices in Europe. They have seen through the Government's claim that prices reflect an environmental imperative rather than a fiscal accumulation, which is what actually lies behind the petrol price strategy, just as surely as they saw through the previous Government who made the same claim when they kicked off the vast petrol price increases.



The public's tolerance is now such that they will not accept the same cavalier attitude as was displayed until last September. The Treasury will be wise to have a damascene conversion in the next few hours and to accept our amendments, so that the price of petrol is reduced as it should be, given the vast accumulation of revenues in the Exchequer and the fact that oil costs $27 a barrel. I suspect that if the amendment were put to the population at large to determine, there would be vast support for it.

We are debating the issue as we enter an election period. When it comes to the Division, all hon. Members will be wise to vote for a more reasonable attitude to the price of petrol at the pumps. That will help every motorist, every consumer who relies on purchasing goods for which the price of transport is important, and our rural areas that are especially hard pressed.

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke** (Rushcliffe): I have great respect for the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), but I cannot recall taking part before in a debate initiated by the Scottish National party. I have no objection to doing so now. I congratulate him on tabling an amendment on an important subject. However, I am not totally persuaded by its literal terms, so I am not sure that I will join him in the Division Lobby.

Nevertheless, the hon. Gentleman raises an important topic for most of our electorate, certainly those who live in rural areas. A short discussion about tax levels on petrol and diesel is justified. I decided to speak in the hope that the Minister would take the opportunity to explain the Government's policy on that. This subject, above all other aspects of their economic policy, is something on which they have no consistency. Their most recent primary motivation has plainly been panic in the face of public opinion. They have been buffeted by events and give no inkling of the direction of their policy should they be returned to power.

4 pm

The explanatory notes to the Bill give the last great pronouncement of our Chancellor on his considered policy on this subject. They say:

"In November 1999 the Chancellor announced that the appropriate level of fuel duties would be decided on a Budget by Budget basis, taking into account the Government's economic, social and environmental commitments."

That seems to me largely to depend on the dates of an election, newspaper reaction to recent decisions and the public reaction to the levels of taxation which have been imposed, and that is not very satisfactory.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said that we are having this debate against the background of an interesting change in the economic climate, which affects all our discussions on the Bill. The Chancellor has at last recognised that he has not abolished the economic cycle. A marked slowdown is taking place in the American economy; there is some slowdown in the eurozone economy and some economic slowdown will take place here.

A question should be asked of a Chancellor who has been very lucky in the past four years. I shall not talk about his inheritance, but I certainly think that he has been

*[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]*

lucky in the state of the world economy. He has managed to produce reasonable results by following fairly aberrant policies. He taxed too much when he did not need to, putting taxes on business, savings and pensions. He savagely restrained public spending for his first two years, and he now promises for the next three years massive increases unrivalled in this country since the days of the Heath Government which he thinks can be sustained by continued growth. All that may be changing, and I agree with what the hon. Gentleman just said about the Chancellor's apparent complacency about that—it fits in with my theme on fuel taxes. The time has come for a clear policy and a clear statement of where we are going, and I am not sure that that is what we will have.

The Chancellor's approach to fuel prices when he came to office was very straightforward. It was very flattering of him to adopt what he said was my policy. Indeed, for some time I had been following the fuel tax escalator, having introduced it when we had the cheapest petrol and diesel in western Europe, a situation that, in my opinion, we had arrived at slightly by accident and without anybody really noticing or asking why. I made it clear when I stuck to the escalator during my time as Chancellor that I was doing so first because I needed to raise the revenue to deal with the state of the public finances. That is a matter for which the Chancellor should be grateful because he inherited very healthy public finances as a result of the tax and spend policies to which he had succeeded. Secondly, the escalator had environmental benefits, which I did not overstate, but I certainly thought that it was worth while to return to a higher rate of tax and a higher price for petrol and diesel to make people think twice about using their car and to make them look for efficiencies in their use of fuel, and that had environmental benefits.

The Chancellor was very flattering—he took all that over and decided that the fuel tax escalator was now an essential part of his tax strategy. However, he increased the rate above inflation at which he was going to escalate fuel tax. He also increased the frequency of the increases by having two Budgets in one year, in both of which he applied the same escalator. He took over the escalator and accelerated it. He also forgot one of the rules of escalators which those who travel by public transport will recall, which is that one gets on at the bottom and one gets off at the top. This escalator was now to go on for ever, and according to this Chancellor, before last September, fuel taxes were going who knows where. At that stage, we were already the most expensive country in western Europe for the motorist and the haulier, and the Chancellor was firmly committed to carrying on with the fuel escalator for the foreseeable future, come what may.

As a tax policy, that was catastrophic. It was one of the Chancellor's more elementary errors. People have often quoted Colbert saying that the art of raising taxation is to pluck the feathers of the goose but to get as many feathers as one can with the minimum of hissing. The Chancellor chose one target, fuel taxes, and drove them on remorselessly at such a rate until he had a consumer explosion—a revolt. He carried on with that policy to such an extent, showing no reservations about it, until we had the nearest that we have had to a citizens' revolt on the streets. For a week or two, it had mass support, as people realised that they had by far the most expensive petrol and diesel in western Europe and that the Chancellor intended to carry on raising prices. Those of us on the road at the time found ourselves surrounded by a public who genuinely sympathised with hauliers going in for direct action, causing conflict and so on. Fortunately—although this is a funny way of conducting Government policy—the Government showed signs of panic, as they do in every crisis, retreated rapidly and backed down. Now we have no policy and there is a freeze on duties for an unspecified period, which will certainly go on until after the election.

**Mr. Salmond:** I do not want to discourage the right hon. and learned Gentleman from speaking in Scottish National party debates in future but, if I have followed him correctly, he said that the Chancellor made two mistakes; first, public expenditure in the first two years was too low—which, of course, was inherited from the right hon. and learned Gentleman—and, secondly, the fuel price escalator, which was also inherited from him. Could he not have left a note in the Treasury telling the Chancellor to get off the escalator, or other helpful advice?

**Mr. Clarke:** The Chancellor is fond of taking my slogans and claiming that he is taking my policies. In previous Budget and Finance Bill debates, I have tried to make it clear that he is getting them slightly wrong. I have been highly critical and have often regretted the fact that he has used my slogans and taken my name in vain to characterise the rather peculiar policies that he has followed. I will not go through everything, but I invented the slogan,

"No return to boom and bust".

I used that in my first Budget, and it was promptly stolen by the present Chancellor. When I used it, I did not mean that we going to abolish the economic cycle; the whole point of macro-economic policy was to stop the extremes that could arise from bad macro-economic policy when the economy went into a bubble, followed by a deep recession, which we experienced in the late 1980s and early 1990s and which the Americans may be experiencing now, as they seem to be going through a classic boom and bust scenario.

I left behind figures on spending and, with all my colleagues, expected an annual public spending round, which would adjust those figures between Departments in the light of circumstances affecting both them and the national economy. The Chancellor said that he was following Tory figures, but when he made that announcement he made only one decision—to cancel two years of public spending rounds. I have said previously that I am sure that none of my colleagues in the Conservative Cabinet, especially the Secretaries of State for Education and for Health, would ever have put up with that.

I find myself agreeing with Liberal Democrat Members that the Government's bizarre decision was motivated only by a desire to cut public spending commitments in the first two or three years to enable them to be more generous at the end of the parliamentary period. The Government left it a bit late; the health service was in crisis and the Prime Minister was panicking when they finally changed gear and went into pre-election mode. Now there are spending commitments, not just on health and education—if we were to take office now, I would

support colleagues who have committed us to that—but across Whitehall. The Government are now postulating increases in public spending in the next three years far beyond any likely rate of growth in our economy. Those increases are bound to take us into deficit in the middle of the next Parliament unless fiscal prudence is pursued by the Chancellor's successor.

I have already dealt with fuel tax: the Chancellor took over my escalator. If, when I was Chancellor, I was asked whether the idea of petrol and diesel escalator was that every year, whatever the circumstances, taxes on those commodities would be increased by a certain percentage beyond inflation for an indefinite and non-foreseeable period I would have said, "Of course not." I would have said that that would have caused a consumer revolt, because no sensible tax raiser puts such a large burden on a narrow piece of the tax base. When people look back on that feature of Government policy, they will think it quite bizarre; the Government just sat and waited until, eventually, the lorry drivers predictably took to the streets. Indeed, we got to the stage when major haulage firms filled large-capacity lorries with diesel before coming back to this country to make their journeys here.

In present circumstances, I do not expect the Chancellor to accept the SNP's inducements to take off another 3p a litre. However, could we have an indication of the Government's present and future policy? Is it just to go to the election saying, "We cut the duty and held it down, and after the election, we'll have to see what turns up, but so long as you keep quiet and the newspapers don't mind, and if we have some problems with the public spending commitments, we will no doubt be back to putting up the tax on petrol and diesel again"?

The Government got away with what they did before September last year because they were very lucky with the crude oil price, which fell extraordinarily for a long time, so the motorist and the haulier did not notice the impact of the taxation. Once the oil price began to go back to a more normal level, the full horror for the rural economy and much of the business economy was revealed, and the Government had to go back. Do they intend in future to take account of crude oil prices in deciding the appropriate level of petrol and diesel tax in any given year?

Will the Government in future pay more attention to the impact of the tax, on the rural economy in particular? This is an especially appropriate time to discuss that aspect, as the rural economy faces a tremendous crisis this summer, which will have a marked effect on the growth of the economy as a whole, when the knock-on effect of the foot and mouth epidemic on many associated rural and countryside industries is felt.

Will the Government have any concern for the environmental consequences of taxation? One minute they put the tax up because that is good environmental policy, then they put the tax down, which apparently, they say, has no environmental consequences at all. I know that the Government have no real commitment to using tax for environmental purposes. I personally introduced the landfill tax and gave a rebate on it—instead of the taxation being paid, when money was put by site operators into environmentally approved schemes. I cited environmental reasons for putting up road tax.

This Government cited such reasons when it suited them, but they had different arguments for lowering the tax on domestic fuel. They had different arguments for subsidising the coal industry and coal-burn in power stations. They have absolutely no consistent or genuine view on environmental issues, but will they be persuaded that there is an environmental case for keeping our fuel taxes among the highest in western industrial countries, but not vastly above the level that prevails in competitor economies across the rest of western Europe?

When the Minister says that she cannot take off 3p per litre, I invite her to take the opportunity to explain the Government's approach. They look back over folly, panic and U-turn. Can they explain what balance they intend to strike, bearing in mind the crude oil price and the particular effects on the rural economy and on other parts of the economy that are dependent on diesel fuel, such as haulage? What is their policy on the environmental consequences of a fuel tax?

**Mr. James Clappison** (Hertsmere): It is a great pleasure to follow my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). I am sure that the House listened with interest to his analysis. If anything, he was unduly modest when he dealt with the history of the matter, and particularly the inheritance that the Government took over from his stewardship of the economy.

My right hon. and learned Friend left the Government a benign economic inheritance and, as he made clear, the Government's principal activity since then has been to tax too much when they did not need to do so. The taxes that are the subject of the amendments are a good example of the Government's inclination towards tax by stealth and to tax as much and as long as possible while they can get away with it. Now, as my right hon. and learned Friend rightly said, after all the Government's boasts about boom and bust, they face a humiliating change of spin but not of policy, with the Chancellor today having to climb down over his claims about the economy and admit what is apparent to many other people—that we are facing a period of uncertainty in the world economy.

I listened with interest also to the opening speech by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). I hope that he will forgive me if I say that I feel able to resist the temptation that he presented to us to distribute Scottish nationalist literature throughout England. That is one activity that I can happily do without. However, I acknowledge reluctantly that some of the points that the hon. Gentleman made with respect to Scotland apply to motorists the length and breadth of the United Kingdom. I shall make some particular points about the effect of the Government's policies on Northern Ireland in due course.

4.15 pm

I want to make our position clear at the outset. As my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor said, we are committed to cutting duty on fuel by at least 3p a litre. We want to cut petrol tax and to offer some relief to the hard-working families who have to pay too much to the Government every time they fill their tanks. I assure Labour Members that those families will remember that in future.

**Mr. Bercow:** Of course, my hon. Friend is absolutely right to speak about the impact of petrol tax on hard-working families. However, will he also bear in mind the interests of an appreciable number of people, not

*[Mr. Bercow]*

least in rural areas, among whom I number Mrs. Elizabeth Zettl, an 83-year-old woman in Buckingham High street in my constituency? Mrs. Zettl travels around by car to undertake charitable work on behalf of deserving causes. She has been consistently punished by this Administration and she is very angry about it.

**Mr. Clappison:** My hon. Friend rightly illustrates some of the personal circumstances that lie behind the problems associated with motoring in rural areas. His example concerned somebody who undertakes very commendable activities. The problems that are faced by poorer members of rural communities, who may rely on their cars to make their way from village to village, or from village to supermarket, often seem to be overlooked by the Government, under whom motorists in town and country alike—I shall deal with the special problems of the countryside in a moment—have taken a clobbering.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe was right in his analysis of the history of those problems. Perhaps his words deserve underlining with this fact: in May 1997, the motorist paid an average of 59p a litre to fill up at the pump, but today, he pays almost 76p a litre. For the benefit of Labour Members, we should make it clear where the responsibility lies, as no less than 13p out of that 17p increase arises from additional tax piled on by the Chancellor. As my right hon. and learned Friend said, it was piled on time and time again for as long as the Chancellor thought that he could get away with it. The amount of tax on a litre of petrol in May 1997 was 45.7p; it is now 59p. Let me give one particular motoring example. We have heard something about Mondeo man in the past. A Mondeo man who fills up his tank now pays £10 more than he did before this Government came to power.

I have obtained from the Library figures that are based on the European Union weekly oil bulletin. According to those figures, even after making allowance for when the change in duty on ultra-low sulphur petrol and the temporary change in respect of ordinary unleaded petrol take effect, the United Kingdom still has the most expensive petrol in the European Union. That is the case because United Kingdom motorists pay so much tax and duty. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan adverted to the fact that tax and duty amount to 75 per cent. of the total price of unleaded petrol at the pump. As was pointed out by one of our tabloid newspapers last week, the United Kingdom has one of the cheapest rates in the European Union for pre-tax petrol, but the most expensive rate for post-tax petrol.

Not least among the implications is that which affects the part of the United Kingdom that shares a land border with another EU member. In the Republic of Ireland, petrol is about 15p to 17p a litre cheaper than in Northern Ireland. The gulf between petrol prices in Northern Ireland and the Republic has been reflected in the growing problem of cross-border fuel smuggling, to whose existence even the Government are beginning to admit, and in the disappearance of petrol retail stations in the vicinity of the border. A significant number of those stations have been lost in the past four years.

The background to our debate is the unprecedented public dissatisfaction with fuel prices that was expressed last autumn. As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe rightly said, the Chancellor was prepared to continue to increase petrol prices, apparently without any rationale or firm policy other than to raise as much revenue as possible from the motorist. He was happy to pursue that course, thus causing more and more pain to motorists, until the general public said that they could take no more.

It was clear last autumn that those who expressed their dissatisfaction and said that they could take no more included pensioners and families on low incomes. High fuel taxation bears down heavily on pensioners and other groups who cannot afford it. However, it is part of the Government's unenviable record of increasing the tax burden on the least well-off in our society. The Institute for Fiscal Studies pointed that out today.

The least well-off include people who want to own and use a motor car. In some rural areas, that is a necessity, as my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) made clear. They want to use their cars, but the Government are punishing them with high levels of tax and duty, which contribute to their record of regressive taxation that hits the least well-off the hardest.

My right hon. and learned Friend was right to paint a wider picture to encompass the world economy and the possibility of future increases in the price of petrol. Whatever happens to the price of crude oil, there should be no doubt about where responsibility rests for the relatively high price of petrol in the United Kingdom. Ministers cannot spin away the fact that the Government have significantly increased fuel duty and that 75 per cent. of that high price—the highest in Europe—arises from taxation. The Government must accept responsibility for the high price that motorists pay every time they visit the pumps. They must not be allowed to spin their way out of it.

We shall endeavour to make it clear where the responsibility lies: it lies with the Government, who have lost their grip on policy. They try to increase taxation whenever they can get away with it—when they are not being pressed and buffeted by public opinion. They created those forces by setting such high taxes. Ministers are responsible for the agony that high prices at the pumps cause so many motorists. Responsibility rests with the Government, and they should not be allowed to escape it.

**Mr. Michael Moore** (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): This has been an interesting discussion, not least for the cameo it has provided of the continuing debate about boom and bust and a possible return to the cycle over the coming months.

Sadly, the debate has lacked any reference to sustainability, or to the role of the environment in the determination of fuel policy and associated matters. I note that no Labour Back Benchers are rushing to participate; I hope that Ministers will address such matters when they respond.

We cannot ignore the difficulties that can arise in balancing the needs of the environment, economic competitiveness and social inclusion, which are the three components of sustainability. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) made some important points about the economy and the way in which he sees it developing. I associate myself with his comments and those of other hon. Members concerning the sad news about Motorola jobs in central Scotland. Our rural

communities are suffering greatly from foot and mouth, and it is therefore right to place emphasis on the way in which we tackle the economic problems that affect the whole country.

In the past two or three years—and especially in the past 12 months—the fuel price issue has been buffeted around. When things came to a head last autumn, we acknowledged that there had to be an accommodation and that we had to keep all parts of the sustainability argument in kilter. In the past, it was important to support the fuel duty escalator for environmental reasons, but changing circumstances meant that it had to alter.

We have been advocating for a long time that there should be a freeze on fuel duty in real terms for the lifetime of this Parliament, and, indeed, the next one. After the events of last year, we would like to have seen a return to the travelling public of the windfall VAT receipts that the Treasury obtained and pocketed for other purposes. It is important to switch car tax aggressively towards encouraging smaller, more environmentally friendly cars and to shift the whole emphasis of our environmental taxation towards congestion charging, recognising, as we do, the need for upfront investment in public transport that will enable us to produce appropriate public transport alternatives.

The pain that many of our communities are suffering has focused everyone's mind. We recognise the difficulties of escalating fuel prices, but we also recognise the opportunities that congestion charging and other technologies will afford us for using a more sophisticated approach to targeting environmental taxation.

New circumstances involving huge increases in world oil prices, followed by massive fluctuations, have been experienced over the past six months. All the parties have had to adjust to that new reality—and some have done so more dishonourably than others. In adapting to the new situation, we cannot let the central idea of sustainability get lost. But alas, that is exactly what is happening, with a Dutch auction under way between the different parties to see which one can promise the most meaningless tax policy changes. We did not hear much about the environment from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan—nor did we hear much from the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) about his party's policy on fuel taxation. Sadly, even his Front-Bench spokesman did not provide an answer to that particular mystery.

There is an argument for a cut in fuel duty if it can stimulate changes that lead the market to adopt more environmentally friendly fuels. We support the plans on ultra-low sulphur fuel for that reason, and, if the debate should move on, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) will have the opportunity to raise the issue of taxation changes on biodiesel.

**Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): I agree with the tenor of most of the hon. Gentleman's comments. However, a problem remains in rural areas, where a double jeopardy, or double whammy, is imposed on rural dwellers. The figures quoted for the price of petrol per litre by the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman would not be recognisable to the people in my constituency, who have to buy petrol at 2p, 3p or 4p a litre more than that. Does the hon. Gentleman have any suggestions as to how, on the social justice side of sustainability, we can ensure that people in rural areas who need some form of private transport for access to jobs and services are not penalised by the differential between urban and rural petrol costs?

**Mr. Moore:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention and I acknowledge his credentials in these matters. He raises the issue of the environment with great regularity. This is a difficult issue for all of us. Our view is that the funds that will be made available through congestion charging must allow us to create alternative public transport systems. That will apply not only in urban areas but in rural areas, where people will be able to use those facilities to get into the towns and cities where many of them have to work. I suspect that the answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is in nobody's mind just yet. However, we must ensure that, when we put forward these arguments, we do not lose sight of the environmental aspects as we rightly and properly focus attention on the problems in rural areas.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor** (Truro and St. Austell): My hon. Friend referred to urban congestion charging. Is it not the case that, in urban areas where public transport could be made available, if properly funded through urban congestion charging, there would not only be a renaissance of public transport, but higher costs for those who chose to use their cars needlessly? That would mean that those in rural areas would pay far less, because there would not be the same availability of public transport or the same need to get people out of their cars.

4.30 pm

**Mr. Moore:** I agree with my hon. Friend.

We should ask what lies behind the amendment—what the intention is. The Scottish National party's petrol price policies have a sorry history: few survive, and this one is likely to fare no better. We have been told that what is proposed is an initial cut of 10p a gallon, which is tantalising stuff. Nowadays we tend to buy our fuel in litres rather than gallons, although we measure our cars' fuel economy in miles per gallon. My point is, however, that there may be just a hint of politics in this, rather than any real concern about the issues that are at the heart of the debate.

What is behind the policy? Is it the environment? Clearly not: we have heard virtually no mention of that, except in the form of attacks on others' views. Is it a desire to help small petrol stations, in the teeth of competition from the major oil companies and the supermarkets? That is unlikely; there was certainly no evidence of it in the speech of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan. Is it the fluctuating oil price? Well, we have heard a little more about that.

Andrew Wilson, the SNP's finance spokesman, relaunched his policy a few days ago, trumpeting it as a response to a price increase announced by Shell. The problem is that the policy had been announced earlier, before the price increase. The "auction" approach that many other parties now seem to espouse does not take account of the fact that the oil price is fluctuating wildly. What we have not been given today is any sense that the objective is to tie us to a particular petrol price at a particular time. We have seen massive shifts in the oil price over the past year; to keep up with that would

*[Mr. Moore]*

require a weekly policy change, which, even by the SNP's standards, would be fairly breathtaking. The party's position has no credible basis.

**Mr. Salmond:** What is breathtaking is the position taken by the Liberal Democrats over a number of years. It is based on the politics of the Kincardine and Deeside by-election: the Liberal candidate was busy attacking the price of petrol under the Conservative party, only for it to be revealed that Liberal policy would make it even higher. Indeed, Liberal policy over most of the last few years would make it even higher than it is under the present Government.

If the hon. Gentleman consults the record, he will note that every fuel tax debate that has taken place while I have been a Member of Parliament has featured an extremely consistent position, to which some Members of his own party have been extremely sympathetic. What a pity that a Liberal Democrat Front-Bench spokesman will have to reveal to the people of Scotland that he is not prepared to vote for lower petrol prices in existing circumstances.

**Mr. Moore:** As usual, what the hon. Gentleman says half-answers the point that we have been debating.

Over the past two or three years, my Liberal Democrat colleagues and I have consistently opposed increases in fuel taxation that have not been accompanied by the requisite investment in public transport. Such investment has been completely lacking under the current Government, and it is still lacking. We hear lots about the £180 billion in the 10-year transport plan—I shall be very surprised if we escape another reference to that this afternoon—but that vague and notional amount is not, in fact, committed. The private sector amounts are not known; and, as we noted earlier during questions to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, we are still stuck in multimodal studies halfway around the country, which means that no serious investment is going on.

The hon. Gentleman need not lecture the Liberal Democrats on fuel policy. We believe that there is a link between any fuel tax, the revenues that are raised, and the public transport that is created as a result. The hon. Gentleman has not demonstrated this afternoon that he cares much about that.

As I have said, there is no credible basis for the SNP's position. This is a pre-election stunt, and we will have nothing to do with it.

**Mr. Alasdair Morgan** (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): I want to talk briefly about the effect that the amendment would have on rural areas such as the one that I represent. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) said, in rural areas, we are talking about a cut in the retail price, which is already much higher than in many urban areas.

Galloway and Upper Nithsdale is one of the six constituencies with the lowest average income in Scotland. Household incomes in Dumfries and Galloway, in which the constituency is situated, are the second lowest of all the local authorities in the UK, yet Galloway and Upper Nithsdale is in the top six constituencies in Scotland for car ownership.

That is not because my constituents are particularly perverse. It is not because, although they have much lower incomes than the average, they want many more cars than the average. It is because it is essential for them to have those cars to get to work. Another consequence of the lower incomes is that people's cars are often much older; more difficult and more expensive to maintain; and less fuel efficient.

People in areas such as mine—as in many other areas in Scotland and the UK—have to travel considerable distances to work. That is largely due to the decline in agriculture, which is on-going even as we speak. In many cases, two members of the family have to travel to work separately: because wages are so low, both parents have to work but they cannot work at the same time because of child care and other commitments, so they need two cars—a fact which to some extent accounts for the increase in car ownership.

In many such areas, public transport is not an option. Dumfries and Galloway offers a very generous subsidy to public transport in the area, yet services will never be frequent enough or at the right times to allow the majority of my constituents to get to work when they want to. I was recently at a meeting in Dalbeattie, where a factory was shutting down, with about 50 redundancies. One young chap said that he had been able to get a job in Dumfries, the nearest major town some 10 miles away, but that the job started at 7.30 am and the first bus in the morning could not get him to work in time. The only alternative for him was to buy a car. It is all very well to talk about alternative transport systems and investment in alternative transport systems, but the harsh fact is that, in many rural areas, no matter how much we invest in those systems, they will never be good enough to enable the vast number of people to get to the jobs that are on offer.

There exists an alternative for those people: to get on their proverbial bike and move out of rural areas. Interestingly, the latest population statistics for Scotland, which were published this week, show that in all areas except Edinburgh, and particularly in rural areas, the population has declined over the past 10 years. At the same time, the number of older people in those areas has increased. The younger people—those who need work—are moving out of the countryside because they cannot afford to travel to work and cannot get jobs in rural areas. As that happens, a vicious circle develops. Local incomes drop even further because fewer people are in employment in rural areas, and the cost of services increases in those areas because more elderly people are putting a burden on social services. There is a cycle of decline in our rural economy.

Many of the imperatives to use private transport are created by changes in our public services. For example, the centralisation of hospital services is going on throughout the country. From Stranraer, the biggest town in my constituency, it is a journey of 150 miles to the nearest general hospital. From the Mull of Galloway, it is a return trip of 210 miles to the nearest general hospital.

People cannot do that sensibly in a day by public transport. They have to have a car to visit a relative in hospital or to go to an out-patient appointment. And that is only for those specialties that can still be dealt with in Dumfries infirmary. For many others, people have to go either to Edinburgh or to Glasgow. So the nature of public services in rural areas is driving people to use their cars.

Although modern technology can enable the economy in rural areas to expand, the Government's policy is to leave telecommunications development, particularly in relation to broadband, to the market. We know what the market is doing in rural areas—it is not investing in them, so in those areas of the modern economy that include some opportunity for rural areas to prosper, nothing is happening.

I remember Government Back Benchers in previous Budget debates saying that the tax was being imposed for the sake of the environment, but we have not heard that story so much lately. That argument cut little ice with my constituents, who are relatively few in number and who did not see that they were individually causing much of a problem to the environment in Dumfries and Galloway, although they could see that the far more highly paid drivers who clog the M25 every day were contributing to the detriment of the environment. The tax did not stop those drivers, who simply absorbed the cost in the higher wages paid in their areas.

It is a pattern that so-called environmental taxes hit rural areas harder. Yesterday, we debated the aggregates tax, which affects quarries, some 99.9 per cent. of which are situated in rural environments. That tax will be redistributed, allegedly, through cuts in employers' national insurance contributions, but—surprise, surprise—most of those with jobs work in urban areas, so the subsidy flows to those areas from a tax raised in rural areas.

Another effect of the fuel duty is the significant impact on commercial hauliers, including those in my constituency. The hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) mentioned competition from Northern Ireland, and that is significant for my constituency because it is the closest mainland constituency to that area. Many hauliers come across to Galloway from Northern Ireland, having filled up with cheap DERV in the south of Ireland, and can undercut local hauliers in my constituency—many of whom have gone out of business as a result.

I suspect that the Government will not accept the amendment, even though they could earn some brownie points for the coming election if they did so. However, the Government must seriously consider mechanisms designed to help rural areas, and I have a suggestion for them. We know that the tourism industry is in deep crisis and we also know that rural bus services receive an essential rebate on DERV duty. Why not extend that duty rebate to operators of touring coaches? That would encourage them to come into country areas. Many hotels in my constituency, and other constituencies throughout rural Britain, have been affected by cancellations from tour operators because they have not had the bookings. Fuel duty is a significant cost for tour operators, and a reduction in it would enable them to reduce their prices and bring more tourists into the countryside. As we heard from the Minister for the Environment in his statement yesterday, we need to encourage more people to come to the countryside, and the Government could play their part today.

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Miss Melanie Johnson):** The amendment is an irresponsible attempt to reduce fuel duty below the levels proposed by the Government. Clause 1 already cuts the duty rates on the main road fuels used in the UK. The duty on ultra-low sulphur petrol will be cut by 2p a litre and that on ultra-low sulphur diesel by 3p, to equalise the duty on the two products. Those reductions form part of a package of measures that will protect and enhance the environment, and are also equivalent to an overall cut of 4p a litre for motorists and 7p a litre for hauliers.

The Government have a prudent and responsible strategy that balances the interests of motorists with legitimate concerns about the environment—about which we have heard remarkably little in this afternoon's debate—while ensuring that we continue to raise valuable revenue from fuel duties for spending on vital public services including health, education and transport, which is another issue that the Opposition seem keen to disregard.

4.45 pm

**Mr. Salmond:** I spoke at some length about the increase of £5 billion in Government revenues that has resulted from the fact that the price of oil is much higher than the Government expected two years ago. Will the Minister say what, in 1999, the Treasury expected the price of petrol to be now? If we are to believe the Treasury forecast, the expectation must have been that the price would be below current levels. If that level was considered sustainable for the environment in 1999, why is it not so in 2001?

**Miss Johnson:** The hon. Gentleman made that point earlier, and I shall respond to it in detail later. However, there has been no reference in the debate so far to the Red Book. It was noted earlier that there have been considerable fluctuations in the spot price of Brent crude oil. The graph at box 6.3 in chapter 6 shows that that price rose from a low of $10 a barrel in January 1999 to a high of between $33 and $34. I am sure that I do not have to remind the hon. Gentleman that that threefold increase makes a considerable difference to the price of petrol at the pump.

**Mr. Salmond:** The Minister makes my point for me. I have demonstrated already that in 1999 the Government expected oil to cost between $10 and $12 a barrel for the foreseeable future. What was the Government's expectation in 1999 of what the price of petrol at the pumps would be in 2001? It must have been lower than the current price, so why is that forecast level not sustainable in environmental terms now? It is a reasonably simple question, and I hope that the Minister will address it now.

**Miss Johnson:** As I said, I shall come to that point in the course of my response. I want to be as logical as possible, to prevent the debate from jumping around from point to point.

The hon. Gentleman did not mention the fact that the amendment would cost the Exchequer more than £800 million a year. That is a substantial amount of revenue, and he must explain how he would recoup the money and so be able to match the Government's spending plans. He must also explain how he would meet the environmental targets. The Scottish National party is keen to be seen as a tax-and-spend party. It needs to offer more of an explanation of how its economic policies hang together, and of how it would be able to deliver—fiscally and in terms of public finances—policies based on the tax-and-spend premise.

**Mr. Salmond:** I give the Minister the credit of assuming that she has read my party's taxation document,

*[Mr. Salmond]*

which explains that we propose to increase the rate of taxation for people earning more than £100,000 a year by 5p. Whether the Government think that that is right or wrong, the Minister's statement that we have not explained how we would raise the revenue to finance the proposal in the amendment is totally invalid. In passing, may I point out that our proposal would still leave the highest marginal rate of tax considerably below what the Chancellor considered to be the appropriate rate just a few years ago?

**Miss Johnson:** I am well aware of what the Scottish National party's manifesto contains, but when he moved the amendment, the hon. Gentleman did not explain to the House how his party's proposals on spending and taxation would be squared. It is good to hear him confirm the party's commitment.

However, the hon. Gentleman's policy contains an inconsistency. His party's taxation document talks about fulfilling Britain's international commitments, especially in reducing levels of carbon dioxide and sulphur dioxide, and related environmental obligations. It is unclear how the amendment would contribute to achieving such objectives.

The package of measures in the Bill represents a balance between economic, environmental and social concerns. As I have argued, a single cut in fuel duty—which is one of the amendment's proposals—could have adverse effects on the environment. Instead, the Government have announced a package of measures that will protect and enhance the environment. The package is equivalent to a cut of 4p per litre for motorists, and 7p per litre for hauliers. Those who wish to cut fuel duty must explain how they would do that. The Government's first priority is a stable economy.

Let me turn to the points made about the global economic climate by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and to the remarks made by other right hon. and hon. Members. The Chancellor said today that all countries should take the necessary action to sustain growth. He made the point powerfully, supported by all that we have done, that our policy is much better placed than before in the face of global instability. As he said, we are on course to deliver stability and sustain growth. One reason for that is our tough and decisive action in introducing tough fiscal rules, reducing the national debt and making the Bank of England independent, which has succeeded in delivering the lowest rate of inflation for 30 years.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe spoke proudly of the previous Government's legacy. We come back from time to time to the idea of the Tories' golden inheritance. I can never manage to square that with the fact that under the previous Government there was £28 billion net borrowing, and that between 1979 and 1997 more was spent on debt and unemployment than on the national health service. What sort of golden legacy was that? In contrast, in 2001-2 alone we will be spending £30 billion more on the national health service than on unemployment and debt. We also inherited an unemployment figure that had reached 3 million, and a 15 per cent. interest rate.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman says how lucky we have been—supposedly—but neglects to mention the Asian crisis and what we have done in international environments to stabilise the global economy and to work for continuing stability through the institution of such organisations as the financial stability forum.

**Mr. Kenneth Clarke:** The hon. Lady has become slightly confused in giving the usual Labour account of the Government's awful inheritance. She will recall that the Government came into power after three years of growth, low inflation and consistently falling unemployment. The public finances were on course for balance. At the last election we debated the black hole in Labour's finances, but when the Government came to power it did not appear. Does the hon. Lady agree that that is because they failed to mention that they would increase the tax burden so heavily, as they did over the next three years, and freeze public spending so severely for their first two or three years in office? They are only just beginning to emerge from the consequences of that, so under this Government the increased spending on health and education, for example, is still below the levels achieved under the Major Government.

**Miss Johnson:** The right hon. and learned Gentleman is again rewriting history. We inherited a 44 per cent. debt-to-GDP ratio, and have reduced it to 31 or 32 per cent.

**Mr. Howard Flight** (Arundel and South Downs): That is too low.

**Miss Johnson:** The hon. Gentleman says that that is too low. He wants to borrow more and enter the cycle of boom and bust that characterised all previous Conservative Governments.

**Mr. Flight** *rose—*

**Miss Johnson:** I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**The Chairman:** Order. This macro-economic debate is going wide of the amendment, and I do not want it to spread.

**Mr. Flight:** Does the Minister believe that the long-term gilt yields underlying annuity costs, and the poor deal that pensioners buying annuities get, is a desirable part of Government policy, or would she like pensioners buying annuities to get better value?

**Miss Johnson:** Our position on annuities has been made clear many times to the hon. Gentleman, and was set out in the Red Book and the Budget statement. I shall not be drawn further on that, Sir Alan, as I realise that I am testing your patience.

**The Chairman:** In the time-honoured phrase, may I refer all hon. Members to the comments that I made a few moments ago?

**Miss Johnson:** We shall abide by them most faithfully, Sir Alan.

**Mr. Clappison:** Will the Minister give way?

**Miss Johnson:** No, I should like to move on.

Complaints have been made about UK tax levels. The overall context, however, is that our tax burden is much lower than the European Union average. Indeed, 10 EU countries have higher tax burdens. Business tax rates are low, and our corporation tax rate is among the lowest in the EU and well below average. In addition, for small companies the rate is only 10 per cent. We can be proud of our record on reducing taxation on business. Our taxation rates are competitive when compared with those of comparable EU and other countries.

Let me talk about the Government's strategy on fuel duty. The appropriate duty rate will in future be decided Budget by Budget. Opposition Members have criticised that, and the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe seemed to complain both that we had ended the escalator that he created, and that we had been on it at all. I am not clear what his argument amounted to. He may have been suggesting that we should have come off the escalator sooner—I see him nodding—but that policy would merely have added to the £16 billion cuts guarantee that his party must already explain to the people of the United Kingdom.

**Mr. Clarke:** The Minister cannot continue the debate using the totally bogus £16 billion figure that the Government keep contributing to an election campaign that is totally brain-free on many subjects, particularly economic policy. Would it not have been logical, having started the escalator when we had the cheapest fuel in western Europe, at least to stop its automatic increase once our fuel had become the most expensive in Europe? Did the Government pursue any logical policy, rather than staying on an escalator towards the stratosphere until civil disobedience on our streets sent them into a U-turn?

**Miss Johnson:** We had already announced the end of the escalator before then. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is obviously uncomfortable about the fact that he introduced the escalator and we ended it, but that is the fact of the matter.

We have used duty differentials to encourage the manufacture and use of cleaner fuels. We have encouraged the use of ultra-low sulphur diesel, which now accounts for 100 per cent. of the road diesel market. The incentives that we recently announced for ultra-low sulphur petrol mean that we expect that to account for 100 per cent. of the petrol market by the middle of June. The Budget introduced a comprehensive strategy to encourage cleaner alternative fuels. Our clear policy on fuel duty has several different dimensions, and it is important that we should maintain that.

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** Will the Minister address the recent report on fuel duty by the Select Committee on Environmental Audit? That report made it clear that the Government's thinking has been muddled and that not enough environmental modelling has been done on the effect of fuel duty and its relationships with traffic congestion and reductions in greenhouse gases. Does she accept that the Government need to make a far clearer environmental case if they intend to pursue the current rates of fuel tax in future? If they do not, the problems that arose in September will come back.

5 pm

**Miss Johnson:** I do not accept that our position is in any way muddled. However, the Committee is fully entitled to its view. We have looked at the triangle of difficult issues and achieved the right balance between them—between the environment and environmental needs, the costs of motoring, and the revenues from fuel duty. We need to balance those issues and we have made those difficult decisions, leading to the 4p equivalent cut for motorists and the 7p equivalent cut for hauliers.

I point out to those Members whose memories seem remarkably short that the percentage of tax on a litre of petrol has not really changed. Indeed, in May 1997, tax was 77.5 per cent. of the cost of a litre of petrol, whereas it is now 74.7 per cent. on lead replacement petrol and 75.3 per cent. on ultra-low sulphur petrol. Several statistics were falsely bandied about by Members during the debate, and I need to put the record right.

**Mr. Clappison:** When one is talking about a proportion, the figure of which it is a proportion is important. Will the hon. Lady remind us of the price of petrol in May 1997?

**Miss Johnson:** I do not have that figure to hand. The point being made by the hon. Gentleman and by other Opposition Members is that the proportion is dramatically different. It is not dramatically different; it is almost the same—if anything, it is slightly lower—so the point is not relevant.

I remind hon. Members that the wider choice of cheaper motoring that we want to see has also been initiated through policies on car use. There is a reduced rate of vehicle excise duty on cars with smaller engines registered before 1 March 2001. It is being extended on 1 July 2001 to all cars with an engine threshold of up to 1.5 litres, and will eventually be backdated to November 2000. As hon. Members know, that will reduce the cost of VED by £55 a year for an extra 5 million car owners. In addition, all car and motor bike VED rates were frozen this year. Those are relevant considerations when considering the cost of motoring.

I accept, however, the comments made by several Members that for people living in, and travelling to work from, rural areas, motoring costs are more significant than they are for people in urban environments. However, we have introduced a 7p equivalent cut in the rate, and that is an especially big help to motorists in rural areas.

Arguments were made about smuggling in Northern Ireland, and the differentials in duty rates between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Those arguments always strike me as curious. UK rates are set for good reasons. The Government are well aware of the smuggling problem in Northern Ireland, but we shall not allow our policies—or the livelihoods of legitimate traders—to be undermined by the activities of criminals.

I am puzzled by those arguments, because they sometimes seem like arguments for tax harmonisation, which the Government completely reject. Instead, Customs and Excise has developed a strategy to tackle oil fraud. In Northern Ireland, that strategy includes significantly increased resources, which have been in operation since 25 September last year and have resulted in greatly enhanced enforcement activity. The aim of Customs and Excise is not only to seize more smuggled petrol and diesel but to ensure that its activity has an impact on the illicit market.

*[Miss Johnson]*

A question was put about the hypothecation of fuel tax for investment in public transport. For the pleasure of the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), I reiterate that we do indeed have a £180 billion, 10-year public investment strategy plan—we are extremely proud of it. The plan represents an increase of current expenditure by about three quarters. In the pre-Budget report in 1999, we agreed that any money derived from any future real-terms increase in fuel duty should be hypothecated for transport spending. That point has already been taken on board by the Government.

I conclude by reminding hon. Members that, as I have said before, if they support the amendment, which is irresponsible, they should say where the money would come from and what would be cut. We have ensured that our monetary and fiscal policy adds up, that we are making the key investments in public services, and that we are tackling the disadvantage that some hon. Members have highlighted.

In talking about some of that disadvantage, especially that in rural areas, Opposition Members forget the importance of the work being done for those on low and average incomes through the introduction of the working families tax credit, the national minimum wage, the children's tax credit and the cuts that we have made in direct taxation. In all those ways, Opposition Members have neglected to view the Government's policy in its wider context, so I recommend that the House oppose the amendment.

**Mr. Salmond:** I assure the Economic Secretary that 75 per cent. of almost £4 a gallon amounts to more in monetary terms than 77 per cent. of less than £3 a gallon. She must take my word for that, but it is absolutely true. She may want to ask the mighty expertise at her disposal in the Treasury to work out that sum, but I can give her an absolute assurance that the sum that the Government are taking in petrol duty has vastly increased during the new Labour party's term in office.

What does the Economic Secretary's speech amount to? She suggests that the Government's proposed 2p cut in the price of ultra-low sulphur is a wise act of policy, but that the 4p cut proposed by the Scottish National party is wildly irresponsible. However, the reality is that the cut proposed by the Government—and, indeed, the decision to step off the fuel price escalator—were brought about by force majeure, because of the impact of a massive fuel tax protest. That was not an act of policy; it was an act of panic, and everyone knows it.

If the Economic Secretary cares to check the record, she will see that the SNP has consistently opposed that approach to petrol taxation, which was, I agree, started by the Conservative party—but it was continued by the new Labour party. The reason why we oppose the policy is simple: it is a blunt instrument. In pursuing the policy that the Government inherited from the previous Government, they tax most the people who do least environmental damage to the overall economy.

Not only is the price of petrol higher in rural areas, but the taxation on every gallon of petrol is higher, because the element of taxation depends on the overall price. The policy is perverse. There are much better and more sophisticated ways to approach environmental taxation. The Economic Secretary talks about the great infrastructure plan, but after four years in government, it is still definitely just a plan.

Matthew Parris wrote an interesting article today, in which he speculated that if the new Labour party won the election, every Minister and Labour Back Bencher would have to get used to the fact that they would no longer have the luxury of blaming the previous Government for their mistakes, because, of course, they themselves would be the previous Government. I hope that when the Economic Secretary has had time to think about some of the arguments that she has used today, she will realise their fragility. Despite being totally unable to tell us what the Government's expectation was in 1999 of what the price of a gallon of petrol would be now, she argued that the policy was based on environmental grounds.

That idea was always a phantom. The policy was always about cash for the Treasury, not about concern for the world environment. It was never green; it was always Brown. That is the reality of the policy, and it does huge damage to the rural economy, in particular, and to every consumer and everyone who depends on the price of transport when purchasing goods in the shops. The Government have not gone far enough to draw the sting from this as an election issue.

If proof positive of that final statement were necessary, the fact that five Labour Members from Scotland have attended the debate without one of them indicating a wish to speak shows that they understand that when people—

**Mr. Malcolm Savidge** (Aberdeen, North) *rose—*

**Mr. Salmond:** The hon. Gentleman wandered into the Committee a few minutes ago, and I will not give him the opportunity to do what he should have done earlier—make his own speech. Neither he nor his colleagues wanted to speak in the debate because when people go to the polls, they will know that the new Labour party means high petrol prices in Scotland.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 129, Noes 287.

**Division No. 190]** **[5.10 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic

Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Saimond, Alex
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Dafydd Wigley and**
**Mr. Simon Thomas.**

**NOES**

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
*(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda
*(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
*(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John
*(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pearson, Ian

Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Greg Pope and**
**Mr. David Jamieson.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**Mr. Clappison:** I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 1, line 21, leave out "14th June 2001" and insert "5th April 2002".

We have been debating the changes in duty on ultra-low sulphur petrol and the temporary reduction in duty on unleaded petrol. We now come to amendment No. 6, which deals with the period for which the reduction in duty on ordinary unleaded petrol is to apply. In his Budget statement, the Chancellor announced that the Government intended to match the reduction in duty on ultra-low sulphur petrol with a reduction in duty on unleaded petrol for a temporary period. The amendment would extend the period during which that reduction applies from 14 June this year—the date fixed by the Chancellor—to the end of the current financial year, 5 April 2002.

Given the Government's plans, hon. Members may find 14 June an interesting choice of date. We are tempted to ask about the magic of 14 June. Where does that date come from and what is the rationale behind it? Why has 14 June been plucked from all other dates as the day on which the concession on ordinary unleaded petrol will end? Why is it necessary to end it then? It is clear that, on 14 June, any ordinary unleaded petrol on sale to the public will bear an increase of 2p a litre in duty. In other words, on 14 June, the 2p that the Chancellor took off on 7 March will be put back on.

I shall resist the temptation to talk about stealth, but we need more of an explanation of where 14 June comes from. Given that the price of petrol in this country is relatively high because of high fuel tax, which we have just debated, and given the ominous pressures in the world oil market, which were adverted to by Members on both sides of the Committee in the previous debate, the last thing any motorist using that type of petrol wants is a further increase in its price on 14 June. I suspect that any motorist who pays that extra duty on 14 June will get an unpleasant shock; on top of the already high price that he is paying, he will find himself paying an extra 2p a litre in duty.

I do not want to anticipate the Minister's reply, but in answering the debate, she may well echo what we are told in the explanatory notes to the Bill:

"To ensure no market distortion in the final transition to 100 per cent. ULSP"—

that is, ultra-low sulphur petrol—

"a temporary cut in duty for ordinary unleaded has also been introduced. This will ensure all distributors and retailers will be able to pass on a 2 pence per litre duty cut to their customers. When this temporary concession ends on June 14 it is expected that ULSP will form virtually 100 per cent. of the petrol supplied to the UK".

5.30 pm

We are told in the concluding words of that statement that Ministers expect that ultra-low sulphur petrol will form virtually 100 per cent. of the petrol supplied to the United Kingdom, but we know all too well that, in this field as in so many others, what Ministers expect to happen does not always come to pass. Indeed, in the previous debate we had some interesting questions about what Ministers expected in the past which did not receive an answer.

In any case, whether or not ultra-low sulphur petrol is supplied to the motorist is not in the hands of Ministers, as Ministers admit. A Minister in the Department of Trade and Industry told my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) in a written answer on 16 November last year:

"Future levels of supply for ULSP will be a matter for individual companies to determine."—[*Official Report*, 16 November 2000; Vol. 356, c. 718W.]

In a further written reply on 26 February, the Financial Secretary stated that he believed that

"the oil companies are on track to meet their target to supply ULSP nationwide at their retail sites by the end of March"—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2001; Vol. 363, c. 511W.].

However, there is no guarantee of that. Can the Economic Secretary say whether ultra-low sulphur petrol is available at all the retail sites of the major oil companies? In addition, we should like to know how many of the retail sites of the independent petrol retailers are supplying ULSP. Can the Minister tell us what proportion of the petrol supplied in the UK is ULSP?

If it is the Government's case that the concession on unleaded petrol should end when ultra-low sulphur petrol constitutes 100 per cent. of the petrol supplied in the UK, why should not the date for the ending of the concession be moved from 14 June to 5 April next year? Why should there be any question of whether or not the deadline of

14 June is approaching, if it is the Government's intention and expectation that ultra-low sulphur petrol should be universally available before the concession ends?

If that is the Government's position, why do they not extend the deadline to April next year? If the deadline is not extended, is there not the risk that some motorists who fill their tanks on 14 June will get the unpleasant shock of an extra 2p per litre on top of the already high price that they are paying, and on top of whatever else they may face at that time by way of petrol price increases? We need an explanation from the Minister.

As matters stand, there is the risk of an extremely unpleasant shock for many motorists on 14 June. Just when they have been told by the Chancellor that there was a reduction of 2p in the price of unleaded petrol on 7 March, hey presto—the 2p goes back again on 14 June. What is going on?

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** When the proposal to which the amendment relates was made, Conservative Front Benchers argued that it was likely that the petrol companies would not succeed in getting ultra-low sulphur fuels on to the forecourt in all parts of the country in time to meet the deadline. It was argued that the deadline was therefore arbitrary and unfair to those who might not otherwise be supplied with the correct form of fuel.

I listened intently to the comments of the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison), as I assumed that he would give the House some evidence to show that that problem was now materialising, but I noticed that he was unable to cite one example or to quote any association or organisation in support of his argument. A little earlier, my colleagues spoke to the RAC Foundation to ask whether it believed there was a problem. It said that it believed that there would be no problem in obtaining ultra-low sulphur fuels. The problem on the basis of which the amendment was tabled therefore appears to be non-existent. Opposition Front Benchers cannot give any examples, and people who are in the know argue the contrary of what they are saying.

The principle of the provision seems to make sense. It is about getting the big petrol companies to supply a fuel that not only causes less pollution in its own right, but will allow the supply of higher-efficiency engines that use less fuel. Such engines are already being used in Japan. As they use less fuel, they will emit less carbon dioxide, so the fuel will also help in meeting the Kyoto targets.

**Mr. Clappison:** The hon. Gentleman is endeavouring to defend the Government—we are used to seeing Liberal Democrats do that—but in doing so, he has not answered the very point that I put to them. Why is 14 June specified, rather than 5 April next year, if it is intended that the ultra-low sulphur petrol reduction should be matched by a temporary reduction in respect of unleaded petrol until there is 100 per cent. coverage?

**Mr. Taylor:** There is a simple answer to that question, but I must respond first to the hon. Gentleman's initial argument: I am defending not the Government but the environment. If there is a way in which we can help to protect the environment and to move towards the Kyoto targets, I believe that we should use it. On the particular element of policy in question, that is what the Government are doing. I say again to the hon. Gentleman that if he can give examples that show that there is a problem, he should by all means make his case. The Liberal Democrats want to ensure that nobody is disadvantaged by the proposal. The hon. Gentleman has failed to make his case, however, and when we asked the RAC Foundation whether there was a problem, it said no. We can therefore see no basis for the amendment.

Why should there be an early deadline, whether it happens to be in June or July? I am sure that it fitted in with the Government's election programme. They were rather lucky, in terms of foot and mouth, that it remained within that programme, but the principle of a tight deadline is correct anyway. We know from experience that the oil companies refused to introduce ultra-low sulphur fuel, on the grounds that it was too costly to do so. As a result of the price differential, we now see that they could have done so very quickly all along. Indeed, that is exactly what we are seeing now.

A big question mark must be placed over the oil companies' willingness to make the investment that they needed to make without the price differential. Provided that the time scale is achievable, the earlier the deadline, the earlier the companies will supply all petrol stations with ultra-low sulphur fuel. As soon as that happens, manufacturers can introduce the engines that rely on such fuel. The environmental benefits that they bring can then be achieved, so a tight deadline makes sense. If the hon. Member for Hertsmere could provide evidence to show that an extra month or two months, or, indeed, the period until April next year, would make all the difference and allow something to happen that would not otherwise be possible, he would be advancing a perfectly coherent argument. The truth is, however, that he can sustain no basis whatever for arguing for postponement until next April.

The only difference on the matter between the Conservative and Labour parties—dare I say it?—seems to be the date when they would like the election to occur. The Conservative party would like it to take place as late as possible, and no doubt the Government would like it to happen as early as possible. It seems peculiar, in terms of the general election, that the Government picked the specified date; and if we can assume Conservative Front Benchers are still in favour of an indefinite delay in the general election because of foot and mouth, their amendment precisely matches their election timetable.

**Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): I support the amendment. If there is an agreement to move to the new fuel and there is to be a transition period, it makes sense for it to be longer rather than shorter. Nothing that the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) said contradicts that. An incentive exists for oil companies to invest in the new fuel if they know that at some point in the near future—next April is near enough—the regime will change. The way the Government are proceeding will lead people to feel that they have been conned. They will believe that they were given a fuel tax reduction that suddenly disappeared.

Logistics dictate that there are bound to be places where the new fuel will not be introduced by the beginning of June. Consequently, people will feel put out. However, if the Government are confident that the new fuel will be introduced across the board by the beginning of June,

*[Mr. Nick St. Aubyn]*

there is no harm in extending the deadline for the offer on the old fuel. A longer deadline is therefore a sensible and prudent step.

**Mr. Christopher Leslie** (Shipley): Clearly, the amendment would have an effect in terms of lost revenue. What would the proposal cost the Exchequer? Where would the money come from?

**Mr. St. Aubyn:** If I follow the logic of the views expressed by the hon. Gentleman's colleagues on the Liberal Democrat Benches, there are two arguments: either all the petrol stations will have the new fuel by June, thus entailing no cost to the Exchequer, or some stations will not have the new fuel, which underlines the purpose of the amendment. We await the Minister's response, but we may surmise that the oil companies have taken to the new measure with a will and that the cost to the Exchequer will be small. However, it will be significant for those who have to bear it.

My constituents already enjoy the benefits of the more environmentally friendly fuel. I am speaking not on their behalf but on behalf of the sort of community that the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell represents. The additional cost of the fuel after June will bear far more heavily on the pockets of those in rural, more outlying parts of Britain, which are suffering so many burdens, than on the Chancellor's. We expect a Conservative Chancellor to be in office in June, and we will easily afford the item that we are considering out of the savings that we intend to make in running the Government.

I want to comment on the presumption behind the Liberal Democrat argument, and others that Labour Members have expressed, that there would be no demand by consumers for, or movement by oil companies towards, the new fuel without the tuppence reduction. First, the British people's political sensibilities have been insulted this evening. They understand exactly what lies behind the short-term dip in the enormous price of fuel. Secondly, their environmental sensibilities have been insulted. Consumers are environmentally conscious, and companies are responding to that. The idea that the tuppence reduction triggered the introduction of the new fuel is naive on the part of Liberal Democrat Members and calculating on the part of the Government, who try to claim credit for something that would have occurred anyway through consumer demand and the companies' development of new technology.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** The hon. Gentleman may know that I used to be the Liberal Democrat environment spokesman. In that role, I was approached by Japanese manufacturers who make high-efficiency engines. They argued for low-sulphur fuel in this country so that those engines could be used. I was also approached by petrol companies which argued against it because it would cost them too much to introduce. The reduction seems to have had the desired effect, and our argument cannot be characterised as naive, since the petrol companies made a case that was shown to be wrong.

**Mr. St. Aubyn:** In his long and varied career, the hon. Gentleman was even spokesman for England. I am therefore not surprised to hear that he was once the Liberal Democrat environment spokesman. I am not sure when he held that responsibility, but my point is that technology is moving forward.

We all have an interest in improving the environmental impact of the fuels and engines that we use. As new technology takes hold, the relevant companies will invest in supplying the new fuel. Their customers want them to do that. Customer and consumer demand drives the changes in our society, not the Government's pettifogging tax changes.

We welcome any reduction in fuel duty, and we will argue for its extension when we can, because fuel taxes in this country are far too high.

5.45 pm

**Mr. Peter Atkinson** (Hexham): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn), who said that although the benefits of ultra-low sulphur petrol would be available to his constituents, he was worried about those in rural areas who would be unable to get it. Many of my constituents cannot get ultra-low sulphur petrol. I entirely agree with my hon. Friend's logic. However, I disagree with that of the hon. Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie), because, if he is right, the extra cost will be borne by constituents such as mine who will probably not have access to that petrol by the due date in June.

I have checked today, and the Petrol Retailers Association tells me that two thirds of the country's garages are now able to supply ultra-low sulphur petrol. It is quite unlikely that the remaining third, including some of the smaller and more remote independent retailers, will be able to supply it by the due date in June. There will therefore be a problem of supply in those small country filling stations that are under so much threat, and customers in those areas will have to pay more.

**Mr. Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset): Will my hon. Friend join me in expressing the hope that the assurance provided by the Liberal Democrat spokesman might be tested by the hon. Gentleman's offering personally to meet the additional costs if there are any motorists who fail to get ultra-low sulphur petrol by the due date? If the hon. Gentleman is as confident as he maintains, should he not be willing to give the House that assurance?

**Mr. Atkinson:** I agree with my hon. Friend, and I shall certainly give way to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell to see whether he will give that assurance. I do not know what a Liberal Democrat cheque is worth, but a promise of something would be better than nothing. I am waiting, but I am sad to say that I do not think that the hon. Gentleman—

**Mr. Matthew Taylor** *rose—*

**Mr. Atkinson:** Ah! I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Taylor:** If the hon. Gentleman was listening to my earlier remarks, he will have heard me say that if the Conservative party could offer evidence of retailers who were unable to find ultra-low sulphur petrol, we would support an extension of the deadline. However, his Front-Bench spokesman has been unable to offer any evidence of that whatever.

**Mr. Atkinson:** As we can see, the money is not forthcoming. The hon. Gentleman would be a brave man

if he were to take on that bet, because the chances of ultra-low sulphur petrol reaching all corners of these islands by June are remote.

We heard earlier about an explosion at a refinery in Houston, Texas. That has already prompted an increase in the price of petrol. One of the problems is that, with many states in the US now demanding cleaner fuel, the US is importing more and more fuel from Europe to meet that demand because it cannot produce it itself. British petrol companies were relying on an import of some ultra-low sulphur fuel from Europe to reach the targets involved in meeting the June due date. That petrol may not now be available to them, because it will go to the United States instead. In that case, there will be a considerable likelihood of the deadline not being met.

I would like to illustrate the problems and penalties of living in a remote rural area such as my constituency in Northumberland. Now that one of the small filling stations there has closed down, some of my constituents are faced with a round trip of 60 miles to fill up their car with fuel. That is a considerable burden. Furthermore, the prices charged by rural filling stations are already considerably higher than urban prices. The problem is that the smaller filling stations are not supplied by the major oil companies, which are currently engaged in a battle with the supermarkets. They have to buy their fuel from smaller, independent wholesalers who, in turn, buy it from the large oil companies. Those filling stations, therefore, face an extra stage in the wholesale market before they can start pricing their petrol.

Today, ordinary unleaded petrol costs the wholesalers between 77p and 80p a litre. They then sell it on to the independent retailers, such as the small ones in my constituency, who are faced with charging 82p, 83p or even 84p a litre. That is considerably more than the 77p or so that people currently pay in urban areas. If rural people cannot obtain ultra-low sulphur petrol, 2p will be added to the substantial additional burden that they must bear, which will make ordinary unleaded petrol in rural areas 10p or 12p more expensive than it is in urban areas.

According to the hon. Member for Shipley, if there is a loss to the Treasury it will be made up by my constituents. For safety's sake if for no other reason, I do not see why there should not be an extension. If the Minister does not like the suggested date of 5 April 2002, perhaps the date could be three months after 14 June 2001. That would be better for my constituents. *[Interruption.]*

This may seem funny to Labour Members. It may be a joke to the Parliamentary Private Secretary. Labour Members like to laugh during debates such as this, but we are not talking about politics now; we are talking about people living in country areas who—in the case of my constituents—are suffering a foot and mouth crisis and a tourism crisis, and may subsequently have to pay 10p or 12p more for their petrol. I do not consider that to be a laughing matter.

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** As well as being unnecessary, amendment No. 6 sends out entirely the wrong environmental signals. It seeks to delay our attempts to ensure that cleaner fuels are available from all United Kingdom petrol stations as soon as is practicable.

Clause 1 cuts the duty rates on the main road fuels used in the UK. The Government have a record of using duty differentials to good effect, as I said earlier today. We successfully introduced ultra-low sulphur diesel across the UK five years ahead of the European Union deadline, and we have now built on that success. By using duty incentives in the case of ultra-low sulphur petrol, we have ensured that this cleaner fuel will be available to every petrol station in the UK by June this year. Clause 1 is an important part of that strategy.

I am not sure that the Opposition have thought out what they are proposing, or the reasons for their proposal. I agree with the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) that they have come up with no evidence in favour of either the date that they suggest, or the extension.

Ultra-low sulphur petrol offers environmental benefits over and above those of ordinary unleaded petrol when used in modern cars meeting Euro I/II emission standards—that is, cars fitted with catalytic converters. Research suggests that its widespread use in such cars could reduce emissions of nitrous oxides by up to 6 per cent., emissions of hydrocarbons by up to 14 per cent., and emissions of carbon monoxide by up to 11 per cent.

As well as ensuring that emissions from the latest generation of cars remain low, ultra-low sulphur petrol allows the use of new fuel-efficient technologies, as the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell pointed out. Gasoline direct injection engines, for example, can deliver substantial carbon dioxide savings. The early introduction of GDI and other fuel-saving technologies in new petrol cars is being strongly encouraged by the Government's carbon dioxide-based reforms of graduated vehicle excise duty and company car tax. The early introduction of ultra-low sulphur petrol ensures that fuel quality is not a barrier to the introduction of such technologies.

**Mr. St. Aubyn:** The Minister said that the Opposition had provided no evidence in favour of the later date in April next year. She has not yet given us a jot of evidence in favour of the date in June. I hope that we shall hear some.

**Miss Johnson:** I trust that the hon. Gentleman will be more generous with his patience than he appears to have been with his research before arriving in the Chamber.

Clause 1 completes the introduction of the ultra-low sulphur petrol duty differential by cutting duty by a further 2p per litre, providing a total incentive of 3p per litre in relation to ordinary unleaded petrol.

The Government recognised that the final stages of transition to ultra-low sulphur petrol had the potential to create competitive distortions in the market, and that short-term constraints on the capacity of UK oil refineries might have meant that it took longer for independent retailers to complete the transition. The Government want to ensure that everyone has access to the environmental benefits of ULSP and the associated duty cut. To ensure a smooth transition to 100 per cent. ULSP across the United Kingdom and to guard against any competitive distortions in the final stages, clause 1 also provides for a temporary cut of 2p per litre in the price of ordinary unleaded petrol.

*[Miss Johnson]*

The reason that that will be withdrawn on 14 June 2001 is that it will no longer be needed by then, as the market shift to ULSP will be virtually complete—in fact, complete.

**Mr. Letwin:** Complete?

**Miss Johnson:** It will be complete.

**Mr. Letwin:** Will the Minister give way?

**Miss Johnson:** I will, but I am trying to answer the points that have been raised.

**Mr. Letwin:** The Economic Secretary has just told us, in terms, that the market shift will be complete by 14 June. Will she now, in slightly more serious vein, offer the guarantee that I mentioned earlier in relation to the Liberal Democrat spokesman, on behalf of the Government? Will she give an undertaking that any motorist who fails to find ULSP as of that date will be reimbursed—paid the difference—by the Government?

**Miss Johnson:** I will not respond to the hon. Gentleman's points. I want to respond to the substantive points made by members of the official Opposition, which I must say were rather limited.

By 14 June, ULSP will be available to all UK forecourts. One reason why I will not answer the more trivial point made by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) is that, although it will be up to petrol retailers to decide whether to make ULSP available, it will be available to them. I understand that 14 June was picked because it matches the oil companies' accounting period, thus minimising compliance costs. It was chosen during discussion with the industry on a practical timetable following the point at which the policy was announced.

**Mr. Letwin:** Will the Minister give way?

**Miss Johnson:** I will give way once more.

**Mr. Letwin:** I am doubly grateful to the Economic Secretary. Now that we understand her logic—which is perfectly rational—may I ask her to adopt a slightly different formulation? Will she guarantee to refund the differential to any retailers who cannot find ULSP to service their own forecourts?

**Miss Johnson:** Let us go through the figures—a process that has been notably absent in the contribution of Opposition Members.

DTI figures show that from early April ULSP was available from 81 per cent. of retail sites—up from 68 per cent. in late March—and made up 94 per cent. of unleaded sales, up from 77 per cent. in late March. By 1 June, 98 per cent. of the network should be covered. By the middle of June, ULSP will be available to every petrol station in the country. Of the oil majors, Esso and Shell already have ULSP at 100 per cent. of their retail sites. BP has it at 99 per cent., TotalFinaElf at 98 per cent. and Texaco at 87 per cent. All the oil majors will achieve 100 per cent. by 1 May.

**Mr. Clappison:** Did not the Government claim that those major oil suppliers would have the arrangements in place by the end of March?

**Miss Johnson:** The reason for the 14 June date is that that is when it needs to be done by, and that is when we are saying it will be done by. The figures show that we are very close to being 100 per cent. there already. I realise that the hon. Gentleman may be a little embarrassed, having come to the debate with no evidence in support of an amendment asking for a postponement, and no real justification for the date that he has selected.

**Mr. Peter Atkinson:** Will the Minister give way?

**Miss Johnson:** I will give way one last time.

**Mr. Atkinson:** I came to the debate with some evidence. I spoke to the Petrol Retailers Association today. The DTI figures given by the Minister do not take into account the consequences of the explosion in the Texas refinery the other day, which will have a substantial effect on United States demand for petrol from Europe. All we are asking the Minister is this. If she is wrong, the DTI figures are not reliable and the oil companies do not meet that target date, what will happen? Who will reimburse the motorists, particularly those in rural constituencies, who will lose out?

6 pm

**Miss Johnson:** I have already explained that ULSP will be available to all retailers. Obviously, it is up to retailers whether they retail it or not, but the fact is that it will be available to all retailers, and that is the point.

The hon. Gentleman mentions the problems of refinery supply. There was a recent explosion at the Conoco refinery on Humberside, but we believe that that should have a negligible impact on supply as the refinery was preparing for shutdown for maintenance shortly. Indeed, the DTI figures anticipate the shutdown.

The amendment is unnecessary. I have placed very good evidence before the Committee that we have made extremely good progress in implementing the commitment and that we are well on target to meet the 14 June deadline. We do not believe that it is necessary to extend a duty reduction for a fuel which will not be in use after June and which carries with it environmental disbenefits that I am sure hon. Members would want to see minimised.

**Mr. Clappison:** I have listened carefully to the Minister's response and I think that the Government are in retreat. She is not prepared to back up her words and the assurances of the past with the guarantee that my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) has sought. Nor have the Government been able even to make good the claim by the Financial Secretary that the major oil companies were

"on track to meet their target to supply ULSP nationwide at their retail sites by the end of March"—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2001; Vol. 363, c. 511W.].

The Minister has made it clear that that target has not been met by the major oil companies, let alone the independent retailers that often serve the rural communities to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) adverted.

The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor), the Liberal Democrat spokesman, asked what evidence the Opposition had as to what the position would be by 14 June. Of course, neither the Opposition nor, it would appear, the Government are in a position to give cast-iron guarantees as to what the position will be on 14 June, but two things are clear. First, the danger of some motorists who rely on unleaded petrol facing a 2p increase because of the non-availability on a universal basis of ULSP will be greater on 14 June than it would be on 5 April—the Government are forcing the companies to meet the deadline. That cannot be gainsaid.

Secondly, if that scenario transpires and we have people from parts of the country complaining that they cannot obtain ULSP and that the 2p that was taken off on 7 March is coming back on 7 June, the first people to denounce the Government will be the Liberal Democrats, who will say that they argued against this all along and warned the Government of the danger of a 2p increase. We know the Liberal Democrats well. That is one thing that is absolutely certain.

We are not satisfied by the Minister's response. It would appear that there is a risk of motorists facing a 2p increase on 14 June after the Chancellor had made a reduction of 2p on 7 March—2p off on 7 March, 2p back on on 14 June, when fuel taxes are already at a very high level because of the Government's fuel taxation policies. We think that there is that risk, perhaps especially in rural areas, and we intend to press the amendment to a Division.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 126, Noes 324.

**Division No. 191]** **[6.4 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davids, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Shepherd, Richard
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Whittingdale, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. James Gray and**
**Mr. Keith Simpson.**

**NOES**

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim

Cranston, Ross
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kirkwood, Archy
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mrs. Anne McGuire and**
**Mr. Ian Pearson.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**Mr. A. J. Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I beg to move amendment No. 5, in clause 1, page 2, line 3, at end insert—

'(3A) The rate of excise duty for biodiesel and bioethanol when used as road transport fuels, shall be 33p per litre below the rate fixed for ultra low sulphur diesel as defined by the Hydrocarbon Oil Duties Act 1979.'.

I have great pleasure in moving this amendment, which would reduce the duty rate for biodiesel and bioethanol to that for road gas fuels, which is around the 7p mark. It offers the Government and the Committee an opportunity to do a deal of good for the environment and for our distressed farming industry at one and the same time. What could be better than that?

Biodiesel offers an unrivalled range of environmental benefits as compared with alternative transport fuels. It is sustainable and renewable, with very positive energy balances; it is safely biodegradable; it is far better in terms of greenhouse gas emissions than fossil fuels; it offers scope for recycling waste oils; it recycles carbon; and it produces far fewer local air pollutants than fossil diesel. Bioethanol is also renewable, sustainable and environmentally friendly and has excellent emission properties. On balance, biofuels offer better environmental advantages than even the road fuel gases liquified petroleum gas, compressed natural gas and liquified natural gas—LPG, CNG and LNG.

My amendment seeks to put the biofuels on all fours with the road fuel gases. Biodiesel compares favourably with those fuel gases and enormously favourably with fossil fuels. The Government have shown environmental logic in granting a substantial reduction to road fuel gases, and the same logic directs that a similar reduction should also be made for the biofuels. Granting a major reduction in duty rates to biodiesel and bioethanol would enable those fuels to make a significant and rapid contribution to reducing atmospheric pollution.

Biodiesel can be used straight or blended in place of fossil diesel in all modern diesel engines, without modification. Bioethanol, blended with petrol, can be used in normal engines or purpose-built bi-fuel vehicles. Ten per cent. ethanol blends are already routinely used in the United States to curtail local air pollution. Life-cycle emissions of greenhouse gases from biodiesel and from bioethanol are at least 55 per cent. and 62 per cent. lower respectively than from fossil diesel. Tailpipe emission figures are also much better for the biofuels. Particulates emissions from biodiesel are 20 per cent. to 39 per cent. better than low sulphur diesel and 10 per cent. to 29 per cent. better than ultra-low sulphur diesel. On almost all normal tests, biodiesel has an extremely favourable score.

A duty rate of 7p per litre has been promised for gas fuels for road vehicles, but the Government have merely indicated that next year there will be a smaller reduction in duty—of 25p—for biodiesel. That is not on the face of the Bill: the Chancellor has simply indicated that that will happen. A much better signal should be sent to the industries involved that they should make the investment.

Major companies are ready to produce such fuels. The necessary crops would provide much-needed new business for agriculture, and the whole country would benefit from cleaner air as biofuels were substituted for fossil fuels.

**Mr. Clappison:** Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, even if the reduction in duty rate is made next year, the price of biodiesel fuels will remain above that of road fuel gases because of the high level of duty on them?

**Mr. Beith:** That is correct, and I cannot see the logic of the Government's position. It is sensible that the same chain of arguments should apply to biodiesel and bioethanol as applies to road fuel gas. In many cases, those arguments apply more powerfully to biodiesel and bioethanol. There is no logic to the Government's position with regard to duty levels—let alone to the year's delay in the implementation of any reduction.

In fairness to the Government, it should be acknowledged that the situation has moved on because of the crisis in agriculture. The matter merits a fresh look. A clear signal from the Government to farming that the current crisis means that there are other directions in which the industry should move would be timely and helpful. Farmers may decide to move out of livestock and into arable at precisely this stage. Those who have lost their livestock and are in receipt of compensation might be ready to make new investment in this area.

The National Farmers Union supports the amendment. It considers that the further duty reduction proposed in the amendment

> is essential if biofuels are to become price competitive and deliver the benefits to the environment and the agricultural industry that they so clearly offer."

The NFU also strongly supports

> "the extension of these reductions to bioethanol, which is extensively used in Brazil and the US where duty rates are more favourable to environmentally friendly fuels.

The NFU adds:

> "You will be well aware that the agricultural industry is deep in crisis. The Government has often urged farmers to diversify into new enterprises, and we are firmly convinced that the emergent biofuels industry offers a realistic opportunity for diversification and for a new market for British farmers."

Incidentally, it is significant that we are currently exporting oilseed rape to countries that produce and use biodiesel.

**Mr. Salmond:** What the right hon. Gentleman is saying is important and welcome. Will he give the House an indication of the possible scale of biofuel use if the amendment were to be accepted?

**Mr. Beith:** Such a forecast would be difficult, and it is not one that I have come prepared to make. The Government are no more prepared to give a clear indication of what they think will be the take-up of road fuel gases. Such calculations are difficult, and they are a job for industry. Making risky decisions about how extensive investment should be is something at which industry excels. Governments of all parties have a bad record in that regard.

However, for industry to make such decisions, there must be a reasonable taxation basis. Giving industry an incentive to invest in road fuel gases and not in biofuels is likely to lead to the wrong investment decisions, or discourage investment that could be very beneficial in terms of both industry and agriculture.

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): I agree with the strong points that my right hon. Friend makes, especially on behalf of farmers across the country. However, is he aware that the Government could adopt a policy of substituting at least 15 per cent. of road fuel with ethanol as from tomorrow? The French have relaxed taxation on the ethanol component in fuel, and the Government could do the same. In that way, they could encourage what is an important and environmentally friendly industry.

**Mr. Beith:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. He underlines my earlier point that conversion would be easy: indeed, people would only need to put a different fuel in their tanks at petrol stations. No engine adaptation is required, so the change would be easy to make.

I mentioned the strong support for the amendment in the agriculture industry, and I draw the Government's attention to this week's edition of *Farmers Weekly*. In a

*[Mr. Beith]*

very strong editorial, it criticises the advice given by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on this subject. Referring to "misguided MAFF advice", the editorial asks:

"Why does MAFF make so many mistakes?"

It states that the Ministry's advice

"could have denied UK growers their biggest break for years."

What was that MAFF advice? It was that an increase in oilseed rape production

"could conflict with Government targets to reduce the decline in farmland birds".

That argument was demolished by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. The RSPB supports renewable energy schemes, including biofuels. *Farmers Weekly* reported that the organisation considers that growing more oilseed rape

"could help stem the decline in seed-eating birds such as linnets and bullfinches."

*Farmers Weekly* reported that, although oilseed rape, as a

"winter-sown crop . . . would not favour ground-nesting birds, it is better than winter cereals."

The RSPB's secretary, Graham Madge, is reported as saying:

"Long term if we don't do something to stem greenhouse gases there will be problems for all birds."

Essentially, in terms of its effect on birds, growing oilseed rape for fuel is no different from growing any other crop—except for the benefits that it offers seed-eating birds. Alternative habitats would need to be arranged for ground-nesting birds, and headlands are an obvious choice in that regard. The Government's arguments simply do not stand up. Given that their policy has clearly been shown to be wrong, I hope that the Treasury will dismiss it from its calculations, and that unfortunate Ministers in the Lords will not be required to trot out an argument that makes no sense.

Another argument that does not stand up is the one advanced by the Financial Secretary in a letter sent to the chairman of the British Association of Biofuels and Oils on 23 April. The Financial Secretary explained why road gas fuels attracted a lower rate of duty than biofuels, and said:

"A 20 pence per litre duty cut ensures no disproportionate cost to society of securing reductions in carbon emissions, while providing recognition for the environmental benefits from biodiesel. Incentives for road fuel gases, on the other hand, are directed predominantly at improvements in local air quality where cleaner road transport has a key role to play. Because the proposed incentives for biofuels are focused on climate change improvements, a direct comparison in not appropriate."

That is nonsense. The tailpipe emissions record of biofuels is every bit as good as that for road fuel gases, and in many cases better. The Financial Secretary was wrongly advised that the benefits arising from biodiesel and bioethanol were confined to the climate change benefits. The tailpipe emission benefits are also extremely important, and biofuels score on both counts. Now that that argument has been shown to be mistaken, I hope that it will not again figure in the Treasury's calculations.

As I said earlier, biofuels perform very well when standard tests for local, tailpipe emissions of carbon monoxide, particulates, sulphur oxides and other pollutants are carried out. Therefore, the comparison that the Financial Secretary sought to make was false: biofuels perform well in terms of both climate change improvements and tailpipe emissions.

The amendment offers an attractive course for the Government to adopt. Conventional oilseed rape varieties such as are grown now could produce up to 6 per cent. of the UK's requirements for road vehicle diesel fuel. Substantial environmental benefits would be achieved. The technology already exists, and subsidies would not be needed to persuade growers to grow the crop. No new research would be needed to develop growers' skills, as the crop is already being grown. No capital advances would be required for processing, as the UK already has crushing and esterification plants.

In addition, the industry would be ready to increase investment, as long as it knew that the relevant tax regime would work. Britain already exports oilseed rape to Germany and Austria, and those countries use what they import to produce biodiesel. We are denying ourselves environmental advantages that we could have. We are failing to give agriculture a benefit that could be extremely valuable at a difficult time such as this.

The Government clearly realise that they should be doing something. That is the reason for the Chancellor's indication of a 20p cut next year. However, what they are contemplating comes too late and is insufficient. To wait until next year risks investments not being made. To preserve a significant difference between road fuel gas duty and duty on biofuels risks giving the industry the wrong signal.

I invite the Government to accept my amendment in principle. I know that they will want to redraft it and present it in different terms—that is in the nature of parliamentary proceedings. However, it surely makes sense to secure an equivalent rate of duty.

6.30 pm

**Mr. James Paice** (South-East Cambridgeshire): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on his speech, and on his wisdom in making this proposal.

I confess that I am slightly less generous than the right hon. Gentleman in my view of the Government's motives. I suspect that at some stage in drafting the Budget, the Chancellor said, "I had better put something green in the Budget, especially if it will not actually cost anything. What can I do?" On the face of it, the Government's proposal looks extremely green, but it is not going to cost anything because it is not sufficient to create the desired result. My cynical belief is that the Chancellor will get away with it, at least for a time, like everything else he does, until people see what is underneath. The 20p reduction, as the right hon. Gentleman said, will not change the economics sufficiently to encourage a massive increase in production and use of biofuels.

The right hon. Gentleman spoke about America and one or two other countries. Unusually for a Liberal Democrat, he did not mention Europe much, yet there are some good examples on our doorstep. Other European Union countries have already seen the benefit of such a measure. France provides a total exemption to its duties which equates roughly to 35p a litre, which is in the same ball park as the right hon. Gentleman's proposal. France has done that because it wants the use of biofuels to increase.

The energy technology support unit, the body that advises the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions on biofuels, told the Science and Technology Committee two years ago that the problem with biodiesel is its poor energy balance: it produces only twice as much energy as is used in its production. ETSU also said that every litre of biodiesel used reduces carbon dioxide emissions by approximately 1.5 kg. That is a major reduction. Even if we accept that first statement at face value, it is only half the story, because what also matters is the source of that energy in the energy balance.

Biofuels cannot emit more carbon dioxide than was taken up in the growing process in the first place—that is basic chemistry. In the simplest comparison, they are energy neutral. They are not, of course, because one must include the energy that was used in growing the crop, producing the fertilisers and the subsequent use of energy in processing it into biodiesel or ethanol. Even allowing for that, we are faced with a major net gain of energy balance. Even if the energy sources used for production and processing are from fossil fuels, as the majority of our energy is, there is still a gain. However, they do not have to come from fossil fuels. There is no reason why other forms of biofuel, such as miscanthus for producing energy at power stations, could not be used to create the first energy and produce a double benefit.

Amazingly, the policy on this issue in Europe has not had much coverage. European Union rules allow up to 15 per cent. by volume substitution of ETBE, an ethanol derivative, in our petrol. It is already there. In answer to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who is no longer in his place, the *Farmers Weekly* article to which the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed referred gave some statistics. Europe currently produces 700,000 tonnes a year of biodiesel and has set production targets of 2.3 million tonnes by 2003 and 8.3 million tonnes by 2010. Germany is on course, as are Austria, Italy, Spain and France. Britain, at the moment, will produce almost zero towards that very sensible target.

Some people claim that biofuels are not sufficiently positive in energy use terms to justify the effective subsidy that is required, which is the subject of the amendment. Much of that opinion is based on historical studies carried out in 1991. Conversion technologies have improved considerably and, as we have heard, the husbandry and every other aspect of the scientific production side is fully covered. In addition, the price of crude oil—the main comparator—has increased dramatically. Although less than it was a few months ago, it is still much higher than it once was. At the same time, prices for grain and oilseed rape, the two major sources of biofuels, have collapsed to little more than half of what they were when these studies were carried out in 1991.

All those arguments about energy balance could be significantly damaged if it were not for the fact that both my party and the Government have already conceded the principle of using a taxation instrument to encourage environmentally friendly fuels. As the right hon. Gentleman said, road fuel gases will be taxed at 6p a litre to encourage their use. They are inevitably much cleaner than conventional petrol or diesel, but they are still fossil fuels. All the carbon dioxide that is emitted when road fuel gas is burned contributes to global warming and carbon dioxide levels. In reducing duty for environmental benefit, I think that we must go considerably further than the 20p proposed by the Government.

The right hon. Gentleman referred to the article and critical editorial in *Farmers Weekly*. I will not go through it again because he demonstrated clearly how daft the comments of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food are. The Ministry has not exactly covered itself with glory in recent months, and this adds to the pile of criticisms.

No one envisages that the development of the biofuels market will manifestly change the face of agriculture. As the right hon. Gentleman said, British agriculture is in serious difficulties, even without the foot and mouth crisis. However, the reduction would provide an alternative market for oilseed rape and cereals. The price of rape or grain would not rise dramatically because the market would set its own levels. If the reduction on fuel duty were fixed at the 33p that we are discussing, that would feed back to a maximum price that people could afford to pay for the raw materials. The market would therefore limit the acreage of grain or oilseed rape being produced, commensurate with that price. If the price of rape went up too much, the economics would go out of the window yet again. So it would be a self-levelling device. It would, as the right hon. Gentleman said, help agriculture at a time of desperate need.

If the reductions in the Budget for next year are a genuine and serious attempt to encourage the production of biofuels, I hope that the Government will listen to those who say that a cut of 20p will not produce the result that they want. I can understand that the Government would look cynically on anything said from the Conservative, and perhaps, occasionally, the Liberal Democrat, Benches, but they should listen to people such as Peter Clery, to whom the right hon. Gentleman referred, who have spent the past 20 years working to develop biofuels.

In the late 1980s, for some unknown reason, the bus company in Reading tried running buses on biodiesel. The only environmental result was that the whole of Reading smelled like a fish and chip shop because the buses were burning vegetable oil, but the technology proved its worth.

**Mr. David Heath:** In case the House has the impression that buses necessarily smell of fish and chips when they run on biodiesel, can the hon. Gentleman confirm that the entire Stockholm bus fleet runs on that fuel without any such problem?

**Mr. Paice:** The hon. Gentleman is entirely right and my comment was a bit flippant, even if, since I was talking about the mid-1980s, it was true. I use that example to demonstrate that the technology was not developed in the 21st century but has been around for close on 20 years. It is time that this country gave it the promotion that it deserves. I hope that the Government will take heed of those who have studied it for many years and will realise that 20p is insufficient to bring the result that we all want. I hope that they will look favourably on the amendment.

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** I support the amendment and what has been said about the inadequacy of the Government's proposals. The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) said that the technology, far from being new, had been around for at least 20 years. In fact, it is as old as the diesel engine itself, since the first of them were designed to run on

*[Mr. Simon Thomas]*

vegetable oil, not black gold from the ground once the oil companies muscled in. Even modern diesel engines have for years been able to run without adaptation on biodiesel or a mixture of biodiesel and conventional diesel. There is no technological problem about moving to a 50 per cent. mix of bioethanol or an even greater proportion of biodiesel. Nor do they smell of fish and chips, unless salt and vinegar are added to the mix.

The Treasury team would have done well to study in more detail the Environmental Audit Committee pre-Budget report 2000, "Fuelling the Debate" before they produced the Finance Bill. Several of our debates tonight have revealed a lack of clear thought about real environmental benefits in Government proposals that purport to bring them. Paragraph 97 of the report states:

"It is clear that whichever the preferred fuels, past experience indicates that long-term fiscal signals will need to be maintained to provide the necessary certainty so that industry and consumers can plan and invest against a particular tax regime. In the UK there have been incentives to encourage autogas for five years, but the market is only now beginning to take off."

My constituency experience supports that. We have only one autogas refuelling station in Ceredigion, which is a rural area, and conversion to autogas is unlikely to take off. Yet the infrastructure exists in conventional fuel stations for biofuels of all types.

I chair a biomass working group in my constituency, which is trying to promote biomass in terms of heat production. We have also considered opportunities for farmers in Ceredigion and west Wales to produce biofuels. For the future of farming, in addition to value added products that we have advocated for years and increasing organic production, we should consider energy production. It is disappointing that we have had so many mixed signals from the Government on that.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire and I participated in a debate in Westminster Hall a month ago at which the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food seemed to give encouraging signals about support for energy crops. Yet the Finance Bill offers only a sop, not a measure sufficient to take matters forward. The 20p reduction in biofuels barely brings the cost of production down to that of conventional petrol and diesel. We need a greater impetus and stronger long-term signals if the industry is to take off. The amendment provides those signals, and I support it.

**The Temporary Chairman (Dr. Michael Clark):** Order. We must conclude our proceedings on clauses 1 to 3 by 7 pm. If hon. Members will co-operate with me, I shall co-operate with them. I intend to call Mr. Brake and ask him to be fast, and I shall then call Mr. Clappison.

6.45 pm

**Mr. Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): I shall be very quick in supporting the amendment and offering one example of why it should be agreed to. The "people, paper, oil and cans" project in Wandsworth works with the bio-regional development group based in my constituency. The core of the project is the conversion of cooking oil to biodiesel that can be used in vehicles which collect aluminium cans and white office paper for recycling. It seeks to create a virtuous circle, and the biodiesel will also be used in vehicles providing a service for users of the centre from which the project is being run.

The project sponsors say that the major stumbling block to success is the fuel duty. Even the promised 20p reduction would be inadequate, and the project would not be viable. A reduction of at least 40p—more than the amendment proposes—is required, in their view. The amendment would at least help that sort of innovation to proceed, and I hope that the Government will consider the points that have been made.

**Mr. Clappison:** We welcome the debate. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) made an interesting case in support of his amendment, and other interesting points have been made, particularly in the characteristically well-informed contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who has a long-standing interest in these matters.

We have already said that we want a reduction in duty on biodiesel and bioethanol. There are environmental grounds for such a reduction. In addition, those fuels give hard-pressed British farmers the hope of another market. If farmers were under pressure before the outbreak of foot and mouth, they are even more so now. It is right to explore every avenue to see what help can be given to them, and there is potential in a market for biodiesel and bioethanol.

The Minister has heard some expressions of farmers' opinions already. My hon. Friend and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed referred to the article in last week's *Farmers Weekly*, and I commend that article to her. I invite her to consider the analysis of Government policy under the headline, "Labour applies brakes to oilseed opportunity", and the opinion column, which expresses the view that the present state of Government policy

"has left biodiesel and oilseed rape stuck on the forecourt".

Let us see whether we can get the Government to move from there.

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** I am pleased to hear support from the Liberal Democrat and official Opposition Benches for the Chancellor's Budget announcement of a new lower duty rate for biodiesel. That consensus is welcome, but the amendment seeks to cut the rate for biodiesel not by 20p per litre, as we propose, but by 33p. That is a bigger reduction than can be justified. The amendment also suggests extending the duty cut to bioethanol and bringing the reduction forward from next year. That would be premature.

The Government are keen to stimulate development of viable alternative fuels that offer environmental advantages. Indeed, it was because of climate change benefits associated with biodiesel that the Government announced the 20p per litre reduction in duty. Although we recognise that the promotion of biodiesel can provide useful greenhouse gas emission savings, that should not be achieved regardless of cost. Many of the arguments advanced failed to take sufficient account of the costs of some of the current alternatives. Our climate change programme emphasises the principle that measures to tackle climate change must provide value for money—that is only sensible. A 20p per litre duty cut, while providing recognition for the environmental benefits of biodiesel, will ensure that there is no disproportionate cost to society in securing the reductions in carbon emissions.

Furthermore, it will take time to introduce a duty rate cut for an alternative fuel such as biodiesel. Not only do we need to settle on a UK specification for biodiesel to benefit from the duty reduction, and to seek the appropriate derogation from the EU mineral oils directive, we also need time to set up administrative arrangements to protect the revenue, and to protect legitimate biodiesel producers, motorists and hauliers by ensuring that poor quality biodiesel does not find its way into the UK distribution chain. Those are practical matters; they may involve time, but they are none the less relevant.

**Mr. Beith:** Will the hon. Lady clarify why, in her judgment, the higher rate of reduction is justified for road fuel gas but not for biodiesel? She has explained that she regards a 20p reduction as sufficient for biodiesel, but she is prepared to make a much larger reduction for road fuel gas, although the same arguments apply to both types of fuel.

**Miss Johnson:** The point relates to the environmental cost or the saving that will be made. I will run through a few figures. Before the Budget, the biodiesel lobby was pushing for a duty incentive of about 35p per litre relative to ultra-low sulphur diesel. That would have resulted in a cost of £2,333 per tonne of carbon saved, which would fall to £1,129 by 2010. It is true that the amendment suggests only 33p, but the cost would be nearly as large as that for a 35p per litre cut; in climate change abatement terms, that would still be extremely high. For example, the duty incentive of 20p per litre for recovered vegetable oil relative to ultra-low sulphur diesel would actually cost £281 per tonne of carbon saved. There is a significant difference between the figures.

**Mr. Paice:** Will the Minister tell us the total cost to the Exchequer of a duty of 6p per litre on road fuel gas? As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) points out, she cannot trot out the figures for one side without giving the other side. This is a question not merely of a 1p reduction, but of the whole duty concession—from that on ultra-low sulphur right down to the 6p that she rightly proposes on road fuel gas. What is that cost to the Exchequer per tonne of carbon saved?

**Miss Johnson:** Biodiesel does not offer the same air quality benefits as road fuel gases—*[Interruption.]* The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has made an analysis; it is in the Library and hon. Members can study it. Road fuel gases provide significant benefits relative to diesel—especially with regard to particulates and nitrous oxides—but there are no such air quality benefits from biodiesel. That is one of the points that hon. Members are not taking on board.

**Mr. Paice:** The hon. Lady must compare like with like. A diesel engine cannot run on gas, so we have to compare ethanol with gas and normal diesel with biodiesel. Will the hon. Lady tell the Committee how she can suggest that biodiesel is no better for the environment than conventional diesel? That is the comparison she should make—not a comparison with gas.

**Miss Johnson:** What is relevant is the environmental cost of production as well as the environmental benefits—as the hon. Gentleman said during his speech, although he did not produce any figures for actual environmental benefits and costs. His arguments were about the general idea. Indeed, we are in favour of the general idea; that is why we are incentivising it in this way. However, the particular options must work in practice. For that to happen, the sums must add up, and the options must offer value for money; all our care for the environment makes no sense if we do otherwise.

The Budget has already given strong indications that have led at least three producers to commission the construction of large biodiesel plants. More than 100 million litres of biodiesel should be produced by the end of 2002. We have given a signal that is being read and is receiving responses.

In his opening remarks, the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) asked why we said that a 33p cut would not be cost-effective. I have already covered that up to a point. The incentives for road fuel gases are directed predominantly at improvements in local air quality, in which cleaner road transport has a key role to play. The proposed incentives for biofuels are focused on climate change improvements, so a direct comparison is not appropriate. The evidence suggests that a 20p per litre incentive for biodiesel is a cost-effective means of delivering climate change benefits from the transport sector, so that is what we propose. We recognise that the promotion of biodiesel can provide useful greenhouse gas emission savings, but those should not be made regardless of cost.

The amendment also suggests a duty cut for bioethanol. The Government believe that would be premature. Greenhouse gas savings from ethanol depend very much on the feedstock used. The production of ethanol from wheat, for example, which was mentioned by several contributors to the debate, is well established, but unfortunately, on a life-cycle basis—taking account of the carbon dioxide implications of crop growing and processing the fuels, as well as its use as a motor fuel—it offers few greenhouse gas savings. I accept that the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) took some account of that fact. There are few savings because wheat cultivation and ethanol production are both relatively energy-intensive processes, so the environmental case for the promotion of ethanol in the UK is weak, if wheat is to be the predominant feedstock. The feedstock does not necessarily have to be wheat, but as there was some discussion of wheat I wanted to make that point.

Greenhouse gas savings of about 80 per cent. can be achieved by using ethanol produced from woody—lignocellulosic—biomass feedstocks; for the benefit of Members who do not know much about the subject, I should explain that those are wheat straw and forestry residues. However, that process is still very much at the research and development stage. The first generation of commercial production plants is not likely to be operational until about 2004.

Given the potential climate change benefits, we are keen to ensure that UK industry can contribute to research and development. That is why the Chancellor announced in the Budget statement that viable pilot projects for bioethanol would be supported through duty exemptions or reductions. That will help UK industry to build on existing biomass research, which is also supported by our new and renewable energy programme.

*[Miss Johnson]*

The amendment urges the Government to introduce lower duty rates for biofuels. I assure the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed that we intend to do so. However, we shall not produce rushed legislation. Indeed, if we did so, I should no doubt be hauled before the House or one of its Committees to give an explanation. Furthermore, we do not believe that we should pay over the odds for those greenhouse gas savings when the revenue forgone could be more effectively directed towards other climate change abatement projects.

I hope that explains that although we have much sympathy with where the right hon. Gentleman is coming from, the practical difficulties have led us to adopt the present position.

**Mr. Beith:** That is a very disappointing reply. It is not true that local air quality would not be improved very significantly by biofuels, nor is it true that the 20p reduction is a clear signal to industry, so I must ask the House to support me in this matter.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 162, Noes 286.

**Division No. 192]** **[7 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Mrs Margaret
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walker, Cecil
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Andrew Stunell and**
**Mr. Bob Russell.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chisholm, Malcolm
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean

Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettlesbn)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Oliver, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mrs. Anne McGuire and**
**Mr. Ian Pearson.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*It being after Seven o'clock,* THE TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN *put forthwith the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on clauses 1 to 3, pursuant to Orders [7 November 2000 and 9 April].*

*Clauses 1 to 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 50

CHARGE AND RATES FOR 2001-02

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 41, line 15, leave out "10%" and insert "0%".

The amendment relates to the 10p rate of tax that the Government currently levy on the first part of people's incomes. We believe that the rate should be reduced to zero, effectively extending substantially the tax free allowance that people enjoy. Some 2.7 million people now have a marginal rate of tax of 10 per cent. as a result of the Chancellor's expansion of the band by £300 above indexation. Along with the early introduction of the 10p rate, that has been a substantial cost to him. However, instead of introducing other tax cuts, we believe that he should simply have extended the tax free allowance, taking 2.7 million people out of paying tax altogether.

The cost to the Chancellor of our suggestion would be £4.1 billion in 2001-02 on an accruals basis and that compares with the money that he has already spent in tax

*[Mr. Matthew Taylor]*

cuts. According to the Red Book, he has spent just over £3.5 billion this year, will spend nearly £4.5 billion next year and the figure rises to nearly £5 billion in the year after that. Therefore, it is clear that he had the money available to undertake the type of change that we have suggested. It would be worth just under £200 to people on incomes as low as £6,500 a year.

7.15 pm

The key debate is whether the Chancellor is going down the right route in seeking to introduce and then expand the 10p starting rate of tax or whether he would have been better advised, as Liberal Democrats have consistently argued over many years, to expand tax-free allowances to take many people out of paying tax. Instead, he has introduced another complication into the tax system.

The first question to ask relates to the distributional impact of the Chancellor's policy. Would we better help people on the lowest incomes by taking the Chancellor's course of the tax complication of a 10p rate or by taking the Liberal Democrats' choice of extending tax-free allowances? Research undertaken by the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows that spending an equivalent amount of money on either widening the 10p band or cutting it to zero has different distributional impacts that do not affect people in the same way.

Broadly speaking, the poorest 10 per cent. would gain twice as much by the Government cutting the 10p rate to zero than they would by the Government spending the same money on increasing the 10p band. The poorest 50 per cent. would gain more by cutting the 10p rate to zero. That led the Institute for Fiscal Studies to comment in its "Green Budget 2000" that widening the 10p band in the way that the Chancellor has chosen to do is "less redistributive". By contrast, on our suggestion of cutting the 10p band to zero, it said:

> "This approach has a number of beneficial features, including being the most progressive means of redistribution via the income tax system, as it moves some people out of paying tax altogether. Increasing the number of non-taxpayers also acts to simplify the income tax system."

That is the second argument for the Liberal Democrats' approach. Cutting tax for people on low incomes and on the first part of their incomes would help to remove complexity.

**The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo):** Will the hon. Gentleman explain exactly how his proposal to introduce a zero rate tax relief band on top of the personal allowance would make the tax system less complex and easier to understand?

**Mr. Taylor:** If the Paymaster General had been listening, she would have understood that I said that, in effect, we would increase the allowance. The nature of this debate and our ability to table amendments to the Finance Bill gives us an opportunity to discuss these issues.

**Dawn Primarolo:** The hon. Gentleman must be clear. Introducing a zero rate tax relief is not the same as increasing the personal allowance. It would add to complexity in the tax system if people had to understand that they have not only a personal allowance, but a zero rate tax relief before they pay the basic rate. He has not dealt with that point.

**Mr. Taylor:** If that is the best that the minds in the Treasury can come up with, I have worries about their ability to brief Ministers. I have said twice—I shall say it again—that our proposal is to increase the tax-free allowance. I shall make absolutely clear the mechanism through which we would do that. We would spend money to turn the 10p rate into a tax-free allowance at equivalent income levels.

In case the Minister is wondering, our approach would be so beneficial in redistributive terms because it would give the maximum benefit at low income, including to part-time earners. That is exactly what the Institute for Fiscal Studies says. The Chancellor has to explain why he has chosen to take such a complex approach in preference to the simplification that we want. The Minister is right: operating two systems—a tax-free allowance and a 10p rate—is complex. If we were proposing, as she suggests, to have two different systems, we would be maintaining the complexity. However, we are not arguing that, because we want simplification. The Institute for Fiscal Studies argues, as does the broad range of those involved in the sector, that there should be a simple system that gives maximum benefit to people on the lowest incomes. Our proposal would take 2.5 million people out of the tax system.

The Chancellor has also introduced other complexities into the tax system since he took office. The number of direct tax rates was 24; it is now 47. There were no tax credits; now there are eight, with five more proposed. The tax system is hugely complex. It benefits accountants enormously, because it allows them to earn much more, but it does not benefit those in greatest need. The money would be put to more effective use if it were given to people on the lowest incomes.

**Mr. Jim Cousins** (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Does the hon. Gentleman not see advantages in terms of tax simplification in aligning the system of personal allowances with the trigger rates for the payment of national insurance? The Government have moved towards that. If we bring the tax and national insurance systems together, we will achieve a massive measure of tax simplification.

**Mr. Taylor:** The hon. Gentleman and I would probably agree to a large extent on long-term reform, for which the Liberal Democrats have been arguing much longer than others. There are difficulties in that policy, however, because we need to ensure that people are not unfairly penalised, which is why change has to be introduced gradually. I do not disagree with the principle of the hon. Gentleman's argument. Indeed, personal national insurance—employees national insurance—is an anomaly within the tax system. It does not build up an individual insurance fund. We have argued that the basic state pension should be available in full to all and not tied to a contribution record that unfairly penalises people, most of whom have stayed at home to look after children and have a reduced pension as a result. The operation of national insurance gives rise to many issues, but I will be called to order if I discuss them now.

The question mark that hangs over the Chancellor's strategy is how he envisages the tax system developing. It is not obvious from the internal logic of introducing the 10p rate and the decision to broaden the band at what point the Chancellor believes the process should be halted. Do the Government believe that the basic rate should gradually become the 10p rate? On what basis have they decided on the £300 increase? In addition, we are increasingly seeing difficult interactions between tax and savings. The tax system has been made more complex.

People who are trying to tackle poverty have argued for our option. They want to take people out of tax altogether in preference to the 10p band. People who deal with tax, such as accountants and those employed by other professional bodies, have also argued that the Government are unnecessarily complicating the system and that it would be better to take some people out of the tax system. There is only one reason for the Government's decision: the Chancellor is delivering a political message designed to trump the Conservatives. They argued for a 20p rate, so he came up with the 10p rate. That is the only logic behind their decision. The Government have a huge majority, which they expect to keep in the general election. I had hoped that they would have the courage to go for a sensible tax policy to take people out of paying tax instead of introducing a tax complication that is purely designed to wrong-foot the Conservative party.

**Mr. Cousins:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Taylor:** I do not want to hold up the proceedings, but I will give way in a moment if the hon. Gentleman still wants to intervene.

The Government might argue that there is a difference of opinion about strategy, but at least Labour agrees—unlike the Conservatives—that the aim is to have a progressive tax system so that people on the lowest incomes contribute least until their incomes increase, when they are expected to contribute a little more.

The introduction of the 10p rate cuts at the basic rate of income tax but huge increases in indirect taxation have made the tax system more regressive. Under the Conservatives, the rich paid less of their income in tax than the poor, but that has got worse under Labour. People in the poorest fifth of households typically pay 41.4 per cent. of their income in tax in one form or another compared with just 36.5 per cent. for the richest fifth. We know that because it is part of the information provided by the Government in table B on page 39 of the Red Book. The proportion of income paid in tax has risen for the bottom 80 per cent. of households since 1997-98 and fallen for the richest 20 per cent. Most people are paying more; the rich are paying less; and the very poor are paying substantially more as a percentage of their income than the very rich. The process that we advocate of taking people out of tax would help to turn that around.

It is not just a question of tax; we are also concerned about inequality in our society. The measure of inequality of income after tax—the Gini coefficient—has recorded another increase in the past year and now stands at 40 per cent. That is the highest level for any year for which the Office for National Statistics has data. Almost every measure shows inequality at its highest, or close to its highest, level. Such information is available in April's *Economic Trends*.

We have a Labour Government who are apparently committed to increasing equality in society, but who are actually increasing inequality. They are theoretically supporting progressive taxation, but have increased the regressive nature of tax in the United Kingdom. They have increased tax for the poorest and cut it for the richest. In the process, they have been unable to deliver the improvements in health, education and pensions that people thought they were going to receive back in 1997 when Labour came to office.

Our proposal shows that the Chancellor had a choice about what to do with the money available to him, which he decided to spend on tax cuts. We have used figures in the Red Book to demonstrate that he could have taken 2.5 million people out of paying tax, increased equality and created a more progressive, simpler tax system which would please even the accountants. We believe that the Labour Government should have delivered on that; it is something on which the Liberal Democrats aim to deliver.

7.30 pm

**Mr. Flight:** We have some sympathy with the underlying principles of the amendment, although we do not support it, in part for the reasons stated by the Minister and because it would create the equivalent of a personal allowance of £6,415 at a cost of over £4 billion, and we do not feel that that is fiscally viable right now.

It is a great pity that a massive effort has been devoted to simplifying the wording of tax legislation but not to the principle of simplifying the tax system for the typical citizen. If anything, the Government have an almost obsessive desire further to complicate the tax system as it applies to individuals and companies, including even foreign companies operating in this country. It must be wrong that ordinary citizens are unable to understand the tax rules that apply to them and that millions of people have to use accountants to look after their tax affairs. Surely it is not an insurmountable problem to arrive at a much simpler system.

In principle, the debate is whether to have two rates or to stay with the three rates that have been introduced by this Administration. Crucial to that, as the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) pointed out, is the Government's intention. Is the 10 per cent. band just a political gimmick or do they intend to widen it significantly so that it is more in line with a model such as that in Hong Kong? It must be inefficient to have millions of people paying very small amounts of tax at 10 per cent., as at present, when an averaged-out higher personal allowance would potentially take a significant number of people out of tax.

The crucial point is the principle that lies behind the amendment. As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, the message is loud and clear, whether it comes from the Institute for Fiscal Studies or chartered accountants, that there is an urgent need to focus on simplifying our tax system. More and more people will end up doing self-assessment tax returns, so more and more people will fail to understand the tax rules that apply to them and there will be increasing trouble with people making mistakes and feeling that they have been ill treated.

*[Mr. Flight]*

The amendment is a point well raised, but the specific mechanism is not operative. The cost of raising personal allowances to over £6,000 is too great a fiscal burden at this stage.

**The Paymaster General:** I understand the Liberal Democrats' main argument that personal allowances should be increased to remove low earners from the tax system. The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) knows full well that the Government's response is that an increase in personal allowances benefits higher earners to a greater extent. To achieve our objective of dealing with the poverty trap and the inequality to which the hon. Gentleman referred, we therefore introduced the 10p starting rate of tax. In this Budget we raised the allowance applicable at the 10p rate—that provision is set out in the next clause.

I understand why the Liberal Democrats consistently advance their argument, but the Government reject it because we feel that it does not deal with our objectives of helping those on low incomes and reducing inequality. The hon. Gentleman's arguments were very confused, but I understand that the amendment is a means whereby Liberal Democrat Members can discuss their principled position on personal allowances. The amendment would introduce zero rate relief on £1,880, if the next clause is agreed to. All the arguments that the hon. Gentleman has advanced against the Government apply equally to his proposal because the amendment would result in a personal allowance, a zero rate relief band and subsequent relief bands. He knows that the cost of such a measure would be about £4.8 billion, which is not an insubstantial amount.

The hon. Gentleman asked why there should be a 10p rate. The Government have made it clear that we want to provide an incentive to those on low wages to work harder, earn more and keep more of their earnings, so that we can tackle the poverty trap. The 10p rate is not the only policy that we are using; there is also the minimum wage and the national insurance changes to which my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) referred earlier. We have also introduced the working families tax credit and the children's tax credit, which deal specifically with poverty. The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that, as a Minister, I favour our approach, with its balanced package, to what the Government agree with him are extremely important issues. The tax system and the supporting in-work benefits must not act as a disincentive to unemployed people to move into employment.

I turn now to the inequality argument advanced by the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that he will acknowledge that the vast number of people on low incomes are receiving benefits and are therefore not paying tax. Government policy assists them by enabling them to keep more money. By introducing programmes such as the new deal, we move people out of unemployment and into paid work. That affects the figures to which the hon. Gentleman referred. He sought to portray a simplistic relationship of cause and effect, but there are other ways to interpret the facts.

The data to which the hon. Gentleman referred relate to the 1999–2000 tax year, and if I am not mistaken they are from the Office for National Statistics. He will know that those figures do not include—indeed, they specifically exclude—the full-year benefits of the working families tax credit, the full effects of the introduction of the 10p rate and the reforms of national insurance, which have benefited those on lower earnings. Taken together over the whole Parliament, all the Government's measures show that we are bearing down on the inequality that the hon. Gentleman seeks to tackle in his amendment. Our judgment is that the balance of using resources is correctly set by widening the 10p band.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** The hon. Lady will be aware that statistics released in the past few days confirm that the gap between the richest and the poorest in this country has continued to widen. She has a good record of campaigning on poverty issues during the period in which I have been in the House. Does it not concern her that the Government's choice of cutting direct taxes while increasing indirect taxes inevitably increases the tax burden on those on the lowest incomes while cutting the burden on those on the highest incomes?

**Dawn Primarolo:** The hon. Gentleman has probably, like me, read the IFS study that shows that the disposable income of those on the lowest incomes is increasing. We must both be careful about how we use the figures. I take that as a correction to myself not to stretch certain issues too far.

As a result of the introduction of the 10p rate which, as I explained, is part of a wider set of policy objectives, including the minimum wage, national insurance reform and working families tax credit—which will move into integrated child credit in 2003—3 million people have had their tax bills halved, including 2.2 million low-paid workers. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor's proposals to increase the 10p band, which are the subject of clause 51, will halve marginal rates of tax for a further 450,000 people.

I accept that Liberal Democrat Members always want more, and that they want us to go further this evening. However, the Government believe that targeted tax cuts are part of a broader package to help those on low pay and, specifically, to help the unemployed into employment; that is the way forward. That package is affordable for the country; the extra £4.8 billion that the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell proposes to spend in his amendment is not. While I have every sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's principled position, I do not agree with the methods that he seeks to use to achieve his objectives, so I urge my hon. Friends to vote against the amendment, should he push it to a vote.

**Mr. Taylor:** Having listened to the hon. Lady, I am worried that the Government are still advancing a case that nobody outside the House sees as anything other than a continuation of the Chancellor's political effort, begun in opposition, to rock the Conservatives. That has complicated tax. Everyone who deals with poverty argues that our route is better.

I am glad we have had an opportunity to debate the issue and I hope that the Paymaster General and her colleagues will reflect on it. Perhaps it is better to have movement on that after the election, rather than before. People are aware of the penny that we would put on tax for education and the higher rate that we would introduce

for people with an income of over £100,000 a year to pay for our education, health and pensions policies, but this is an opportunity to make the point that we are also arguing for a tax cut for those on the lowest incomes. My hon. Friends and I believe that the Government have made the wrong choice; the Paymaster General has not addressed that in arguing that the amendment should be rejected on a technical point. We therefore wish to press it to a vote.

*Question put,* That the amendment be made:—

*The Committee divided:* Ayes 41, Noes 281.

**Division No. 193]** **[7.43 pm**

**AYES**

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Burnett, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Fearn, Ronnie
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Paisley, Rev Ian
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willis, Phil

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Steve Webb and**
**Mr. David Heath.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie

Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mrs. Anne McGuire and**
**Mr. Ian Pearson.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Flight:** The issues that we wish to raise in relation to clause 50 are represented by amendments that were not selected. Our argument is that the clause does nothing in the area of tax policy to relieve or compensate those who have suffered most from Labour's 48 stealth taxes, equivalent as they are to a 10p increase in income tax. The categories that we believe should be compensated are savers, married people in cases where one spouse has chosen to stay at home to look after the children, and those who are retired.

The Conservative view is that it would be correct to remove the starting and basic income tax rate on savings; to abolish the 10p ordinary rate of income tax on dividends; and in particular to restore to individuals who are non-taxpayers but who are in receipt of dividends their right to claim a 10 per cent. tax credit in cash. The failure to address that is, in our view, Labour's single most unjust policy in respect of personal taxation. The issue has been raised many times and it affects 660,000 people.

People's savings have been accumulated out of income that has been taxed. It is therefore a question of principle as to whether the fruits of that taxed income should again be taxed. A further issue is the volatility in the savings rate that has occurred under the present Administration, and the economic good sense of seeking to achieve a much more stable savings rate.

It may surprise the Government to learn that of the 12 million shareholders in this country, almost 60 per cent. belong to socio-economic groups C1, C2 and D/E. We want to encourage saving by the many. Proposals to relieve savings from basic and lower rate tax would also go some way to offset Labour's £5 billion a year stealth tax on pension funds. It will cost the average family an extra £400 a year to keep its pension fund capable of producing the same pension as it would have done before the removal of the advance corporation tax credit. The Government are no doubt aware that Tesco, for example, has advised its staff that contributions need to be increased by some 15 per cent. a year just to stand still.

On the wider issue of savings and the volatility of savings, there is a major point to be made about the Government's overall fiscal policy. They love to boast of the extent to which they have reduced Government debt, but they do not comment on the fact that personal debt has increased by almost the same amount as Government debt has gone down. They do not reveal the fact that disposable incomes have grown by considerably less than the economy as a whole—on average, by 1.7 per cent. The reason why the savings rate has more than halved is that individuals have been borrowing more in order to keep up their consumption.

The danger of this posture, especially now that we are entering much more difficult economic climate, as the Chancellor now admits, is that individuals will look to de-gear and to rebuild their net savings, quite sharply reducing their consumption in the process. That is precisely what leads to the ups and downs—the booms and busts—of the business cycle. The Chancellor is making optimistic noises about the British economy. I trust that they will prove well founded, but the Minister knows that growth in the first quarter was only some 0.3 per cent., annualised at 1.2 per cent. The evidence is that the savings rate is bouncing back up rather more sharply than is desirable. Our view is that the tax policy in relation to savings should be designed to stabilise the savings rate as far as possible.

8 pm

**Mr. Bercow:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, as he is an acknowledged expert on these matters. In the context of the halving of the savings ratio, which is common ground among all hon. Members, what assessment has he made of the likely impact on that state of affairs of the substitution of the inferior ISAs for the superior TESSAs?

**Mr. Flight:** I thank my hon. Friend for that question. As everyone knows, the main issue with ISAs is that they are too complicated. People still do not understand clearly the difference between mini-ISAs and maxi-ISAs. In terms of the savings that ISAs have attracted, the figures appear reasonably satisfactory—excepting those for recent months. The relevant figures are difficult to distil, as large sums have been transferred into ISAs from building society accounts that did not qualify in the past.

**Dawn Primarolo:** The hon. Gentleman is being uncharacteristically disingenuous. Perhaps he will tell the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) that, as he well knows, a third more people are investing in ISAs than invested in TESSAs and PEPs together in their last and most successful year. In total, 8.5 million people

invested some £28.4 billion in ISAs in their first year. ISAs are doing extremely well, especially for people who want to save smaller amounts.

**Mr. Flight:** I thank the Paymaster General for those figures, but I point out that they do not tell the entire story. The preponderance of ISAs involves people who were already building society savers and who merely switched a modest cash element of their savings from outside an ISA to within one.

**Dawn Primarolo:** Good for them.

**Mr. Flight:** Yes, but the argument that ISAs have created huge numbers of new savers does not stand up.

Let us consider also how total volumes of savings in the various good years of TESSAs and PEPs compare with those in the best years of ISAs. When the Government introduced ISAs, they admitted that their primary objective was to reduce the tax cost that was previously associated with PEPs and TESSAs. Indeed, that objective was set out in their Green Paper. Although they have been forced by the pressure of public opinion to keep the ISA level at £7,000 rather than to reduce it to £5,000, the benefits to the community in terms of tax incentives have been marginally less than those of PEPs and TESSAs.

In respect of the tax positions of people who are retired and of those who will be retiring, one of the particularly objectionable aspects of the Government's fiscal policy was the removal of married couples allowance for all people who were going to retire in future. The spin was that retired people would continue to receive the allowance, but that applied only to people who were already 65 and receiving the money. Many people made their retirement plans on the basis that they would qualify for the allowance, but reached 65 this year and cannot receive it.

The Opposition propose to increase the age allowance by £2,000 a year for everyone over 65; that would more than compensate for the circumstances that I am describing. It would take 1 million retired people out of tax and benefit almost 3 million more people by approximately £400 a year. It would also be a powerful antidote to the major swing towards a means-tested society that has occurred under the current Administration. The proportion of retired people on means testing has increased from 37 per cent. to 56 per cent. It is especially demeaning for people in the latter part of their lives to have to come cap in hand for means-tested benefits. Many pensioners are paying tax and also qualify for means-tested benefits. The measures that we propose for 2003-04 would be a major swing back towards enabling people to stand on their own feet and allowing most pensioners to come out of the tax net altogether.

I want to comment now on tax and marriage and on couples in which one spouse wants to stay at home and bring up young children. We propose to restore a tax incentive for marriage and to acknowledge the importance of stability for people who are bringing up young children. We would recognise the contribution made by parents who are looking after young children or caring for elderly relatives by allowing the non-working spouse who is staying at home to transfer his or her personal tax allowance, which is now £4,535 a year, to the working spouse.

That arrangement would be worth up to £1,000 a year, depending on tax rates and full usage of the personal allowance. In particular, it would enable many people who would prefer to work part time rather than full time to do so, in order to give them more time to look after young children. Such a tax change would offer a tremendous benefit to almost 4 million married couples with children aged under 11. In more than one respect, the Government have penalised through taxation—I trust that they have not done so intentionally—married couples where one spouse wishes to stay at home to look after children.

Let us also consider widows. We are supposed to have a caring Labour Government, but the position of widows has deteriorated under this Administration. Unlike the Labour party, we propose to cancel any tax burden for widowed parents by making the continuing widowed mothers allowance and the new widowed parents allowance, both of which are worth £87.50 a week, free of tax in future.

Our concern is what the clause does not do. It merely repeats the tax bands as they were last year and does nothing to compensate the main sufferers under Labour's tax policies. We want to put on record the key areas in which the future Conservative Government would propose to use by 2003-04 the £8 billion—not £16 billion—of tax savings that we have identified, in order to do justice to the people who have suffered and to return a stable savings regime throughout the country.

**Dawn Primarolo:** I want to contribute very briefly to this short debate. I begin by reminding the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) of something that he knows well: household wealth is at a record high and the ratio of household debt to wealth has fallen. As he follows such matters very closely, he knows also that the Bank of England said in its quarterly bulletin for spring 2001 that the UK household saving ratio did not seem unusually low when adjusted for changes in inflation rates in the past 30 years. When I challenged him, he had the good grace to concede the success of ISAs in assisting people who wish to save. He also acknowledged that they were more successful than their predecessors, PEPs and TESSAs.

I am a little surprised at the hon. Gentleman, who knows a great deal about the subject, because once again his point about the tax on savings is a red herring. He tried to claim that the same money is taxed twice. He knows that that is not the case: the tax applies to earned, additional income that has not already been taxed. He slipped quickly over that point because he does not try to mislead the House. He seemed to claim that the same money was taxed twice, but I am sure that he did not mean that, because he knows that it is not so.

The hon. Gentleman made several points, and presented the Conservative party's manifesto on tax on pensions, the age-related allowance, savings and the married couples allowance. He failed to point out that 90 per cent. of the age-related personal allowances, which Conservative Members say they will provide for the over-65s, would go to the richest 30 per cent. of pensioners. Sixty per cent. of the gain would go to the richest 20 per cent. He also failed to point out that only four out of 10 pensioners pay tax. Some of our pensioners experience poverty not because they pay tax but because their income is low. The Government have therefore introduced the minimum

*[Dawn Primarolo]*

income guarantee, increases in the state pension, and the £200 winter fuel allowance, and made a commitment to the pension tax credit. I shall go no further because I am straying beyond the clause.

**Mr. Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton) *rose—*

**Mr. Flight** *rose—*

**Dawn Primarolo:** I shall give way first to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), who is itching to intervene.

**Mr. Davey:** Will the Paymaster General confirm that using the money that the Conservatives propose to spend on a so-called tax cut for pensioners to increase the basic state pension, as proposed by the Liberal Democrats, would be much more effective in reducing pensioner poverty?

**Dawn Primarolo:** I shall not act as a referee between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives about which party has the marginally better policy. I believe that the Government have the best policy.

**Mr. Flight:** The Paymaster General may have misunderstood our proposals. Pensioners who pay tax at the rate of 40 per cent. would not benefit from our proposals. The 3 million pensioners in the middle, who pay the standard rate of tax, would be the main beneficiaries.

**Dawn Primarolo:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for confirming that not all pensioners would benefit from Conservative party proposals on the age-related allowance. The publicity and—dare I say it?—the spin implied that all pensioners would gain from the change. Clearly, that is not the case.

**Mr. Bercow:** The Paymaster General invariably makes the best fist of a poor case. It is, none the less, a poor case. We are considering a position whereby the interest earned on income that has already been taxed is at stake. It is mere casuistry for the hon. Lady to dance on the head of a pin. My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs, whose expertise the Paymaster General has graciously and rightly acknowledged, made the point that people are being taxed twice for the same money. That is so blindingly obvious that only an extraordinarily clever person could fail to see the point.

8.15 pm

**Dawn Primarolo:** The hon. Gentleman is extraordinarily clever. If he cares to study the way in which investments are taxed, he will realise that they are taxed on the interest that they earn. That money has not been taxed before.

**Mr. Bercow:** That is very cheeky.

**Dawn Primarolo:** That is how tax law works. If Conservatives want to explain the benefit of their suggested policy change in that way, that is fine. However, they should not suggest that the money is taxed twice.

I dealt with savings in my intervention on the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs and in my initial comments. He also considered the married couples allowance. First, the Conservatives said that they would reintroduce the married couples allowance, then they said that they would not. They then claimed that they would limit the number of those who would gain from it. Again, the proposals lack clarity. Eight out of 10 married couples and eight of 10 families with children would gain nothing. Single parents and married couples with both partners working would gain nothing. That also applies to married couples with children of secondary school age. However, the Government's policies—the 10p starting rate, the working families tax credit, the minimum wage, the children's tax credit, increases in child benefit and reform of the national insurance system—are all targeted at helping families on low income.

Clause 50 establishes income tax for 2001–02. It shows that the Government have kept their promises on tax rates. We promised not to increase the top rate of tax, which remains at 40 per cent. We promised not to raise the basic rate of tax. The Chancellor's stewardship of the economy, ably assisted by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary, has meant that we were able to make a cut of 1p in the basic rate last year, to 22p. We promised to introduce the new starting rate of 10p and we have done that. The next clause expands that provision.

We are halving the marginal rate of tax for nearly 3 million people. Our policies mean that the direct tax burden on a single earner family on average earnings and with two children will fall from 21.5 per cent. in 1996–97 to 18.1 per cent. by 2001—the lowest since 1972. The Government keep their promises on tax, and I commend the clause to the Committee.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 50 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

**Clause 51**

STARTING RATE LIMIT FOR 2001–02

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Flight:** Although the increase in the band by £360 per annum will be welcome to all citizens who benefit, and the Government boast that they have increased it by more than the statutory indexed increase, it is worth pointing out that it is equivalent to 69p a week. At the same time, the increase in the upper limit for national insurance from £535 to £575 a week has resulted in an additional national insurance bill of £2.09 a week for 2.9 million people.

The Chancellor did not announce that in the Budget; in retrospect, we knew that another stealth tax was on the way. Therefore, nearly 3 million people are £2.09 a week worse off and 69p per week better off. There may be justifiable reasons for such redistribution—it depends on one's view of what is best for the economy. However, the Chancellor's failure to make it clear that, for 3 million people in the middle, more was being taken away with one hand than given with the other shows a lack of transparency and is simply electioneering.

**Mr. Edward Davey:** I want briefly to put on record my concern at the continuing complexity in the tax system

that the 10p band represents. The arguments against the 10p band are as powerful as those that were used against the 20p band when it was introduced as an election gimmick by the former Chancellor, now Lord Lamont, just before the 1992 election. The problem with these bands of lower tax over a small amount of income is that they do not target the most tax relief on the poorest people. They also add unnecessary complexity to the tax system.

If one is trying to target precious resources on those who need them most, one should always increase the allowance. That takes people out of tax altogether. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has been arguing this for years, and it has been right for years. One used to hear from many Labour politicians—including some very reform-minded politicians—when they were in opposition, that they understood that argument. Simple arithmetical calculations can be made to show that, for every extra £1 million that the Government have to spend, it is always better for the poorest people if that money is spent on increasing the allowance because that takes the poorest people out of tax altogether.

**Mr. Bercow:** It is very difficult to contain oneself in these circumstances because, frankly, the amiability of the hon. Gentleman is equalled only by his effrontery. He has the brass neck to grumble about the complexity of the system—which has undoubtedly been exacerbated under the auspices of this Chancellor—but, unless he is going to argue, as my hon. Friends and I consistently do, for simplicity and for lower overall taxation, he has a cheek, as he is arguing for higher overall taxation. He can rest assured that his cheek in this debate will be relayed by me to the next Conservative Member of Parliament for his constituency, Mr. David Shaw.

**Mr. Davey:** I am sure that the former hon. Member for Dover, to whom the hon. Gentleman refers, will be pleased that his election expenses have now been started by the hon. Gentleman.

It is rich for the hon. Gentleman to accuse another Member of the House of having a brass neck. He raised the issues of the level of taxation and of the simplicity of the system. I make no bones about the fact that the Liberal Democrats have argued, continue to argue, and will argue at the forthcoming election that the basic rate of income tax and a new top level of tax for incomes above £100,000 a year should be raised to provide revenue to fund our public services and to ensure that pensioners have a better deal. However, I shall not continue down that line, Mr. Lord, because you will rule me out of order.

I was making a point, separate from the hon. Gentleman's argument, about complexity. Whatever one's view on the overall burden of taxation, surely there can be consensus on the need for simplifying the system and getting rid of bureaucracy and unnecessary costs, whether in relation to individuals or the corporate sector. New tax measures such as this add extra complexities.

**Dawn Primarolo:** Will the hon. Gentleman explain whether a balance needs to be struck between simplicity and fairness? If he believes that to be the case, where and how should such a balance be struck?

**Mr. Davey:** The point that I was making was that if one increases the personal allowance—the 0 per cent. band of taxation—one gets the benefits of both worlds: the benefits of greater fairness and of greater simplicity. That is the whole point of the argument made not only be party politicians but by academics, accountants, members of the tax profession and members of the business sector.

**Dawn Primarolo:** I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman is making now. However, when he started his complexity argument, he was advocating raising the marginal rates of tax and the average rates of taxation by a combination of policies that he said his party would advocate at the next election, whenever that is. Will he explain why it would be fair to put up the marginal rates of tax and the average rates of taxation at the same time?

**Mr. Davey:** The hon. Lady is making a similar mistake to the one made by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), which, to her credit, is very unlike her. The Liberal Democrats have always made it clear that marginal rates of tax should go up to fund essential expenditure. That is completely different from the argument that I am making, which is that if the Government have a certain amount of money to spend on making the tax system fairer, as sure as night follows day it would be a better use of that money to increase the income tax allowance, the 0 per cent. tax band. That would have the added advantage of not adding these unnecessary complexities to the system.

That is a simple point that has been made many times by hon. Members in all parts of the House. I want to use the opportunity of this clause stand part debate to make the point again. We have a tax system that is far too complicated, and we should argue at every opportunity for simplifying it. One of the Government's major economic mistakes has been to make the tax system far too complex, and I hope that, as they think again about tax policy, which they may or may not have the chance to implement in a future Parliament, they will understand that reducing complexity is an important issue. It is important in the personal sector, in the move to greater self-assessment, and in the reduction in complexity for the corporate sector. This is a microeconomic issue that has macroeconomic outturns, and the Government should take it very seriously.

**Dawn Primarolo:** The clause fulfils the Government's commitment to introduce a 10p starting rate of income tax—the lowest rate of income tax since 1962–63. We are also introducing a range of other measures, on income tax, national insurance contributions and tax credits, to encourage people into work and ensure that they keep more of what they earn. The allowance with which the clause deals is part of that package.

Both the hon. Gentlemen who have spoken in the debate seem fundamentally to misunderstand the purpose of the Government's policy, particularly when it is coupled with the new deal. One of the Government's many tasks is to assist those who are unemployed into paid employment. That requires us to ensure that there are low marginal rates of tax, so that those people can move from unemployment into employment and then up the ladder, earning more and more.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) makes a simple point, and he makes it regularly. He wants things simple, simple, simple. However, a balance has to be struck in policy objectives

*[Dawn Primarolo]*

between fairness and simplicity. We have had the discussion a number of times in the House, in Committee and in Select Committees about how the Government should balance their objectives and keep the tax system as simple and as clear as possible.

If the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton looks closely at his proposals he will realise that, if implemented, they would cut directly across the objective of moving people from unemployment to employment—an objective that I believe his party shares with the Government, but which he is in danger of undermining. That is what the hon. Gentleman has seemed unable to grasp during our discussions about the 10p rate and the 10p band rate.

**Mr. Edward Davey:** I thank the Paymaster General for giving way so generously, but can she explain how a policy objective of moving people from unemployment to work is better served by a 10p rate band than by a 0p rate band?

**Dawn Primarolo:** I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was present when I explained to his hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor), who had spoken to a Liberal Democrat amendment, about the importance of giving unemployed people incentives to move from benefits to work and ensuring that they keep more of what they earn. The desirability of reducing, wherever possible, the marginal rate of tax in order to maintain that process is the rationale of the 10p rate and the 10p rate band. I know that the hon. Gentleman thinks that the Government have other motives, and that our proposal is not part of the welfare-to-work programme and is not related to our objective of securing full employment. If he examines the full range of our policies, however, he will see that they are all targeted in the same direction.

This has been a short but interesting debate on a very narrow clause. I commend the clause to the Committee.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 51 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

## Clause 52

CHILDREN'S TAX CREDIT: AMOUNT FOR 2001-02 AND FOR SUBSEQUENT YEARS

*Question proposed*, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

8.30 pm

**Mr. Flight:** The Government may have forgotten that three or four years ago—unfortunately, the Chancellor's office arranged a little leak—the Select Committee on Social Security advised strongly against arrangements of the type that the children's tax credit represents, suggesting that such arrangements were ill-conceived and not the best way of helping children. Of course, an increase in the maximum receipt to £520 a year will be welcomed by those who qualify, but the principle of CTC remains flawed. It tends to benefit the lowest earners with children least; it is complicated and regressive in its interaction with working families tax credit; and it is unfair in that its impact on families with a single earner is different from its impact on families with double earners.

The proposed increase will, in many instances, reduce entitlement to working families tax credit, as well as creating yet more complexities and administrative problems for the employers who have been forced to administer CTC. The Chancellor himself has admitted that the arrangement is unsatisfactory by announcing that Labour would abolish it in future, and make it part of an integrated child care element—or rather that the child care element of working families tax credit would be replaced by an integrated child benefit.

As has been widely recognised, it is morally wrong for a child benefit to discriminate against single-earner couples. If the combined income of a working couple is £65,000—it may be £60,000; I have forgotten the precise figure—that couple are likely to qualify. If only one earner is involved, the couple will not qualify, although the same children are there to benefit. After tax, the single earner may have less than two earners receiving the same gross pay.

There is an administrative nightmare when divorced and separated parents and couples involving new partners come together to look after children. The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, expressing the feelings of many, has complained that the application form is so complex that, for a number of people the task of completing it is too difficult, and they will lose out as a result. I believe that some 500,000 have failed to apply in time this year, and they are likely to be those most in need of support. Even the BBC news, that great organ of the Labour party, has admitted that citizens need a guidebook to work out what family tax credits they will be entitled to.

The Conservatives are pledged to review the position, to introduce a fairer and simpler child tax credit and to increase the cash benefits by a further £200 per annum in respect of children under five. We will set out in due course how we will do it. The principle of providing greater support to children must be right—I should declare an interest: I have four children. The cost of child rearing is a major burden. I go back to the cross-party Social Security Committee, which advised against trying to apply a means-tested approach. The mechanism is not working. The Government themselves admit that, in their proposals to make changes in due course.

**Mr. Edward Davey:** Let me start by saying something that the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) did not say: it is welcome that more money is going to families with children.

**Mr. Flight:** I did say that.

**Mr. Davey:** I beg the hon. Gentleman's pardon. He corrects me from a sedentary position. I withdraw the remark. It is important to target extra money on families with children. This Government have done so, which has been a welcome change: the previous Government did not do so. It is worth acknowledging that, and putting it on the record.

Having said that—

**Mr. Graham Allen (Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household):** Ah—there's a "but".

**Mr. Davey:** There is; the hon. Gentleman from the Whips Office is right. The children's tax credit is a very

complicated way of targeting money on families with children. Simplicity is of the essence in many of these issues. Let me explain how complex a system of child care support we have. We have child benefit, a children's tax credit, the child care tax credit and the working families tax credit. It is incredibly complicated. There is a plethora of forms and of civil servants and a range of guides, and the different tax credits operate in different ways.

**Mr. Flight:** In contradictory ways.

**Mr. Davey:** The hon. Gentleman is right. It is not surprising that not everyone who is entitled to the children's tax credit is taking it up. It is so confusing. That is what happens when we have complexity.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the Government have realised their mistake. They have realised that they have made the system complex, so they are going to get rid of the children's tax credit. We are debating an increase in the credit that has come into force only this month, when the Government have already announced that they will get rid of CTC by 2003. They have admitted that this was the wrong way to go about things. Although it is welcome that more money is going to children and families, this is not exactly the most effective way of governing. It suggests that there is a lack of strategic thought in the Treasury. The extra money is welcome, but the piling of change on change and the extra complexity leave one questioning the way in which the Government have gone about things.

Although it has been said before, and I am sure that the Minister is almost fed up of hearing it, it must be said again that some of the support mechanisms for families, particularly the working families tax credit, have imposed severe burdens on business. Small business in particular has been hit by the burden of administering the credit, which was previously administered in the form of family credit by the Department of Social Security. Businesses have effectively been asked to get involved with social security mechanisms. As a principle, that is not sensible.

As we consider the clause in the knowledge that the Government have those plans—and particularly as the clause increases the value of the children's tax credit—it is worth asking how they propose to get around some of the problems that they have created for themselves in not having a coherent strategy from the start. When they move to the integrated children's tax credit, if they do, it will, we are told, be assessed on household income—the incomes of both parents. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs made the valid point that a single-earner couple is discriminated against in the administration of the children's tax credit as compared with a dual-earner couple who have earnings below the higher-rate tax level. That lacuna in the current legislation will cause a problem when the Government introduce the integrated tax credit. A couple who both earn an amount just below that which qualifies for higher-rate tax, and who therefore receive the full children's tax credit, will have their incomes added together when they are assessed for the integrated tax credit and, unless the scale is increased significantly, they will lose a substantial amount of children's tax credit—and possibly all of it.

The Paymaster General is giving me one of her quizzical looks, which suggests that she may have thought of that point. If she has, I hope that she will enlighten the Committee further, because we have had no public announcement of how the Government intend to overcome that very real problem. Some families in that situation can benefit to the tune of £520 a year from the children's tax credit, and they will stand to lose a significant amount when it is integrated. If the Government try to take £520 a year away from such families, they will soon hear all about it.

I welcome the extra money for families with children, but—as the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs said—more than 500,000 people who are entitled to the credit have not yet claimed it and will not benefit from the increase in its first year. The Paymaster General may have more up-to-date figures and I hope that take-up has increased. My party wants the take-up to be 100 per cent. and we hope that the Government are successful in achieving that, because no one wishes to see families with children denied money to which Parliament has decided they are entitled. However, the question is how we can ensure that those families with real financial problems are getting the credit, and that is an important policy objective for everyone. I hope that the Paymaster General will be able to tell us how the Government will be able to ensure that their extra generosity goes to the people who need it most.

**Dawn Primarolo:** Clause 52 will increase the amount paid for the children's tax credit so that it is worth up to £520 a year, or £10 a week. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor said in his pre-Budget report last year that he was minded to do that, and he confirmed it in the Budget. The increase of £1.50 a week is the equivalent of a 3p cut in the basic rate of tax, and will be very important for those single-earner families on average earnings who will particularly benefit.

The hon. Members for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) and for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) both welcomed the proposals, but they raised several points of detail, including the treatment of single-earner families compared to dual-earner families; the position in cases of separation or divorce; the complexity of administration; the numbers who have applied; and the transition to the integration of the full panoply of support that is offered to families. I shall deal with each point, briefly.

8.45 pm

First, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton ended his speech by referring to the complexity of the current child care support structure. That structure includes child benefit, income support—which the hon. Gentleman omitted to mention—working families tax credit and the children's tax credit. The Government intend to move in 2003 to an integrated child credit, based on a household income paid to the carer. That move will enable the Government to tackle some of the matters that have been raised this evening.

I can tell the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton that that move will be a substantial change affecting a huge number of families. The Government took the view that the move should be taken step by step. At each stage, we will ensure that we can get resources quickly to those families who need it most. That is why the working families tax credit will separate in 2003: there will be an employment tax credit for adults, while the child support

*[Dawn Primarolo]*

element will be made part of the integrated child credit. Those changes are part of a coherent strategy that will enable us to deal with the problem, identified by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton, in connection with single-earner and dual-earner families.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs should know—I hope that he does—that the treatment in the tax system of the difference between a single-earner family and a dual-earner family is the direct result of the introduction of independent taxation by the previous Government. I hasten to add that independent taxation is a good thing for millions of women. It means that each taxpayer has allowances and access to tax rates. As a result, a family with two earners clearly has access to both earners' allowances, and the tax rates.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs said that that produces direct discrimination. In fact, it is merely a function of a tax system that respects and recognises individuals equally. We are working to resolve the matter, although the solution is not simple. Moving to the integrated child credit means that there will be a move to a household assessment which the present tax system does not allow us to make. The different treatment of dual-earner and single-earner families will thereby be dealt with, as the amount of tax payable will be assessed according to each household's income.

I reject the suggestion that we should have waited and not used resources currently available for the children's tax credit to help the families involved immediately over two years.

**Mr. Flight:** I accept that the reason for the distortion is a function of our tax system, but I refer the Minister to the deliberations of the Select Committee on Social Security. Two or three years ago, the Committee focused on just that problem, and made some suggestions for dealing with it. The Government therefore did not have to go down the route that resulted in the functional problem that the Minister describes.

**Dawn Primarolo:** If the hon. Gentleman looks at the latest report from the Social Security Committee on child support and the development of the integrated child credit, and if he reads its comments on the children's tax credit, he will find that the Committee now recognises that matters have moved on. It accepts that an attempt to bring together for the first time support for children into one place, to be paid directly to the main carer, is the correct way to advance. The Committee now acknowledges that the children's tax credit is an important element in providing immediate support to those families.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs referred to the complexity of the system with regard to separation and divorce. The arrangements for the children's tax credit were agreed in the Finance Act 2000. I do not recollect the hon. Gentleman or any of his colleagues referring to the very unhappy circumstances in which a couple separate and there has to be a fair and decent apportionment of entitlement to a tax relief if there is joint care of the children. The children's tax credit approach to that is sensitive and fair. It has not been criticised before. Compared with the huge complexities of the married couples allowance and the additional personal allowance in terms of entitlement, the arrangements in the children's tax credit are as fair and straightforward as possible, given that they apply to complicated personal circumstances where a family is under considerable pressure and stress.

The hon. Gentleman said that the form was complicated. I am sure that he cannot have seen what is a straightforward form for claiming tax relief. He might be confusing it with some other form, but I do not want to speculate which one it might be. The application form for claiming the children's tax credit was researched and tested on a sample of about 1,000 people to see whether they understood it clearly or whether it would put them off making a claim. The most recent figures show that 3.5 million PAYE taxpayers—some 85 per cent.—have returned their forms. The other 1 million people are self-employed and pay their tax in arrears anyway. Under the self-assessment scheme, their relief will be available to them when they account for their income in the current tax year.

I agree that we need to find those people who are entitled to claim the children's tax credit but have not yet done so. The Chancellor wrote to every hon. Member asking them to encourage parents at every opportunity to apply for the relief. It will be paid from the beginning of this tax year, whenever they apply for it. I hope that all right hon. and hon. Members will continue to encourage parents to claim the children's tax credit, because up to £10 a week is no small amount for those families.

**Mr. Edward Davey:** I know that the Paymaster General has not been speaking for long, but she has not answered my point about a two-earner couple—*[Interruption.]* The Minister says that she will answer it, but I will just make the point for the record. In my example, both people earn just below the base rate limit. When the integrated child credit is introduced, will they be protected against losing the £520 provided for in the clause?

**Dawn Primarolo:** I had not forgotten the hon. Gentleman's point; I was trying to work through each subject area.

When the Government introduce the integrated child credit in 2003, the Chancellor will have to look closely at the distributional impact of the introduction of the children's tax credit with regard to whether it benefits families as well as its predecessors did. I am sure that the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton would not expect me to commit the Chancellor to future decisions, although he might wish that I would. However, the hon. Gentleman's point must be crystal clear to all those who understand the position—that is, why would we create a system to help families that did not do so?

Finally, specific points were made about entitlement to children's tax credit and its interaction with the working families tax credit and the 10p rate. The combination of those three things will ensure that the families in greatest need receive maximum benefit from the provision that the Government have made available. On that basis, I commend the clause to the Committee.

*Question put and agreed to,*

*Clause 52 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

**Clause 53**

CHILDREN'S TAX CREDIT: BABY RATE

*Question proposed,* That the clause stand part of the Bill.

**Mr. Flight:** I shall speak about clause 53 and touch on schedule 11, which relates to it. The objective of the clause is to provide, from 2002–03, a full year's child tax credit in respect of a child born in the current tax year. I am not clear whether the credit will be given pro rata, but my understanding is that it will not. Would a couple who have a child in September 2002 and who qualify for full child tax credit receive the full £520 or six months' worth? The wording is slightly obscure about whether they would receive a full year's worth or a pro rata amount.

Schedule 11 adds complex changes to the rules when a qualifying baby is resident with more than one adult during the year of assessment. Will the Minister explain, in understandable language, what that means? The fact that the schedule refers to a "qualifying baby"—a qualifying child born in the relevant year—implies that there must be babies who do not qualify.

Disqualification under section 257AA of the Taxes Act echoes the definition of a qualifying child, and where a husband and wife or the relevant two people split up, they may lose some relief, which cannot then be claimed back. The schedule is so complex and obscure that I have read it several times without understanding precisely how it is intended to operate. My main request, therefore, is for a practical explanation of what people will receive and what the angle is on qualification and disqualification.

**Mr. Edward Davey:** I shall focus on the policy point, and why the Government are going down the route taken in the clause. They want to provide extra money for families with children aged under one—babies—and that aim is laudable. The question is whether the clause is the best way to do it.

In the past, new parents could claim a maternity grant on registration of the birth of their first child, and that provided a lump sum up-front that they could use for the expenditure well known to arise when one has a baby—on prams, cots and all the other things that one needs. Incidentally, perhaps I should declare an interest—although I am not sure whether it is required by the Register—as an unmarried male who hopes to be married and have a child.

9 pm

As regards political policy, the question is whether a maternity grant or a tax credit is the most effective measure. With a tax credit, the money is not up-front. Presumably, one has to wait for the monthly pay cheque, so the benefit will be received over a period. Perhaps some families buy everything on hire purchase, but many want to pay up-front, so the benefit of the Government's laudable aim of putting money in the pockets of families with new-born babies could be more effectively delivered if they chose a different route. The old maternity grant achieved what I am advocating—money up-front for the purchases needed at the beginning of a child's life.

There is a strong argument that a tax credit may not be the best way of delivering the Government's policy objective. Of course, there are arguments on both sides. The Government might say that a universal maternity grant would be claimable by higher-rate taxpayers, while the tax credit is, in effect, means-tested. However, there are not many people in that category; the means-testing necessary to achieve the Government's aims would not involve a huge amount of money.

Moreover, it is possible that the Government's chosen method might reduce take-up. That is important. What about families who do not pay income tax for a short period? What about families who have not applied for the credit and are not aware of it? They will miss out. We have heard about the problems of take-up of the children's tax credit, which is a recurring credit. How much greater will the problems be for a credit that lasts for only one year? I am not convinced that the Government are taking the right route to ensure that families who need extra help at that time receive it. I hope that the Minister can persuade me, but I am not sure whether she can.

There may have been take-up problems with the former maternity grant, but my recollection of the days before the Tories abolished it is that there was a high take-up rate. It was one of the benefits for which take-up was almost universal. It was advertised in maternity clinics, GP practices and so on, and it was fairly easy for people to apply. Young mothers might be reluctant to get involved with tax credits; it all sounds terribly financial and difficult. They might be more reluctant to go for that form of help than for a straightforward maternity grant.

I hope that the Government will be able to explain their policy objective. I am not convinced that it is the right way to go.

**Mr. Steve Webb** (Northavon): I should like to explore further the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) was making about take-up. The Paymaster General said that children's tax credit forms had been returned by about 4 million families on PAYE—so 15 per cent. have not yet claimed it. As my hon. Friend says, we do not know whether that 15 per cent. will claim the new baby tax credit. Obviously, it is not too late for them to do so, but they have not yet been found. Given that the Government invented the children's tax credit two years ago, and have thus had two years to find people but have failed to find that 15 per cent., there is a question about whether the new tax credit will eventually reach them.

**Dawn Primarolo:** The hon. Gentleman is very knowledgeable on such subjects, so he will recall that the take-up of family credit, for example, which ran for a considerably longer period, did not reach the heights that the children's tax credit has already achieved in the year in which it has become operational. Yes, we must find the 15 per cent. or so—the 500,000 people who have yet to send in their forms—so I am not complacent, but by any measure, the Government should be congratulated on the very high take-up that we have already achieved for the children's tax credit, notwithstanding all the other issues that the hon. Gentleman raises.

**Mr. Webb:** Well, that is interesting, is it not? The Paymaster General said, "by any measure", and there is an alternative yardstick to the family credit or the working families tax credit take-up rates—the child benefit take-up rate, which, as she will know, is approximately 100 per cent. She may know someone who is not claiming it, but the rate is about 100 per cent.

*[Mr. Webb]*

The Government have decided that they want to support families who have a new baby, and they know where every single one lives, because when the child is registered for child benefit, the Department of Social Security sends back a response and issues a benefit book or notifies the family that the money can be paid into their bank account. They are precisely the people at whom the child tax credit is aimed, so instead of having a baby tax credit—the subject of the clause—why do not the Government simply put a £500 cheque in the post when those people claim child benefit on day one? As my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) says, that would give them a lump sum up-front, with which they could buy cots, prams and so on. I speak as a father of young children, which is why I thought I would take part in the debate.

Another point, which has not been mentioned so far, is that when the money becomes part of the monthly income for the first year of the child's life, there is a danger that the family will adjust to that pattern of income. Parents will have £40 a month extra for a year, but when their children reach the age of one, they will come to our surgeries telling us that the Government have just taken £40 a month from them.

There was never any pretence that the payment would continue—it is just for the first year—but the families will have become used to a pattern of regular income that includes the £40 boost. They will not have been able to smooth out the payments to buy the lump-sum items, because they will have had to buy those items at the beginning. The danger is that families may get used to that standard of living, and then have the money taken away from them. However, there may be a hidden agenda in that idea—to get the mum back to work.

The clause is not really about supporting families in poverty when babies are born, because that policy is now known as the sure start maternity grant, or whatever. I believe that that is largely the same initiative, but it has to be renamed. There is a maternity grant system, so the baby tax credit is not really about poverty among families with new babies; it is about the Government's agenda of getting more people into the labour market. They seem to suggest that a year is enough. The financial support for families with young children drops after a year, so how will they make up for the loss of that £40 a month? Perhaps they will start pin-money jobs or work a day a week at Tesco, or whatever.

I should be interested to hear the Paymaster General expand a little more on the Government's thinking, because they have not taken the action that they were expected to take on paid leave and so on. I wonder whether that is why the tax credit will last only a year—but what does that say about the Government's views on whether people should return to work a year or so after their children are born?

The Government clearly have a mechanism to get the money to every one of those families if they wanted to, but the problem is that they would have to use the benefits system. The second fundamental criticism is that the Government's dogma says that this is a tax credit. It is not in the tax code, and it is assessed on the family, not on the individual, but it is called a tax credit, so it will probably not feature in the DSS accounts and expenditure.

A system that would have given money to everyone who was entitled, with 100 per cent. take-up, has been ditched—or rather, not adopted—in favour of a system that misses 15 per cent., and does not help families so effectively because of the Treasury dogma that it is better to provide things called tax credits rather than social security benefits. Sometimes the benefits system is the best way to help families. Sometimes take-up is better in the benefits system than with a tax credit, so I am disappointed that the Government have not gone down that avenue.

**Dawn Primarolo:** Contributions to this debate have fallen into two categories. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight) talked about the clause and how it relates to schedule 11, and the hon. Members for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and for Northavon (Mr. Webb) referred to the support policies that go alongside the children's tax credit, which is designed to support young families.

I shall deal first with the points made about schedule 11 and the clause, and describe what they will do. They will introduce the additional children's tax credit that will be payable from 2002 for the first year after a child's birth. It will not be paid pro rata but for the whole year. The clause also provides for an additional £5,200 of children's tax credit in 2002–03, and that will be paid at the rate of 10 per cent.

The clause establishes the principle of the baby credit within the children's tax credit. Subsection (1) will insert a new subsection (2A) into section 257AA of the Taxes Act 1988, and will provide for an additional £5,200 of children's tax credit in the year after a child's birth. Similar provisions were made last year to introduce the children's tax credit, and although the figure of £520 already appears in the Taxes Act, this clause inserts the principle of the credit of £5,200.

The clause also describes the basis on which the baby credit can be claimed and defines the qualifying child. A child must be born within the tax year to qualify for the relief. The clause also relates to schedule 11 and provides for the introduction of the baby credit in 2002–03.

Schedule 11 will place those principles in the Taxes Act 1988 to sit alongside the existing provisions for the children's tax credit, which will be worth up to £520. Paragraph 2 introduces the higher rate and provides that it can be shared in the same way as the lower rate. Paragraph 4 provides for a re-election in year, which means that when a baby is born within the tax year, a family will be able to apply for the credit immediately and will not have to wait.

The schedule also makes it clear that however the credit is paid—it may be shared between two members of the family who live together or between two people who have separated but have equal responsibility for the child—the combination of their entitlement can never exceed 100 per cent. of the credit. However, if the family structure changes, their entitlement to the credit remains.

9.15 pm

If a family separates having claimed the baby credit and decides to share the remainder, the schedule provides for the two periods to be added together as a tax year. Otherwise, the baby would not be a qualifying baby.

Paragraph 5 sets out how the arrangements will work. Only one credit is paid for a child. Irrespective of whether the parents live together or are separated, they are still entitled to only one credit, which they can divide between them. I hope that that is crystal clear to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs, but I shall give way—with some reluctance—if it is not.

**Mr. Flight:** I have a simple and obvious question. As I understand it, depending on the extent to which the new-born baby qualifies, the parents will get both the children's credit and the baby credit in the first year of that child's life. However, the provision could also be taken to mean that it is not possible to get children's credit if the baby is born within the tax year. In those circumstances, the parents would have to wait until the child was six months, nine months or whatever and the next tax year started. The wording could mean either that a double credit is provided in the first year, or that it is not.

**Dawn Primarolo:** It is based on the year in which the child is born. However, I shall consider my explanation of schedule 11 and if for any reason I was not precisely correct, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman. I believe that what I have said is right. The provisions for the baby credit operate in the same way as those that were used when we introduced the children's tax credit in last year's Finance Bill. Clause 53 and schedule 11 add the baby credit, which will operate on the same basis in terms of proportionment.

The hon. Members for Northavon and for Kingston and Surbiton inquired about the best way in which to assist families, especially when their children are very young and the burdens are greatest on the family budget. I know that one of them is very knowledgeable about such matters and the other is hoping to be so soon. They asked whether the children's tax credit and the baby credit were the best way to proceed.

The pressures on families in the first year of a child's life are acute when one parent is unable to work. Certainly the woman would not work during her confinement and maternity leave. The baby credit should be seen as part of the package of changes that the Government are progressively making to maternity pay and maternity leave, which we are extending. The sure start maternity grant has been increased to £500 from April 2000 and is paid up-front. The children's tax credit and the working families tax credit will follow the income support premium for children, so that they are included in the integrated child credit. That will be paid directly to the carer and will be a regular income.

I was puzzled by what the hon. Member for Northavon said about the Government's hidden agenda to force women out to work. I can speak from personal experience. When I was a single parent, I met many people in the same circumstances. Indeed, I continue to meet single parents and know that many women want to be economically active. The debate centres on managing the balance between work and life, and the need to enable women to do that.

There is nothing sinister about the Government's advancing that agenda and taking the opportunity to introduce the children's tax credit, which gives immediate help to families. We are publicising the children's tax credit in bounty packs. I am sure that the hon. Member for Northavon, who must be knowledgable about those packs, will explain later to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton what they are and what their significance is, to mothers in particular.

The argument about dependency could apply to any payment. I agree with the hon. Member for Northavon that we must use the method of giving the support that works best, whether that comes through the social security system or through tax credits, which the Government believe are the best way to deal with questions of welfare to work and the work-life balance. Lowering marginal rates of tax provides incentives for family members to be in paid employment. The hon. Gentleman's point about families having to adjust to the loss of the baby credit could apply equally to child benefit. When a child becomes economically independent, the family lose child benefit, which is not an insubstantial amount, thanks to this Government, and if an unemployed person finds employment, the child premium will be lost.

I reassure the hon. Gentleman that there is not a sinister message behind the measure. I understand that he and his party do not see eye to eye with the Government about the use of tax credits, but I will continue to advocate them, and I am sure that he will continue to explain why he does not like them. There is no hidden agenda, and the Government have not concealed the fact that the children's tax credit will become part of the integrated child credit in 2003. Important decisions about the structure of that credit will be made. Those are not the subject of this debate, but hon. Members will want to be aware of them.

I have explained how clause 53 will operate and how schedule 11 supports it. I have made it clear how the Government's broad approach of using tax credits, maternity pay and grants to support families with young children is the best way forward. I commend the clause to the Committee.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause 53 ordered to stand part of the Bill.*

*Schedule 11 agreed to.*

*Bill (Clauses 1 to 3 and 16 to 53 and Schedules 4 to 11) reported, without amendment; to lie upon the Table.*

# Road Traffic

9.23 pm

**Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): I beg to move,

That the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 561), dated 26th February 2001, a copy of which was laid before the House on 28th February, be revoked.

The motion is in the name of my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) and other colleagues. It concerns a highly controversial statutory instrument and two important issues, which is why, unusually, we have requested that it be dealt with on the Floor of the House. When debating statutory instruments in Committee, on a number of occasions I have spoken about the importance of the matter under consideration, only to be asked why, in that case, I did not deal with it on the Floor of the House. Tonight, therefore, we are in the Chamber to deal with several issues relating to the road vehicles regulations.

Basically, two issues are involved. First, there are the proposals for a number plate with emblems on it—the letters GB and the European Union flag. Secondly, there is the matter of American cars, which involves deeper issues. If the regulation is passed, it will be difficult for many in the American car business to continue and people may be forced out of it.

I shall begin with the first and most important issue. In this country, we have a long tradition of not having any logos or flags on our number plates except a registration number. In 1998, the Government agreed in Europe that we would move to ensure greater commonality on number plates and would introduce the statutory instrument, which makes provision for plates to show the GB symbol and the EU logo. There is a choice, as people can continue with existing number plates, with nothing else on them. However, as we have already seen, even before the regulations become law, car manufacturers have been producing vehicles with the new logos.

May I ask the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), whether it is legal for manufacturers to produce number plates to the new standard, which the House has not approved? For many people, having a symbol with the EU logo on a number plate is upsetting. Symbols and flags are important and carry meaning. Tonight, we stand in a palace above which flies the Union Jack flag from Victoria Tower. This is about who we are and to whom we owe allegiance.

If the nation is going to depart from having a plain number plate and have one with logos, I take exception to the fact that the regulations will mean that it will bear the GB symbol and a Euro flag, and that if people wish to put a Union Jack on their number plate, they could be criminalised and fined up to £1,000.

**Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): This is important for Back Benchers like me. In view of the significant issue raised by my hon. Friend, can we have an assurance that, as we are likely to have a Conservative Government soon, they will introduce legislation to change the position and ensure that people will be able to have a Union Jack on their car number plate if they wish? Can my hon. Friend give a clear commitment on behalf of the Conservative party, particularly as it is likely that there will be an election soon? Many people would love to have a clear answer, which we always get from those on the Conservative Front Bench.

**Mr. Syms:** Yes. The issue is important.

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): As the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) said, for many people, this is quite an important issue. We have just been joined by a Labour Whip, but it should be recorded that only he and the Minister are on the Government Benches, and no one else. It is 9.30 pm, and I cannot believe that Government Members are canvassing in their constituencies. Where is new Labour on this important issue, as defined by the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms)? *Hansard* should record just how lightly the Government view the importance of having a saltire on number plates in Scotland.

**Mr. Syms:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. If people wish to have a Euro logo and a GB symbol on number plates, we are not against that. However, we are in favour of choice. If people wish to have the Union Jack on their number plate, they should be allowed to do so. Equally, if they wish to have the Scottish saltire or the Welsh dragon, we would be perfectly happy with that.

The statutory instrument has been laid by a Government who have no sense of what our nation is about—a Government who gave us the contents of the dome, and who do not understand the deep importance that the symbols of our nation hold for the vast majority of our constituents. That is why the Conservative party has already announced that it will revisit the regulation. As I said, in government we will allow people to have the Union Jack, the Scottish saltire or the Welsh dragon displayed on their car, if that is their wish.

Symbols are important, as can be seen around the world. The current debate in the United States about the old confederate flag in the south shows that that symbol still stirs great passions. The Union Jack stirs passions in this country. The Government aim to introduce regulations under which the European Union flag would be allowed, but displaying the Union Jack would be criminalised and people could be fined for doing it. That would be extremely unfortunate. Our position is clear. I should like to hear from the Minister a full explanation as to why his Government cannot support the display of the Union Jack as an important symbol on a car.

It is interesting that the position of the Labour party in opposition was different. The then shadow Secretary of State for Transport, now the Minister for the Environment, wrote on 16 August 1995 to T. R. McLennan of Jepson & Company of Sheffield:

"Thank you for your letter regarding the harmonisation of number plates throughout Europe.

At the present time, the Labour party has no plans to replace the British number plate with an E.U. flag and typestyle plate. We are also of the belief that the British number plate is probably the most legible and easily memorised plate in the world and that reducing the size of the characters would be a mistake."

There we have it: the Labour party in opposition saying something different from the Labour party in government. If this important matter is the subject of a deferred Division tomorrow, the Conservative party will make its feelings known and will vote against.

A further important issue is the problem faced by American car owners. The number plate on American cars is smaller than that on British cars. The American cars, which are imported into the UK mainly by businesses, have a 12 in by 6 in number plate with motor cycle-style font lettering. The regulation would make it difficult for any such car number plate to be legal. At present, it is not the easiest thing in the world to become an American car owner. A number of businesses import the vehicles, which must undergo single vehicle approval.

The regulation would mean that modifications would have to be made to the rear of the vehicles in order for them to be legal. That would be entirely against the principle of SVA, the purpose of which is to certify that the vehicle is safe. It would not be a simple job to put a larger number plate on many of those vehicles, because safety regulations on extended projections from vehicles, particularly sharp edges, mean that alterations would be necessary to the boot and the lights, which would to some extent ruin the line of the vehicle and diminish its appeal.

In the UK there are between 50,000 and 75,000 American cars, and 500 to 600 are imported each year. That represents an important minority in the UK. The individuals who participate in that business do not feel loved, either by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions or by the Government, because of what is proposed.

There has been endless correspondence between American car owners and importers, and various other individuals. So far, those who are anxious about the regulations do not seem to have had much joy from DETR or the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency. They have been making suggestions about how their vehicles could be made legal. For example, there is a specialised vehicle category in which their cars could be included. They think that they should be able to carry on purchasing and driving the vehicles if they continue to use smaller number plates with the motor cycle-style font.

There are currently 175,000 motor cycles in the UK whose number plates have a smaller font than those of other vehicles. Nobody says that reading those number plates is a problem. One should also take into account the fact that the number plates of most motor cycles are illuminated by one light, whereas an American car with a similar number plate will have two lights, so the characters will be easier to recognise.

The key point is this: if the Government do not recognise that people with American cars have a special case, they will be criminalising all such people and causing great difficulty for the businesses that are involved. So far, those businesses have spent more than £300,000 in trying to fight the regulations. They have been given some comfort by the European Commission, which has said that, on open-market grounds, there is no need for the Government to encompass many of the vehicles within the regulations.

In a letter to Mr. Harry Tune, the DVLA vehicle policy group set out some of the reasons why it does not wish to allow people with American vehicles to use number plates with a smaller font. The letter states:

"Extending the use of the smaller font to vehicles imported from America was carefully considered during the consultation period. The police and road safety organisations had serious concerns over the ability of witnesses to read the smaller characters with the naked eye. The Government is keen to bear down on criminal activity involving the use of the motor vehicles. In many cases the successful apprehension and conviction of criminals relies on a witness sighting a number plate and being able to recall a part of its number. The success rate will be substantially enhanced with a standardised font as provided for in the new regulations."

That is clearly nonsense. As I mentioned, a car's number plate will be illuminated by two lights, so it will be easier to read than those of motor cycles, but apart from that, a Buick, Pontiac or Chevrolet will be one of the most easily recognisable vehicles in the UK. I put it to the Under-Secretary that a person who was going to do a blag in Streatham would not turn up outside a bank in an American car.

**Mr. Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton): I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Surely, a person who is doing a blag in Streatham or wherever else will be more likely to use a motor cycle, which would not be covered by the regulations. The Government have got it wrong on both counts.

**Mr. Syms:** The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point.

Many people enjoy owning American cars. They take great pride in their vehicles and like them to be admired. If the driver of such a vehicle breaks the law, it will not be the most difficult thing in the world to track down the perpetrator, given the limited number of these vehicles on our roads. I think, therefore, that the argument that the regulations should be strictly applied is wrong in this instance. The Government could easily agree to the motor cycle-style font and accept that the cars are easy to recognise on our roads.

The various individuals who are involved have been in touch with the European Commission to ask whether the Government can exempt them from particular aspects of the regulations. I should be interested to know whether there has been any correspondence between the European Commission and DETR. My noble Friend Earl Attlee asked a question in another place about whether relevant letters had been sent by the European Commission in relation to the free movement of markets. The answer was no, but I understand that there has been further correspondence. I should be interested to know whether the Minister could confirm that.

The regulations do not do justice to our national symbols and flag. They do not allow people to exercise choice. If they were not amended, all manufacturers would produce vehicles that displayed the GB symbol and EU flag. They would resemble Henry Ford's Model T Ford, which one could buy provided that it was black. Number plates displaying the GB symbol and EU flag would become standard. If we move away from the normal British number plate, which displays no symbols, we should be able to opt for the display of the Union Jack.

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): In eager anticipation of the Under-Secretary's comments, would my hon. Friend care to reflect on the fact that in the Standing Committee that considered the Vehicles (Crime) Bill in January, the Under-Secretary unwisely said that there was and would be no obligation to display a flag or other symbol that some people might find distasteful? If the production practices that my hon. Friend predicted occur, people will find themselves in that predicament.

**Mr. Syms:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. The regulations risk putting American car importers and

*[Mr. Syms]*

enthusiasts out of business. We are considering a small number of people who nevertheless invest a lot of money in their businesses. They fight a constant uphill battle with the SVA regulations in order to get vehicles into the country. They are not the big battalions; they are not major international firms. They are individuals and I do not understand why Parliament should not protect their right to conduct their business and provide products that people wish to buy and cherish. I hope that the Under-Secretary will consider the matter carefully and amend the regulations so that businesses, jobs and livelihoods are not lost.

9.42 pm

**Mr. Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton): I agree with everything that the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) said. I want to focus on his second point because I have a constituency interest in the matter, and it is also important to many vehicle and business owners throughout the country. Livelihoods are at stake. Although I accept that Conservative Members and others wish to raise issues of principle about flags, I believe that our priority should be businesses.

The American Carriage Company on London road in Kingston is a successful, long-established family firm, which is owned by the Ouvaroffs. It could be put out of business if the Government do not have a speedy, major rethink about the regulations' application to a tiny section of the car market, namely the imported American car market, which the hon. Member for Poole mentioned.

Some owners of American cars live in my constituency. Mr. Don Rolt, who owns an 88 Pontiac Fiero, is worried about the implications of the regulations for him and other owners and aficionados of American cars.

We are considering between 50,000 and 75,000 car owners; that is a lot of people. I should not be surprised if every Member of Parliament had a constituent who owned an American car and could be affected by the regulations. Between 100 and 200 businesses will also be affected. I want to explain the services that they provide to our constituents. About 40 businesses and organisations are directly involved in the importation and sale of American cars. They are involved in sourcing bespoke vehicles. We are talking about a very low-volume market: not many end-users desire these cars. That is why the sales and importing business is so specialised.

As well as those involved in the sales and importing businesses, many people are involved in after-sales service. They service the cars, provide the equipment to do so, and ensure that all the Government safety requirements are dealt with. Many people are employed, including qualified mechanics and servicing personnel. In addition to the 30 or so servicing businesses, about 20 companies are involved in supplying parts to the garages and owners who service the cars. People specialise in providing certain parts, such as the special glass and tyres that American cars need.

It does not end there. Other businesses are involved, including specialist insurance companies. In the larger insurance companies, there are special sections dedicated to insuring these cars, which are often of very high value and require specialist insurance capabilities. Finance houses and warranty suppliers are involved, and there are also clubs where people who own the vehicles get together and organise. We are, therefore, talking about quite an extensive number of people and businesses.

The Minister should be in no doubt about the effect of the measure. Some people say that this is a small niche market. Compared with the overall market, of course it is. However, a lot of people and businesses are involved, and that is why we should pay special attention to the American car business. I hope that the Minister will show some movement on this matter, and show that he is sympathetic to these demands.

**Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): I have listened to what the hon. Gentleman has said about the American car market with some interest. He said that all constituencies probably contained owners of American cars. That may well be the case, although no one from my constituency has contacted me on the matter. However, between 5 and 10 per cent. of my constituents drive around with a Welsh flag incorporated in their number plates. The proposal, as well as affecting American cars, will make criminals of those ordinary, law-abiding citizens. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will address that point as well.

**Mr. Davey:** As I said earlier, I support everything that the hon. Member for Poole said, and I intend to address that point. However, I want to concentrate on the people that I have been describing, because they have businesses and they have investments in these cars, some of which are worth an awful lot of money. They put their hard-earned savings into them. Their hobby, their pleasure, their pride and joy is going to be affected by the regulations, and I make no apology for taking up some of the House's time discussing the issue. The regulation is not justified. It is bad government, bad economics and bad politics.

I want to explain a little bit about the technicalities. The hon. Member for Poole performed some of that task for me, but it is important for the House to realise what is involved. This is, as the hon. Gentleman said, about the size and space allowed for the fixing of a rear registration plate. If the regulation goes through unamended, or is not amended in due course, more than 90 per cent. of left-hand drive American cars imported to the UK will have to be modified. The hon. Gentleman went into some detail about the modifications required. If anything, I think he underplayed the problem of making the modifications.

One of the reasons people own American cars is for their look, their aesthetic value. *[Interruption.]* People drive round in them and want people to look at them; they want people to see that they have an American car. They are proud of their car, and quite rightly so. However, if they have to modify the boot and the rear of the car, it will change it to some degree. It will no longer be a genuine American car, and a lot of people will no longer want to buy it. The modification will reduce these cars' value.

**Mr. Bercow:** I am really quite shocked by what I have just heard, and I am not easily shocked. Did the hon. Gentleman, while making his point about the attractiveness and physical beauty of American cars, hear the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) chunter from a sedentary position "No style"? I do not want

to be unduly provocative—I rarely am—but does the hon. Gentleman agree that it ill behoves an enthusiast for the displaying of the EU symbol to lecture others about style?

**Mr. Davey:** The hon. Gentleman makes his point in his usual extravagant manner—flamboyant, perhaps, or even stylish—but I do not want to be tempted down that route. I have serious points to make which are not about style or substance.

I was talking about modifications. It is not as if those who are importing American cars, or buying them, were not prepared to make modifications—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston listens, he will realise how serious this is. People in his constituency will be affected. The hon. Gentleman laughs again: I find that shocking.

Those who buy such cars have to make modifications in order to conform to regulations already imposed on them by the British Government—modifications involving their lights, for example. It is not as if car owners and businesses were not used to making modifications; the question is whether this is a modification too far, which will completely change the way in which people view cars. I believe that it will. I believe that it will eventually destroy the market—not the overall market for cars, which will continue because, I am delighted to say, we have a European single market, but the market in the United Kingdom that is owned by British business people and used by British customers.

People will go abroad, to continental Europe, to buy their American cars. That means that we shall be exporting jobs. It will be child's play for someone who wants to buy an American car to get to Holland, where the car will be approved by the Dutch authorities and can then be imported. The Government and other authorities here will have to accept that, because the car will have been approved by another member state. The Government have been defeated in their regulatory enthusiasm by the fact that we have a single market.

This is an example of the European Commission's riding to the help of British industry. The British Government, in this instance, are doing very little to support British industry. I have a letter from D-G XV, which was sent to someone who wanted to complain about the Government's draft regulation, signed by an official called S. Lecrenier. She—I think it is a she—says at the end of the letter that the Commission is to call on the British authorities to include left-hand vehicles in the specialised vehicles category. The hon. Member for Poole mentioned that.

The Government would have the support of the European Commission if they decided to exempt imported left-hand drive American cars. They would not be isolated; they would be joining the Commission in ensuring that there was no barrier to trade. In this case, the European arguments are on our side and also on the Conservatives'—which is good, as it happens very rarely.

The hon. Member for Poole made a couple of points about the way in which the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Department of Trade and Industry had gone about things. Their initial consultation suggested that they were quite happy for registration plates the size of those on motor cycles to be fixed on all vehicles, but after that, and their second consultation, they changed their minds. Worse still, during the consultation those whom I am representing tonight—people who import American cars—were not themselves consulted, and received no consultation documents. They therefore could not register their disapproval at that stage, which meant that the regulatory impact assessment made by the Government following the first consultation did not take account of the industry—of all the people who would be affected. The whole consultation exercise has been discredited, which is another reason why the Government should think again.

When we begin to analyse the pros and cons of the fact that the Government have yet to provide an exemption for imported American vehicles, we are prompted to ask what is behind it. Why are they deliberately pushing the regulations, which will hit that small and entrepreneurial sector so hard? One thinks that there might be some conspiracy. Perhaps it is the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders in this case that is trying to ensure that there is no extra competition in the sale of cars.

I would not want to impugn that organisation unfairly, but the Government are rightly putting pressure on it, to reduce car prices and perhaps this is one of the pay-offs. I hope that the Minister will be able to say that that is not the case. If it is not, I wonder whether he could comment on something that I have heard: officials at the DTI who are responsible for trying to promote competition in the motor vehicle market are concerned about the attitude of DETR. That is not joined-up government. One part of Whitehall is saying, "Let us promote competition" and another part wants to pass protectionist regulations.

**Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): If there were any logic in the hon. Gentleman's argument, General Motors and Ford, two rather large American companies, would surely, through the SMMT, have raised objections. Is he aware of such objections?

**Mr. Davey:** The hon. Gentleman shows that he knows nothing about the subject, because the cars that he is talking about have regulatory approval as a class. The cars that we are talking about must go through single vehicle approval. General Motors and Ford make, to my knowledge, very few cars in that sector. We are not talking about the mass car market. We are talking about a niche market. *[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman wants to say that I am wrong, I hope that he will intervene on me formally to try to make his point and to prove his case, rather than shout from a sedentary position, which certainly does not become him.

I do not believe that the Government have made any attempt to defend the proposal. The letters that I have seen passing between the industry and the Department are unconvincing. The argument does not stand up. I am sure that the Minister will use the debate to reflect very carefully on the matter and to bring his civil servants to book. I do not believe that he intends to damage the sector. He needs to ensure that his civil servants are not misleading him about that sector.

There have been other cases—for example, those involving type approval—where bureaucratic pressure and problems have been put in the way of that reputable car market sector. It has had to battle at great legal expense, employing expensive QCs, going to Brussels, regulating, and getting Brussels to tell the British civil

*[Mr. Davey]*

service that it should not be gold-plating regulations from Brussels. It is having to fight the whole time. This is not the right way to promote business. The Minister is in a position to bring those civil servants to book, to listen to the Commission and to British industry, and to get it right.

I want to talk about the issue that many other hon. Members wish to talk about. I agree—I signed the early-day motion—that if the Government are, through the regulations, introducing a new option to have a flag on the registration plate, that option could be multiple. One understands the argument following on from the discussions in Europe for the right to have a European flag. That enables people to meet the requirements of the Vienna convention without necessarily having the nationality indicated on the registration plate when they go through the countries of the European Union, although hon. Members may wish to correct me on that point. One can understand why the option came about in the first place. The Government have the chance, because they want to implement the regulations and to give people that option, to give people other options.

That has never been done by a previous Government, so let us not have too much hypocrisy. The previous Government did not want to make that option available. When Conservative Members speak later, I hope that they will realise that their Government did not make that option available to people.

*It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),*

That at this day's sitting, the Motion relating to the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations may be proceeded with, though opposed, until half-past Eleven o'clock.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

*Question agreed to.*

*Question again proposed.*

**Mr. Davey:** I am tempted to use a French phrase—revenons à nos moutons—to come back to the point that I was making, but I am sure that some Conservative Members would not appreciate it.

If we are making new regulations to allow the European flag on registration plates, it makes sense to allow some flexibility. There is no European plot and no harmonisation of registration regulation is proposed. It will be an option, and we should remember that no right is being removed, only given. The real issue is how many other rights should be given, and I agree with the hon. Member for Poole that we should have the right to have the UK, Welsh and Scottish flags, as well as the flag of St. George. I speak as a pro-European, because it is an issue of choice.

The Minister may argue that he cannot act because of problems with space on the registration plate or with visibility, but those problems are not insurmountable. If a European flag can be fitted on a registration plate, so can another flag. I hope that the Minister will show flexibility in the American case and in this.

**Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot): The hon. Gentleman is right that it is possible to have the union flag in place of the Euro stars. He may care to examine my car, which is standing at the Members' Entrance and which displays an illegal number plate with a blue strip down the left-hand side, proudly bearing a union flag.

**Mr. Davey:** That does not surprise me.

I hope that the Minister will not be intimidated by the anti-Europeans who will contribute to the debate. This is not a debate between anti-Europeans and pro-Europeans, although some of the hon. Members present are certainly more Eurosceptic than Europhile. The issue is one of choice, and I hope that the Minister will give the English, Scottish and Welsh peoples that choice.

10.4 pm

**Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): I speak as someone who is Welsh and proud to be so, and British and proud to be so. That is something that some Labour Members fail to understand. I do not see why I as a Welshman ought not to have the opportunity to display the Welsh flag on my car registration plate if I so wish. Indeed, when I was in Wales a month ago I saw a Welsh flag displayed on somebody's registration plate. I have also seen Union Jacks and Scottish solents—[Hon. Members: "Saltires!"] That is what I mean.

The Government should say whether the Home Office has given guidance and advice to police forces throughout the country as to whether people who display symbols other than the union flag will be prosecuted. I pointed out a union flag on a car to someone the other day. I said that that was illegal and that the owner could be prosecuted. I was asked who would be stupid enough to prosecute people for displaying the union flag on their cars, and in reply I asked who would be stupid enough to prosecute someone for selling bananas by the pound instead of the kilogram. That happened the other day in Sunderland, where there is clearly no other crime.

The Government say that they are tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, yet they have created a new crime. There are fewer police on the streets than four years ago, but the police will have to check out cars to see if they are displaying anything other than the union symbol.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) said that between 5 per cent. and 10 per cent. of his constituents drive cars that proudly display the Welsh flag. They are breaking the law, and are therefore criminals. They can be stopped by the Welsh police or their counterparts in the United Kingdom, and prosecuted for displaying the fact that they are Welsh.

That comes very rich from this Government, given that the census forms that we have to return by 29 April allow people to say that they are Scottish or from Northern Ireland, but not that they are Welsh or English. What is wrong with the Government? Why do they not believe that people should be able to say whether they are Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or English?

**Mr. Dafydd Wigley** (Caernarfon): Although I recognise the right of people to put a Union Jack on their cars if that is what they want, does the hon. Gentleman not agree that our advice to the thousands of drivers in Wales whose cars bear the Welsh flag should be that they carry on showing the flags and ignore these stupid regulations? If the Government insist on introducing them, they will be bringing the law into infamy.

**Mr. Evans:** This is a bad law. A law that is widely flouted needs to be looked at again. I do not believe that

the consultation procedure that the Government followed was right. They did not consult widely with the motoring organisations, which would have told them that the introduction of space for symbols on registration plates would mean that people in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and England would want to display their nationality. People would also want to display the Union Jack as well. I cannot believe that that was not pointed out to the Government in the consultation that was held.

The Minister must tell the House what the guidance is. Will people driving around with their national flags displayed proudly on their cares be told that they are breaking the law? Will they run the risk of being stopped by the police and prosecuted, and of having to pay a fine of £1,000? If the Government want to create martyrs, they are going about it the right way—they will create thousands, as people ensure that they change their registration plates to show the flags of the nations of which they are proud.

I am not one of the nutters who wants to throw up whenever they see the euro symbol—*[Interruption.]* However, I do not jump for joy when I see it. In contrast, when I see the Union Jack, there is a flutter in my heart. When I see the Welsh flag, there is a bit of hwyl about me. I am also proud to represent an English constituency. Thank goodness the Government had the good grace not to insult us all by having this debate yesterday. I am also proud whenever I see England playing football or the flag of St. George being displayed throughout England and people wearing red roses, as they did yesterday. It is quite right that they should be proud as well.

I find it incredible that we do not have the Minister for patriotism here. During one of their frights, the Government decided that they were being charged with not being sufficiently patriotic. They therefore dredged up a Minister who not many people had heard of and gave him the title of Minister for patriotism.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal):** Order. I have allowed the hon. Gentleman some latitude, but he must now return to discussing the regulations.

**Mr. Evans:** I was going to say that although the Minister for patriotism is not here, I suspect that the Minister for Europe would have been here had he not been indisposed.

The Government must give the House an explanation. They have an opportunity to do so tonight. It has already been noted that there are no Scottish or Welsh Members of Parliament on the Labour Benches for this debate. Because we are using this dreadful procedure, people debating the issue are not allowed to vote on it tonight. The vote will have to be deferred until tomorrow. I will be looking very carefully at how Labour Members representing Scottish and Welsh constituencies vote. The people of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland ought to know exactly how their Members of Parliament vote on this issue.

I am staggered at the necessity for this debate. We are given a choice that we can either display the European Union symbol or nothing. It is Europe or nothing with this Government, and that sickens me. I am proud to be British, I am proud to be Welsh, and I demand the right to be able to display those symbols on my car if I so wish and not have the European Union pushed down my throat.

10.12 pm

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) said that if the Conservative party were returned to power, it would be content with the flexibility that we seek. I am pleased at that indication, although it may be academic for the next few years. However, I agree with the hon. Gentleman wholeheartedly.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): That is a start.

**Mr. Llwyd:** While I am at it, perhaps I should admonish the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) for being so personal about the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and saying that he throws up whenever he sees the European Union symbol. That was really out of order.

In an exchange on this subject between my hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) and the Home Secretary, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"The Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Executive were consulted on that and . . . raised no objection.

I am happy for the issue to be raised in Committee."—*[Official Report,* 18 December 2000; Vol. 360, c. 31.]

To my certain knowledge, neither body was consulted. That brings me back to what the hon. Member for Ribble Valley said. What kind of consultation process was this?

**Mr. Wigley:** I give my hon. Friend a categoric assurance that the National Assembly, as a whole, was not consulted on this. The Executive may have been, the Labour Government, or Lib-Lab Government in Wales may have been, but the Assembly was not. That is certainly the truth.

**Mr. Llwyd:** What makes it even worse is that quite recently, when the matter was discussed by the National Assembly, virtually all Labour, Liberal Democrat and Plaid Cymru Members decided that this flexibility should be introduced and that people should have the right to display the Welsh flag if they wanted to do so. That opinion is now being totally ignored by the Government. They want to steamroller this measure through with an apparent complete disregard for the feelings of thousands of people in Wales, criminalising them on the way. Interestingly, they are taking the same approach as they did when denying Welsh people the right to say that they were Welsh in the census, given what has been said about the Welsh "tick box".

The Government are not listening to the people of Wales. It is the wrong way to proceed, and I am sure that they will pay a heavy price for it in the next few weeks.

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** One of my constituents, a professor of physics at the university of Aberystwyth, is currently in Davos in Switzerland undertaking international research. He drives a great deal on the continent, between Wales and his international work. He has a doctorate in physics, and he happens to be my parliamentary agent. He will be criminalised by this measure because he, a committed European, chooses to display the Welsh flag on his car. Is that the sort of person whom the Government should seek to criminalise?

**Mr. Llwyd:** Absolutely not. That gentleman is one of many law-abiding people in Wales who will similarly fall

*[Mr. Llwyd]*

foul of this wrong, stupid and senseless regulation. My hon. Friend has spoken about this matter before and made his feelings clear. There is a resonance across the House on this matter: whether one wants the flag of St. George, the Union Jack, the Welsh flag or the saltire should be entirely up to the individual.

**Mr. Alasdair Morgan** (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this matter goes further than flags? Many people in Wales and Scotland choose to display "CYM" or "SCO" on their numberplates. Previously, there was no rule about whether one should have a "GB" sticker or any other sticker. That, too, is entirely new.

**Mr. Llwyd:** I agree. What I say, I am also saying on behalf of the Scottish National party—at least until I am pulled up for saying something wrong.

The consultation process is interesting. The follow-up consultation letter was sent on 20 January 2000, and a summary of responses was published on 10 May. The Minister looks perplexed, but my information comes from the House of Commons Library. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions asked for views, but I do not know how far the consultation went. Will the Minister tell us how wide it went and who and which bodies were consulted? Why, even at this late date, are the views of the National Assembly for Wales and the Scottish Parliament being ignored? That cannot be right.

Whether or not one favours devolution, it is wrong to bring in bad law by the back door. That law will have no credence in the country and will not be adhered to by law-abiding citizens. It will create a class of people who will be in court for the first time in their lives because of this action by the Government—though inaction might be a better description.

The Department has been cackhanded in its dealings with the European Commission. It submitted draft proposals, which came back duly amended and rewritten. The Commission has made it clear that there is no intent to harmonise registration plates across the community. That makes it clear that what the Opposition seek is perfectly legal under EU law. There is no impediment to what we want. Even at this late stage, will the Minister take a message to his Department asking that the matter be reconsidered. There could be a huge outburst of feeling in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The regulations are offensive to many of us.

We were initially told that the big problem lay in the fact that the Commission would dictate the regulation to the Government. That is not the case. It is the Government's intransigence that is causing a growing crisis. I appeal to them to reconsider, and swiftly. It is all very well for the Minister to put his hands in his pockets and look at the ceiling, but the regulations are grossly offensive to us all. *[Interruption.]* I repeat that this matter is grossly offensive to many of us. It is noteworthy that no Scottish or Welsh Labour Members are present—either they have no mind of their own or they could not care less about their native countries.

When we were told that the Commission was at fault, Ian Titherington—soon to be the Member of Parliament for Swansea, West—held discussions with the DVLA and was told that the matter had nothing to do with the Commission; the proposed regulations could be implemented with no problem whatever. At some point, the Government will have to come clean. Just as the census form is insulting and offensive and may lead to law-breaking, so too will the regulations.

I listened carefully to the comments of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) about American vehicles. I am a German-vehicle person myself, but that is beside the point. I do not know anyone in Meirionnydd Nant Conwy who can afford to run American cars, given the current price of fuel.

I shall briefly and swiftly conclude my remarks as other hon. Members want to speak. The Government claimed that the Assembly raised no objections—I doubt whether that is true. The Assembly and its Ministers have said that they want recognition of national flags—as did the Scottish Parliament.

The DVLA was led to believe that the order was mandatory under European law—that is also nonsense. Will the Minister please allow the people of the constituent nations of the British state to have their say and show respect to their nations?

10.22 pm

**Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): It had been my intention to make a lengthy speech about European number plates and national number plates, but there is now no need for me to do so. Tonight, we have seen something dramatic: it has emerged that, in a few weeks' time, the new Conservative Government—with the support of the Liberal Democrats, the Welsh nationalists, the Scottish nationalists, our friends from Northern Ireland, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly—will bring back the right for people to use the number plates and the flag that they think most appropriate.

Obviously, I hope that my hon. Friends will not end up in a European prison as a consequence of their bravery. However, a popular front has been established; we know what can happen if the right decision is made in the general election. For that reason, I want to say a few words about the American car issue.

My sincere appeal to the Government is that they reconsider the matter. What on earth can be gained by the regulations? What will be lost? I am sure that there are such car dealers in the constituency of every Member. In my constituency, there is a small firm—Route 66—at 41 Purdeys Way, Rochford; another little firm, the American Car Company, is located in the area of Southend represented by one of my colleagues.

As the Minister knows, no big firms are involved in that business. There are only small firms—tiny businesses—which do not make much money. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that only about 500 American cars are registered every year—it is a small sector. What the blazes will happen under these regulations? Unless a way of fitting a new number plate can be found—usually that cannot be done—about £1,000 will have to be spent on altering those cars. Great expense will be involved for many businesses. Why are we doing that?

Will the Government include an exemption? They have done that already for left-hand drive cars. On the advice of the European Union, the Government brought in

legislation in schedule 2 of the Motor Vehicles (Approval) Regulations 2001, to give an exemption for left-hand drive vehicles. The Government could easily introduce an exemption if they want to.

I know that people have been writing to Ministers and civil servants to ask why the Government are introducing the regulations. In fact, one of the American car importers—a nice man called Mr. Cohen—wrote a letter to the Department asking why the proposal was being introduced. He received an answer from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, whose only argument was that some people in the police thought big letters were easier to see than small letters and that that could help in the battle against crime.

I ask the Minister to tell us how many big American vehicles were involved in crime last year or the year before. I think he will find that they are not the kind of vehicles purchased or used for that purpose. If the Government are concerned about crime, why the blazes do we allow motor cycles to have small number plates? If it is difficult to see an American car plate because it is too small, what about criminals who ride around on motor cycles?

**Mr. Edward Davey:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** Certainly—but the hon. Gentleman spoke for a very long time.

**Mr. Davey:** I want to reinforce the point that the hon. Gentleman is making. The DVLA argued that smaller number plates might not be visible to speed detection cameras—until the owners of American cars sent the DVLA their speeding fines.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** The hon. Gentleman refers to another point that has been mentioned.

If the Minister considers the issue, he will discover that there is no argument. He must ask himself what is to be done. He will know that we are not dealing with the big battalions of the motor industry and with big firms that can spend a lot of money on alterations. He will know that those businesses have difficulties because American cars cost a lot of money. If the regulations involve more discomfort, more trouble and more expense, what is the point?

The Minister could very easily include an exemption for American cars. That would be as easy as pie. It could be done specifically for left-hand drive American vehicles. However, people might ask why an exemption should be made for American cars. We want such an exemption because American number plates are different and the structure of American cars is different. The modifications will involve a lot of extra work. The manufacturers calculate that, apart from a tiny number of cars to which bigger number plates can be attached, the alterations will cost more than £1,000.

I am afraid that Governments of all parties have sometimes introduced legislation that involves a lot of expenditure, bureaucracy and distress, and I ask myself, "Why on earth do they do it?" Can the Minister give us any good reason for introducing the regulations? I can see no advantage of any sort to anyone; I can see a great deal of trouble and distress. That matters to a small number of people who might be daft enough to want to own an American car. Some people love owning American cars; some of them look terrific. This is a country where people should have that freedom, and it must not be taken away. So why should more unnecessary bureaucracy be introduced?

The Government should be aware that there is no need to aim for consistency. There is almost an obsession with ensuring that everything is the same—but there is no need. We have repeatedly asked the Government to tell us what is the argument for introducing the regulations. The argument about crime does not stand up, given what has been said about motor cycle number plates. The argument adduced about speed cameras is not very relevant. Given the recent test case in Scotland, the Minister will be well aware that we may have to do away with speed cameras because of the European rules.

**Mr. Miller:** The hon. Gentleman should be aware that the ruling in the case to which he refers was overturned by the House of Lords.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** I am well aware of what happened. I have had the pleasure of being a Member of Parliament for a very long time. When something stems from European law, it can be stopped in various ways in the House of Lords. I do not want to be ruled out of order, but I ask the hon. Gentleman to consider what happened in relation to the Merchant Shipping Act 1988, when many hon. Members cheered their heads off because Parliament's decision was overturned. The hon. Gentleman is always trying to cause trouble, but there is no need. If he really thinks that democracy is safe from European rules, he honestly has a lot of rethinking to do, and I ask him to think about that very carefully indeed.

I simply tell the Minister that we should forget about the big issues because they will be resolved at the next election. If people want to go the Government's way, they can vote them back into power. If they want to retain their national freedoms, they can vote for the Conservative party, along with the Welsh nationalists and all our other new friends—the popular front. The crucial question is this: why should we introduce a measure that will cause a lot of trouble, involve great expense and make many people unhappy when no one can see any benefit from it?

I hope that the Government will show common sense and agree to a tiny amendment to the regulations. That would be better for everyone and save a lot of trouble and unhappiness when there is no benefit to be obtained. I hope that the Minister will at least say that the Government will reconsider the matter and perhaps bring in a minor change to help decent people who deserve some attention.

10.30 pm

**Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot): This is an historic night because there has been such a broad consensus among the Opposition parties. We are all united in our belief in the concept of choice—choice which the Government wish to extinguish. Had it not been for the perception of my hon. Friends on the Front Bench and the determination of my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) to pray against the regulations and to seek to have them revoked, there would have been no debate on the matter. I salute them for bringing this matter to the attention of the House.

The regulations are extensive and they are made up of 19 paragraphs that do not relate to just a couple of issues. In them, the Government are guilty not only of crushing individuality and choice, but of being something of a spoilsport.

The first issue that I wish to raise relates to paragraph 11 on the nature of registration plates and the way in which the characters are laid out. Sub-paragraph (2) states:

"A registration plate must not be treated in any other way which renders the characters of the registration mark less easily distinguishable to the eye or which would prevent or impair the making of a true photographic image of the plate through the medium of camera and film or any other device."

Sub-paragraph (3) adds that a registration plate must not be fixed to a vehicle in such a way

"which has the effect of changing the appearance or legibility of any of the characters of the registration mark, which renders the characters of the registration mark less easily distinguishable to the eye or which prevents or impairs the making of a true photographic image of the plate through the medium of camera and film or any other device."

The effect of such provisions will be that those of us who have an enormous interest in looking at number plates and at the ingenious way in which our fellow countrymen manage to order the letters of the alphabet and numbers in such a way as to make their number plates interesting reading will have that possibility denied to us. For example, I see a Jeep Cherokee near where I live in London—I have no idea who owns it—which has the registration "L10N TV". For all I know there may be a production company called Lion TV, but I find it interesting to see the way in which that number plate is laid out. Other obvious examples spell out names such as "SUS1E" and "ANG1E", although I do not know the ladies in question. Hon. Members may have seen some rude examples, but I will not repeat them to the House because even though it is after the watershed and sensitive journalists have gone to bed, they may be videoing our proceedings. My son's girlfriend Tammy has a car and the number plate on it spells out her name—"T4MY"—and that makes her car recognisable. Such registrations are so much more noticeable, visible and memorable than the boring old number plates that there will be if the regulations come into effect.

Those of us who have had the displeasure of engaging libel lawyers know that there is a splendid firm of libel lawyers called Peter Carter-Ruck and Partners, of whom I have been the beneficiary.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** They are expensive.

**Mr. Howarth:** They are extremely expensive, but they were very good value in my case. Peter Carter-Ruck wanted a particular number plate. When the DVLA auctioned licence plates, he asked me whether I would be prepared to help because he did not want to be seen to be bidding in case it pushed up the price. Instead, his partners bid for "L1BEL" and he now drives around in a Rolls-Royce with a plate that reads "libel". That makes two statements: "Don't mess with me" and "My profession warrants a Rolls-Royce". However, in my case, the BBC paid, not me.

The Government are determined to crush individuality. They are in favour of big brother. They want our number plates to be uniform so that we can be photographed and our movements recorded everywhere we go. We do not know why. It might be fine to do that to catch criminals, but for what other purposes are we to have our vehicles photographed?

**Mr. David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): The hon. Gentleman's example of "ANG1E" is fascinating. Perhaps the vehicle in question belongs to the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). On the matter before us, the regulations on the sequencing and placement of letters on number plates have been in existence for many years. Did the hon. Gentleman raise concerns in previous debates?

**Mr. Howarth:** It was not necessary. The citizens of our country enjoyed the freedom conferred on them which was not allowed in other European countries. In addition, the DVLA cashed in on specialist number plates and coined money for the Government by flogging them. It will be interesting to see how the agency will be affected by the regulations and whether they will reduce substantially its receipts from the sale of specialist number plates.

**Mr. Bercow:** Although it is true, as the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) said, that the European Commission is not currently planning to impose complete uniformity on this country, the Government are preparing to soften us up for that scenario. Is my hon. Friend aware that, when challenged to commit the Government to oppose rigorously any such intended uniformity, the Minister came over all shy and reticent in the Standing Committee on the Vehicles (Crime) Bill? He said:

"somebody in my position, as a mere Under-Secretary of State, is not in a position to make commitments on behalf of the Government."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 11 January 2001; c. 134.]

Very touching, but not very convincing.

**Mr. Howarth:** Indeed not. However, the Minister is modest. No doubt he will be even more modest by the end of the debate and will not want to have anything to do with the measure. He will ascribe to his Secretary of State the responsibility to take the decision.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill):** The buck stops here.

**Mr. Howarth:** Unfortunately it does not; we know that only too well. However, the Minister would enhance enormously his standing in the Chamber, and, no doubt, in his constituency of Streatham, if he persuaded the

Secretary of State to abandon the measure. No Opposition Member—I suspect this is true of many absent Labour Members—wants the measure enacted.

The second issue that concerns me was splendidly covered by my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) and the hon. Members for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) and for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). The fact is that it is not legal for cars to travel around the country with blue strips on the left hand side of their number plates bearing the letters GB and the European symbol. They will be made legal only if this measure is enacted.

That is fine, but the Government have tried to smuggle the business through the House and they have been less than open about the way in which that has been done. *[Interruption.]* The Whip, the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall), suggests that I am being unfair. I invite hon. Members to read paragraph 16(2) of the regulations, under the heading "Miscellaneous", which says:

"Where a mark is displayed on a dual purpose plate—

(a) no material other than the international distinguishing sign of the United Kingdom displayed in accordance with the Council Registration may be placed in the space provided on the plate for that purpose".

To all intents and purposes, the casual reader seeking to understand what the Government are on about would think it perfectly in order to display a United Kingdom international distinguishing sign, which for many of us is the union flag.

What does the reference to "Council Registration" mean? Does it refer to local authorities? Are we talking about Buckinghamshire county council, Hampshire county council or perhaps town councils in Streatham or Hawley? Fortunately, there is an explanatory note, and sub-paragraph (g) on page 25 of the regulations refers to:

"The making of provision for the display of the international distinguishing sign of the United Kingdom adjacent to the registration mark in accordance with Council Regulation (EC) No. 2411/98 (a copy of which can be obtained from the Stationery Office)."

Therein lies the secret of what this is all about.

One has to go to another document—the European Council regulation of 3 November 1998, to read, if not the full story, at least part of it. The preamble to that document reads as follows:

"Whereas several Member States have introduced a model registration plate which, on the extreme left, displays a blue zone containing the 12 yellow stars representing the European flag plus the distinguishing sign of the Member State of registration; whereas for the purpose of intra-Community transport this distinguishing sign meets the objective of identifying the State of registration as provided for in Article 37 of"—

the Vienna convention of 1968, I can tell the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton. That is the only indication that the only international symbol that will be lawful is the EU flag. One has to turn to the annexe to the regulations to see what is proposed. All that will be permitted is the European symbol with the national symbol beneath it. It will be a criminal offence to display any other symbol. It is a circuitous way of introducing a measure that will greatly offend our fellow citizens once they discover the enormity of what the Government are up to.

To some, this may seem a trivial matter, but it is not trivial to all the hon. Members in the Chamber tonight. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton said that as far as he is concerned it is a matter of choice. The hon. Gentleman is a committed pro-European, and he has chided us for the anti-European motives that he believes lie behind our opposition to the measure. I have explained why I am opposed to one part of it. I oppose the requirement to authorise only the European symbol. I say to the hon. Gentleman that I see this as another attempt to foist a European identity on this country. We have a European Parliament, a European Court, a European currency, a European anthem and a European flag, and we are about to have a European army, so we have all those symbols of nation statehood. That is what worries us: our driving licences have to have the Euro symbol—we cannot have the union flag—and now our registration plates have to have it as well. It is an affront to the British people to authorise motorists to bear the Euro symbol on their cars and make it a criminal offence for Englishmen proudly to proclaim the cross of St. George on their motor cars, for hon. Members from Wales proudly to bear the Welsh dragon on their number plates, and for the saltire of Scotland to be borne on Scottish number plates. Indeed, my French car—a blue Picasso—is outside the Members' entrance and carries the Union Jack, but I would be made a criminal if I put such a new number plate on it after 1 September this year. People in this country will find that deeply offensive.

However, there is a solution. Between now and 1 September it will be possible for us to have things other than Euro symbols on our cars. I can tell the House that I have a number plate with a blue strip bearing the Union Jack and the letters "GB" on the left-hand side because there is a splendid company called I-N-M(UK) Ltd., which, for the sum of £27, provided me with a set of number plates. It is based at 22 Kingswood Gardens, Leeds LS8 2BT, and Mr. Peter Rogers, a company director, has said that he is prepared to make to order a set of number plates for Members of Parliament, whatever their shade of opinion. I am sure that he will provide a Welsh dragon or indeed, a fish symbol for those who wish to proclaim their Christian faith on their vehicles. Members can have whatever they like on their registration plates and Mr. Rogers will provide it not for £27, which I was charged, but for £25. There will be no commission for me; I am doing this in the interests of our country and to ensure that we retain some individuality and maintain pride in our national symbols, which should not be taken over by the dreaded Euro flag.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** I endorse everything that my hon. Friend has said. Does he believe that on the blue strip on the left of the registration plate one should be able to put not only the Union flag—the Union Jack—but the cross of St. George? Why should we not boast not only of the Union of the United Kingdom but of England, which comprises the greater part of that union?

**Mr. Howarth:** As my hon. Friend said, that is a possibility. I do not know what is in Mr. Rogers's extensive range, so I cannot say what he can provide, but I am sure that a call to him—

**Mr. David Taylor:** Is this a commercial break?

**Mr. Howarth:** The hon. Gentleman is perceptive; this is an unashamed commercial in support of a man who, I believe, is doing good for our country and providing us

*[Mr. Howarth]*

all with the means to proclaim pride in our country—and, if I may say to the Minister, for whom I have high regard, metaphorically to put two fingers up to those who would have us behave in a uniform fashion. As Mr. Churchill might have said, that is something up with which we will not put.

Of course, the House cannot vote on the regulations tonight because we are muzzled under our new arrangements and are denied the opportunity to vote. However, when the measure does come to a vote, I hope that the House will ensure that it is thrown out, because a comprehensive case has been made across the board. In conclusion, may I ask the Minister for an assurance that cars bearing those number plates perfectly legitimately after 1 September 2001 will not fail their MOT on the grounds that they do not have the appropriate symbol on their number plates? I seek an assurance from the Minister that there will be no attempt to stop people having such number plates after 1 September by making it a requirement that their cars fail the MOT if the number plates do not bear the Euro symbol, should they choose to put any symbol at all on their number plates. With that, I rest my case.

10.50 pm

**Mr. Patrick Nicholls** (Teignbridge): I shall be brief, not from any uncharacteristic compassion for the sentiments of the House, but simply because I want to enjoy the spectacle of the Minister, who is a popular and intelligent person, having to justify the wholly unjustifiable.

I have not always led a blameless life. I have been in the House for 18 years, but before that, I was a humble country lawyer—or at least, I was a country lawyer. One of the attributes of humble country lawyers is that they have a certain interest in good law being passed. Good law is not necessarily popular or welcome, but it is obeyed. I remember that many years ago, before I came to the House, there was a great feeling of outrage when we made safety belts compulsory. It was thought to be an infringement of civil liberties and there was a great brouhaha about it, but the day that law came into force, it was observed. No matter how much people may grumble about it, everybody now puts on a safety belt, because they acknowledge that the law is right.

As a lawyer and a parliamentarian, I am worried when I see that the House is prepared to enact law that will not be obeyed. We Conservatives have learned the lesson. We saw what happened with the council tax: excellent measure though it was in many ways, it lacked the essential ingredient, and ultimately, people would not accept it. That was an isolated case under the Conservative Government, but the present Government have shown time and again that they are prepared to enact legislation which ordinary, decent, law-abiding people will not obey.

We have seen that, and we will see it again in due course if the Government win the next election. We will see them outlawing foxhunting. They will take a swathe of ordinary, straightforward, decent, law-abiding human beings and provoke them into breaking the law. I appreciate that there are passions on both sides of the argument, and it might be argued that the issue is so important that Parliament is entitled to take a view. However, there is no earthly reason why the regulations before us should be pushed through the House.

If Labour win the next general election, we face the prospect of pointing out to any policeman whom we may see that some horse boxes on their way to a foxhunt, which have stopped off to buy some non-metric bananas, have dodgy illegal number plates. Is that the choice that we are to present to our police forces? Are they to chase non-metric bananas, foxhunters, or those with dodgy number plates? That is the nonsense that the Government are prepared to inflict.

I warn the Government that there are many people who, on an issue such as foxhunting, may feel deeply upset but will not break the law. However, with the regulations before us, the Government could face a string of vehicles parked all the way up Whitehall, with people rattling the gates outside No. 10, saying, "Come on, big boy. Come and prosecute me on the grounds of public policy." That is what the Government are in the business of doing. The one thing that they do not have in the slightest degree is any sense of humility or propriety about what they are and are not entitled to do.

I shall now sit down to watch the Minister, who is extremely popular, and who has great charm and intelligence, standing at the Dispatch Box to justify the unjustifiable. It will not be a pretty sight.

10.53 pm

**Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): After that introduction, I hesitate to rise and speak. I am almost tempted to quote the number plate "VOM1T", which is the reaction of most of us to the measure proposed. This will probably be my shortest ever parliamentary speech, but I hope that it will make up in quality what it lacks in quantity.

There are three points to make. First, why are the Government introducing a measure to allow the European symbol to be put on number plates, when, as everyone knows, the law that prevents people from doing that now is not being enforced? The answer is fairly obvious. The Government are introducing the measure to allow that to be done in preparation for the time, which they know will come, when it will be made compulsory. Otherwise, there is no reason for them to introduce the provision. They are trying to make it legal for the EU symbol to be displayed on number plates throughout the United Kingdom and the European Union only because they know that it will be impossible to order that to happen if the practice is technically illegal.

Thus the first point—or question—is why the Government are doing this, and the second point is the answer to that question, which is that they know that what is now to be permitted will later be made compulsory.

The third point is this: what are the various pressure groups that oppose the creeping federalism of the European Union going to do about the regulations? As somebody who was once arrested for playing the national anthem in public, I have a certain amount of experience of what pressure groups do in such circumstances. I predict that they will commission quality printing firms to prepare union flag stickers with permanent, self-adhesive backs that can easily be stuck over the European symbol on future number plates.

That will have a double effect. It will mean that people who want the union flag to cover the relevant part of their number plates can stick it on. Such people can claim when they are stopped by the police that some opponent must have stuck the symbol on, and that they did not do it themselves. Alternatively, it will be possible to place stickers on the number plates of car owners who support the European Union, which will mean that they are done for a criminal offence and fined £1,000.

Will the Under-Secretary address that problem and explain how it will be dealt with? How should the police respond when they discover that somebody is driving around with a regulation number plate on which the British flag is displayed in the form of a sticker of the sort that I have described? Will such a person be fined, or will it be enough of an excuse for him to say that he did not do it himself? Will he be obliged to check his number plates every time he takes his car out? Will he be required not to take the car out because he cannot remove a sticker and make his number plate legal again?

The whole process is fatuous, unenforceable and deeply sinister. The provisions are not permissive, as the Government are trying to suggest. They are being introduced to pave the way for a compulsory measure, and I predict that that measure will not be long in coming down the line.

10.58 pm

**Mr. William Ross** (East Londonderry): I did not originally intend to speak in this debate, but a few minutes ago I picked up the statutory instrument and opened it up to find out about its extent. Hon. Members will know that when one reads legislation, one usually finds a little sentence saying that it extends to somewhere, wherever it may be. It might extend to England and Wales, to Great Britain or to the United Kingdom. I cannot see such a provision anywhere in the regulations, but at the top of page 11, I see a paragraph stating that particular regulations introduced for Northern Ireland in 1973 "shall cease to apply".

I am curious to know whether the regulations are a United Kingdom measure. What is their extent? If they are United Kingdom regulations, as they seem to purport to be, what is the position with regard to the powers of the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland? After all, it is responsible for the registration of vehicles in Northern Ireland. As was pointed out earlier, many number plates are sold, and the Department of the Environment has a number of public auctions every year. Once upon a time, I tried to get a message to a member of the Government to tell him that a number in which I thought he might be interested was coming up for sale. Unfortunately, the message was not passed on, and the hon. Member in question missed the number "VAZ 1". I thought that he would have been more than interested in such a number plate. The sale made only £3,000 or £4,000, but it gives some idea of the value that some people place on such number plates.

As the Under-Secretary knows, the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment holds back the first 1,000 numbers in every run and sells them off. One sees Northern Ireland number plates all over London because people buy them. There is a huge trade in them; tens of thousands are advertised for sale in the press. They bring in a lot of money to the Northern Ireland Exchequer. Will we be deprived of that in future? If so, who will receive it?

Are we considering United Kingdom regulations? Has any discussion taken place with the devolved institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? If not, why not? Their finances could all be adversely affected.

**Mr. Evans:** England is the one nation that the hon. Gentleman has not mentioned. What consultation occurred with the English about the changes?

**Mr. Ross:** Is there not a rising tide of anger throughout England? Do the English feel bereft of a Chamber? Or would they, like me, be much happier if we had only this one? I could live with that. I believe that especially given that I have to live with a Chamber that, if it ever had hopes of being democratic, has proven since its inception that democracy does not rule there.

I simply raise the question of responsibility and the extent of the regulations, which has financial implications. I hope that I shall receive a clear reply from the Under-Secretary.

11.1 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill):** Our debate has been fascinating, and all too brief. It has been an evening of passion, even atavism—and it was not entirely predictable that the subject of vehicle number plates could provoke that. I shall deal with several key issues. First, however, I shall try to put the subject in perspective.

I doubt whether any hon. Member, with the possible exception of that well-known libertarian the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), would disagree that it is important for law enforcement and road safety that number plates should be clearly legible to the naked eye and to enforcement cameras.

Over the years, apprehending criminals in many high-profile cases, often involving serious crimes, has depended on the successful identification of a motor vehicle. The number plate—in many cases, only a part of it—has often provided the only clue that the police have had to work on.

The Government are determined that there should be no dilution that might adversely affect the legibility of number plates. Indeed, the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001, which we are debating this evening, will strengthen the existing 1971 regulations and introduce for the first time a standard character font to improve clarity. In passing, let me deal with the point that the hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr. Ross) made. We are considering a United Kingdom measure; the matter is not devolved to Northern Ireland.

The regulations also introduce a new British standard to make number plates more durable. Furthermore, they introduce a new format to replace the existing one, which, as has frequently been pointed out, runs out at the end of August. The format last changed as long ago as 1963. No doubt some of those present, but perhaps not all, recall that. We are therefore experiencing a once in a lifetime event. Because of its rarity, the Government took the opportunity to consult widely before drafting the regulations. I shall revert to the subject of consultation later.

I assure the House that we have carefully considered representations from all interested parties.

*[Mr. Keith Hill]*

We have listened in particular to those from the independent American car importers business who are quite rightly keen to foster, preserve and encourage wide use of what, for many, are highly desirable vehicles.

I shall respond to a couple of the observations made on this point during the debate. The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms), who introduced the debate, asked whether the European Commission had written to the United Kingdom Government asking for left-hand drive vehicles to be included in the list of specialist vehicles allowed to use the smaller font size. The answer is yes, the European Commission wrote to the Government in January 2001. The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) asked about the import of American cars. The regulations do not change the position on American vehicles—it has never been legal for them to display small number plates.

The point at issue is that vehicles manufactured for the north American market have, in many cases, a restricted space for the vehicle number plate, making it difficult for owners to fit a standard UK number plate. However, that problem is not exclusive to vehicles arriving here from across the Atlantic. Vehicles made for markets in Japan and the far east—in other words, vehicles not manufactured to European standards—have a similar difficulty in displaying a legal UK plate. It is estimated that up to 50,000 vehicles are independently imported here annually from those markets. So, we are dealing with a sizeable number.

Many of those vehicles currently display plates made for motor cycles. These are smaller in size and not intended for display on cars. They are illegal under the current regulations, and owners who display them are liable to prosecution. Enforcement of the regulations is a matter for the police who, for operational reasons, have—to my mind, quite rightly—concentrated their efforts on more serious offences. *[Interruption.]* My old sparring partner, the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) says that the law is an ass. I would say that this is a splendid example of British pragmatism. We have heard much about great British qualities this evening and, in my humble submission, that is one of them.

The easements in the new regulations, and those carried forward from the 1971 regulations, as amended, continue to permit two-wheeled and three-wheeled vehicles, quadricycles, agricultural machines and road rollers to use small characters on their number plates. In the case of motor cycles, smaller plates are necessary for safety reasons, and they could not reasonably accommodate larger plates. The other vehicles that may use the smaller plates are tightly defined. They are not generally high-powered or used on the public road. When they are, they are usually driven slowly or for very short distances.

We have carefully considered the representations made on behalf of the importers of American vehicles who wish to be granted a similar concession. I want to assure the hon. Members for Poole, for Kingston and Surbiton and for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) that we will, of course, continue to take account of those representations. Perhaps I should add that a complaint has been lodged with the European Commission, which has urged the UK to provide an exemption. If such an exemption is not given, the Commission has reserved the right to challenge the provisions if they create an unjustified barrier to trade. If it is eventually decided that an exemption has to be provided, all that would be required would be to make a small amendment to the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001. However, for the purposes of the present regulations it has been decided that, for the reasons that I have given, there should be no change to the existing position that American vehicles should fit standard plates.

**Mr. Edward Davey:** Will the Minister go slightly further than he has done? He seemed to suggest that we needed to wait for the Commission to take on the Government. Could not the Government listen to the argument that has been put very strongly from all parts of the House and—rather than wait for the Commission to take the Government on using European law—move to anticipate the outcome, given that they might well be contravening European law by introducing this measure?

**Mr. Hill:** I have just spent a long time explaining why there are powerful safety reasons for the regulations. It is possible that they will be found to be defective according to the European Union's commercial legislation, but I cleave to the view that we have the right to assert our commitment to road safety in this regard.

**Mr. Syms:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Hill:** I will, very briefly.

**Mr. Syms:** Small businesses that have already spent considerable sums on sending letters to the European Commission, the DVLA and DETR feel very frustrated because no one has listened. We are at the end of the process. The Minister acknowledges that there is a problem. Why can we not sort it out now?

**Mr. Hill:** I have spent some time telling the hon. Gentleman and the House that we are talking not just about American imported vehicles, but about up to 50,000 vehicles from the far east and Japan that fall into the same category.

**Mr. Evans** *rose—*

**Mr. Davey** *rose—*

**Sir Teddy Taylor** *rose—*

**Mr. Hill:** I do not want to engage in a protracted discussion, but I will give way to the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East, because he spoke about this issue specifically.

**Sir Teddy Taylor:** The Minister has implied that we have not been applying the law correctly—that what we have been doing has been illegal, but that we have not been bothering about it because the police have been concentrating on other issues. Would it not be appropriate to apply the same policy until some decision is made by Europe? I appreciate that that is not an easy thing for a

Minister to say, but is it possible that the new law might not be applied in the foreseeable future, given that the police have much to do and many issues to face up to?

**Mr. Hill:** The hon. Gentleman would hardly expect me to incite people to break the law from the Dispatch Box. Let me add that this is essentially a matter for the discretion of the police force.

**Mr. Davey:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Hill:** No. I have given way sufficiently, and I dare say I shall give way again later.

Let me deal with an issue that was raised with rather more passion: voluntary provision for the display of the GB national identifier and the European circle of stars on number plates. I must confess that I cannot deal with the extraordinarily complicated question asked by the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) about permanent adhesive, but I shall peruse *Hansard* carefully and in due course, if I am able, respond to the hon. Gentleman in writing. The hon. Member for Poole asked whether it was illegal to produce plates featuring a European Union symbol. It is not illegal: there is no provision relating to the symbol in current legislation. Use of it, however, might be illegal if it affected the size or legibility of a registration mark.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) asked about consultation. Letters were sent to both the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Executive. How those devolved authorities have dealt with the issue is, of course, entirely a matter for them, but they had two bites at the cherry, because they were involved in the two rounds of consultation. The hon. Gentleman also asked—as did others—who else was consulted. The Automobile Association, the Royal Automobile Club, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, the Road Haulage Association, the Confederation of British Industry, the number plate industry and the Association of Chief Police Officers were all consulted, and welcomed the regulations.

**Mr. Llwyd:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Hill:** Let me answer the questions first—this set of questions, at least.

The hon. Member for Aldershot asked for an assurance that after 1 September the display of a number plate not conforming to the regulations would not be a cause for failure of an MOT test. I consider that an important and interesting point. I confess that I do not have the answer; however, I give the hon. Gentleman an absolute assurance that I will make it my business to find it, and write to him. I am grateful to him for raising the issue.

**Mr. Llwyd:** The Minister said that the Welsh Assembly had had two bites at the cherry. At the time of the first consultation, the Assembly did not even exist.

**Mr. Hill:** I am tempted to say, "Touché!" I take that point, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that, if it had been in existence, the Welsh Assembly would certainly have been consulted.

I would like the House to be clear about the issue of the European symbol on number plates. There is no provision within the regulations for either the GB logo or European flag to be mandatory on vehicle number plates. All the regulations do is to allow motorists to take advantage, if they so wish, of a European Commission regulation that allows vehicles displaying the Euro symbol on their number plates to dispense with the need for a separate national identity sticker for journeys within the Community.

Where the Euro symbol appears on the number plate, it must be accompanied by the GB national identifier. It will also be possible for neither logo to appear. It will also be possible for neither logo to appear on the number plate and for the conventional GB decal, as it is known, to be attached to the rear of the vehicle. All those options will be available and acceptable, entirely according to the voluntary desires of the vehicle keeper.

**Mr. Evans:** Will the Minister now give a direct answer? If motorists in the Ribble Valley display the flag of St. George alone or the Union Jack alone, will they face prosecution because of the regulations?

**Mr. Hill:** Not if they are displayed as a decal on the rear of the vehicle. There would be no question of a prosecution in those circumstances.

**Mr. Evans:** I am happy to clarify the situation for the Minister. If a motorist does not have the European Union symbol on the registration plate and just has the union flag on the plate, which I have already seen in the Ribble Valley, could the motorist be stopped and prosecuted because of that?

**Mr. Hill:** I think that the answer is yes. *[Interruption.]* There are roars of surprise from Opposition Members but I think that they already knew the answer to that question.

**Dr. Julian Lewis:** Given that the police are not enforcing the law in respect of those number plates anyway, why are the Government changing the law to allow this practice to be made legal, unless it is because they know that, further down the line, it will be made compulsory?

**Mr. Hill:** Let me come back to the deep-dyed suspicion of a conspiracy. The fact is that the essence of the scheme is to permit ease of circulation in certain European countries. That is the whole basis of the use of these symbols, which after all are 98 mm by between 40 to 50 mm—4 by 2 inches in the old measurement, for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman. This is not a major deal.

**Mr. Bercow:** Whenever the Minister has not a leg on which to stand, the decibel level of his oration rises proportionately. Given the concern that my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) has expressed—that this measure is the prelude to a compulsory imposition of an EU symbol, a concern that I expressed to the Minister in the Vehicles (Crime) Bill Standing Committee in January—why will he not now abandon his procrastination, give up the coy nonsense about being merely a junior Minister and pledge in front of you, Mr. Speaker, and the House that he will always oppose any such compulsory EU imposition? It is blindingly simple. Is he up to it?

**Mr. Hill:** The British Government have no intention of making such a symbol compulsory on number plates. I cannot go further than that.

*[Mr. Hill]*

I stress the voluntary nature of the arrangement. I know that many of our compatriots are keen to exhibit their national identity, whether it be through the display of the Union Jack or other flags from within the United Kingdom. The Government have absolutely no desire to impede perfectly proper displays of national pride. Of course, as I have said, vehicle keepers may continue to use stickers and transfers on their vehicles. We simply do not believe that the number plate is the right place for such flags or logos. The watchword here is clarity and the need for a standard mark on the number plate.

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) *rose—*

**Mr. Hill:** I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, although he is a somewhat belated, if not entirely unpredictable, sojourner in our proceedings.

**Mr. Leigh:** If it is unhelpful to road traffic safety to have certain symbols on the number plate, why have any symbol on it? It would surely be easier to exclude all symbols and have neither national nor EU symbols. What is it about the EU symbol that, alone among any other patriotic or religious symbol in the world, makes it the only one that should be allowed on our number plates? Where is the logic in that?

**Mr. Hill:** I remind the hon. Gentleman that it is entirely up to the individual vehicle keeper whether he or she has the symbol on the number plate. The reason for the use of the EU symbol is to permit ease of circulation in the European Community. It is also a standard symbol, not a confusing or distracting symbol. The hon. Gentleman may not have been here for the beginning of my speech, so I shall repeat that the object of the exercise is clarity. The recognition of a number plate is vital for law enforcement and it is for that purpose that the Government have decided to legislate to ensure that number plates are easy to read and free from other potentially distracting marks. The EU symbol does serve a particular purpose and is to be permitted on a voluntary basis. There is no good reason to allow other variations.

I appreciate that strong feelings over national identity have been expressed here tonight. However, I hope that the House now fully understands the intentions of the new regulations and that the Government, by making the display of the Euro flag optional, have preserved that freedom of choice which is the birthright of every self-respecting Briton.

*Question put:—*

**Mr. Speaker:** I think the Ayes have it.

**Hon. Members:** No.

*Division deferred till Wednesday 25 April, pursuant to order [7 November 2000].*

## Battersea Primary Care Group

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Touhig.]*

11.22 pm

**Mr. Martin Linton** (Battersea): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the issue of the funding of Battersea primary care group. I make no apology if this sounds like a cry for help, because the health service is seriously underfunded in Battersea by comparison with neighbouring areas. I do not wish to drown my right hon. Friend the Minister in statistics, but he will know from his Department that Battersea is underfunded by £4 million and he will be familiar with the figures produced by the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority. Battersea primary care group has an allocation of £70 million, its target spending is £74 million, and that leaves a shortfall of just over £4 million, or roughly £43 a head.

Battersea is not even in the flush of good health. Among the six primary care groups in the health authority, Battersea is in the unenviable position of having the highest rates of heart disease and respiratory disease. Indeed, it may have the highest asthma rate in the country, but this comparison is solely with the other primary care groups in the health authority. Battersea also has the highest neonatal mortality rate; the highest mortality ratio for all ages; the highest admission rate for respiratory diseases; the highest admission rate for men and women over 65; and the highest admission rate for diabetes. I am sorry if the list is long, but it is important to establish the facts. It also has the highest admission rate for epilepsy, the highest conception rate for under-age mothers—three times the London average—and the highest conception rate for teenage mothers. It has the highest proportion of single, widowed or divorced households. Battersea also has the highest proportions of one parent families and of pensioners living alone. All those factors are indicators of medical need.

Battersea also has the highest rates of claims for income support, jobseeker's allowance, attendance allowance and many other benefits. The NHS needs index is the Department of Health's measuring tool for medical need. It shows that Battersea comes top on the indices for acute needs, for community mental health, for district nurses, for health visitors, for community maternity, and for chiropody. Battersea comes top in every single category.

The needs are high in national as well as local terms; Battersea is 26 per cent. above the national average on the community mental health index, and 19 per cent. above the national average on the mental health index. It is 10 per cent. above the national average level for the chiropody index, and 10 per cent. above that for the health visitor index.

Battersea also has the highest limiting long-term illness ratio, according to the normal standardised basis that takes account of age. It has the highest proportion of adults in-household who are recorded as unable to work because of permanent sickness, Battersea has the highest mortality rate for people over 75, and for people under 65. That is extremely worrying, because the population is very young. Of all the 659 constituencies in the country, Battersea has the highest ratio of people aged between 25 to 34.

The last census showed that Battersea had the second most mobile health authority population in the country. I am sure that the new census will show that we have reached the number one spot—certainly in the Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority and probably in the entire country. The electoral register shows that Battersea has gained 37,000 new voters since the 1997 election: that is, 53 per cent. of electors in Battersea were not living at their present addresses in 1997.

When Battersea is not first in terms of medical need, it is often second after the neighbouring primary care group of Balham, Tooting and Wandsworth, part of which is in my constituency. Balham, Tooting and Wandsworth is not much better off financially, having an allocation that is nearly £4 million under target. It has the highest mortality rate from lung cancer and diabetes, with Battersea in second place in both cases.

The Battersea and Balham, Tooting and Wandsworth primary care groups are at the top of every relevant league table bar one. Both are at the bottom of the spending league table, at roughly £4 million below target. This is not a simple demand for more cash. I want to ask my right hon. Friend the Minister about the criteria according to which funds are allocated to primary care groups. Should the guiding principle be equity, need or demand?

If the Government believe that the guiding principle should be demand, I concede that in some respects the Battersea primary care group has low demand. We have the lowest admission rate for cancer, for instance, and for bypass operations, even though we have the highest incidence of heart disease.

That sums up the problem: Battersea has low demand in some areas, but that is not because needs are low. We have the highest emergency admission-to-hospital rate, but a low admission rate from GPs. That is a classic symptom of people on low incomes in the inner city who need the NHS more but use it less. It is not because they do not believe in it—quite the reverse: it is usually because such people lead hard, stressful and chaotic lives. It is much easier for such people to miss an appointment with a GP or a hospital. To go through the system from diagnosis of a heart problem to a bypass operation often requires a lot of tenacity.

The Government believe that the national health service should be founded on the principle of treatment on the basis not of demand of need. The health service should not simply meet the needs of the articulate or the well organised. We need a proactive health service that can find the people who need the treatment most.

The Government's system is based on measuring need, producing target figures based on need and providing more growth money to be distributed to health authorities with higher need. Primary care groups that are under target should be levelled up. Pace of change money is provided, but what happens? Health authorities have so many "must do" targets, such as reducing waiting lists, fulfilling the quota of cancer operations—all good aims in themselves—that it is easy to lose sight of the most important target of all, which is to meet medical need.

Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority ended up with pace of change money of only £500,000. That may sound like a lot, but the portion that went to help Battersea PCG reach its target was only £281,000—just 0.4 per cent. of its annual budget. Wandsworth council has calculated that at that rate it would take 21 years for Battersea to catch up with its fair share of the budget.

I understand the reluctance of the Department of Health to reduce budgets. I understand why there is a principle of non-disinvestment, as it is called, and that PCGs should not have money taken away from them. It is not my aim to take money away from any of the neighbouring primary care groups, but I want the growth money to go to the primary care groups that need it most and to close the gap not in 21 years but in two or three years—the foreseeable future. That must be a "must do" target.

I remind the Minister that Battersea primary care group has been a pace setter. It was a pilot for locality commissioning schemes back in 1997–98. When my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health was Minister of State, he visited Battersea primary care group when it was set up as a pilot because it was seen as a model of good practice. I pay tribute to the work done by the chairman of the primary care group, Dr. Sian Job, by Dr. David Finch, and by all the other members of the board who have set up a model PCG. It is involved in its community, it has good relationships with its general practitioners and it consults and listens to local people.

If the Government set up primary care groups, they must listen to them. If they have targets, they must make progress in meeting them. If they give more money to health authorities in deprived areas, they must ensure that the redistribution occurs not just between health authorities but within health authority areas. Wandsworth is in inner London, but in a health authority that is mainly in outer London, taking in the whole of Merton and Sutton. The danger is that this system of funding will turn into a huge disadvantage if money is allowed to drift towards demand rather than need. That argument has all-party support. The Minister will hear it from Wandsworth council as well as from me, as the Member of Parliament for Battersea.

Just as the deprivation of Wandsworth, as an inner London borough, is diluted and, to some extent, disguised by being joined with Sutton and Merton, so the deprivation of Battersea as the most inner London, deprived part of Wandsworth can be disguised by the creation of a new Wandsworth primary care trust, which would average out some of these inequities.

I do not seek to make a purely local point. The aim of this debate is to draw attention to a wider problem through the example of Battersea. Primary care groups need to become intelligent primary care organisations—the very point of setting them up in the first place. When general practitioners were purely reactive, one could not expect them to go out to discover the health needs of their areas. Battersea PCG provides a role model of a group determined to be proactive and intelligent in tackling its job, seeking out health needs and pushing preventive care programmes. It can make sure that the people who most need the health service receive the help.

I appeal to my right hon. Friend to take another look at the formulas used to determine how soon PCGs will meet their targets. While the situation that I have described has come about for the most understandable of reasons and out of the purest of motives, it would be unacceptable, having set targets, to allow it to be possible to take more than 20 years to achieve them. The Minister and his hon. Friends have set up PCGs and a system that can deliver intelligent primary care, but he must either provide the money for health authorities to make that a reality or

*[Mr. Martin Linton]*

loosen the system so that more resources can be put towards the most important health objective of all—medical treatment in relation to need.

11.36 pm

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Denham):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing an important debate on the funding of the Battersea primary care group. PCGs and primary care trusts are at the forefront of modernising the national health service, and we see them playing a key role in leading the way towards better patient services. I am aware from the debate and from recent correspondence of my hon. Friend's concerns about funding for Battersea PCG.

Before I address my hon. Friend's specific concerns, I want to clarify how PCGs and trusts receive funding, and to set out the background to my hon. Friend's points. Health authorities in partnership with primary care trusts, primary care groups and other local stakeholders should determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

Prior to the establishment of primary care groups in April 1999, health authorities established contracts with NHS trusts and other bodies to provide health care services to meet the needs of their populations. Since then, health authorities have been responsible for allocating resources direct to their primary care trusts or primary care groups within national guidelines.

The formula used to set targets for PCTs and PCGs is essentially that used for health authorities. Health authority PCT and PCG allocations are based on a weighted capitation formula that combines the population number for the area with the levels and types of problems historically found in that area. The aim is to distribute NHS funds fairly on the basis of health care needs in the local population. Although the weighted capitation formula is largely based on utilisation, it includes a wide range of socioeconomic variables associated with the need for health care. It takes full account of the age profile of local populations.

A review of the existing funding formula used to distribute resources is under way. The NHS plan has made the direction of travel clear. We want reducing inequalities to be a key criterion for allocating NHS resources, as the NHS plan specifically says. The review is being carried out under the auspices of the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation, which has NHS management, GP and academic members. We are adopting an incremental approach to the review of resource allocation. ACRA will make regular reports to Ministers as the review proceeds, and will move towards fairer resource allocation as improvements become possible.

When my hon. Friend described the situation in Battersea, he made no acknowledgement of the substantial increase in resources invested in the NHS in his area—as has occurred throughout the country. Although I understand his concerns, to talk solely about distance from target may be inadvertently to give the impression that substantial investment is not going into the NHS in his area. An increase of about 24.9 per cent. in resources in the area covered by the Battersea primary care group in three years is, by any measure, a more substantial investment in the health service of that part of London than was experienced in most previous years. Of course, we are only at the beginning of the unprecedented expansion of resources announced in the second spending review, which underpins the NHS plan. That is important in setting the context for the remainder of my remarks.

Overall, health authorities are receiving an increase of about £3 billion for 2001–02. That represents an average cash increase of 8.9 per cent.—a real-terms rise of 6.2 per cent. Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority received an increase of £42.4 million—a 9.3 per cent. increase. That health authority received the ninth largest increase of any health authority in England.

Within national guidelines, health authorities determine the pace of change at which individual PCTs and PCGs in their area move towards their fair share. For 2001–02, the national guidelines state that all PCTs or PCGs should be given a 2.5 per cent. uplift on their unified baselines. All health authorities should distribute the funding for implementing the NHS plan to PCTs or PCGs on the same basis as allocations have been made to health authorities.

Within those parameters, health authorities are encouraged to make progress towards fair shares, especially for those PCTs or PCGs that are most under target. That should take into consideration the service investment that all PCTs or PCGs will need to make this year. In addition, health authorities will continue to follow the principles of pace of change guidelines that we set out in 1998, including moving towards equity, maintaining continuity and stability.

It is true—and, I think, right—that we do not want to take funds away from PCGs even when they are over target, although that is allowed in exceptional circumstances with their agreement. We want PCGs instead to move towards target through levelling up—by allocating bigger shares of the extra money that we are giving the NHS to those PCGs that are furthest under target.

Battersea PCG is one of the five PCGs and one PCT within Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority, covering the three local authority areas. Battersea PCG consists of 51 GPs working in 17 practices, six of which are single handed. The PCG covers a very mobile and multicultural population of 99,000, which has a wide variety of health needs.

In terms of funding, Battersea PCG and Balham, Tooting and Wandsworth PCGs are under target. The Nelson and East Merton PCT and PCG are close to target, while Putney and Roehampton and Sutton PCGs are above target. We do recognise, however, that Battersea PCG is still about £3 million, or 4 per cent., below the figure suggested under the allocation formula.

Nothing in national policy prevents under-target PCGs from moving towards their ultimate target. Although national policy has stipulated a minimum increase in allocations for all PCGs and PCTs during the past three years, there is still scope for all health authorities to allocate extra funds to under-target PCGs and PCTs, provided that does not destabilise services.

Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth and all its stakeholders—including the primary care groups and trusts—agreed how the additional 9.3 per cent. funding should be allocated. They agreed to focus on maintaining stability within the local health economy by levelling up

under-target PCGs and PCTs. A sum of £500,000 was made available for pace of change for Battersea and Balham, Tooting and Wandsworth PCGs within the borough of Wandsworth. That has moved the two under-target PCGs in Wandsworth 0.6 per cent. closer to target. This is the third year the health authority has set aside funding for the pace of change initiative. Battersea PCG has received the largest increase of any of Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority's PCGs this year.

It is worth noting that all PCGs in the health authority, including Battersea, have confirmed in their 2001–02 service and financial framework that they will deliver the main NHS plan targets this year. One of the aims of the guidance issued nationally was to ensure that the targets set out in the NHS plan would be met in every area of the country.

My hon. Friend has mentioned that although Battersea has poor health indicators, that has not been reflected in the use of services. The health authority's public health department and the two under-target PCGs are working together better to understand the relationship between health needs and utilisation and the range of actions that may be most appropriate better to address health needs.

My hon. Friend mentioned many of the borough's specific problems, which relate to high teenage pregnancy rates, lung cancer and respiratory disease, coronary heart disease and diabetes. I understand the points that my hon. Friend made about funding, but it is also worth acknowledging the many initiatives that are currently in place in Battersea PCG to tackle those problems. The PCG is piloting a "young person friendly" GP practice in Battersea. There is the smart heart campaign, with the London ambulance service and the British Heart Foundation. Work is being done with Battersea research group, through the conduit project, to create active coronary heart disease registers in all practices. A multidisciplinary diabetes taskforce is being established, and there is a relatively new walk-in centre at Tooting.

Those initiatives reinforce what my hon. Friend says about the PCG's ambition and vision. Although I have absolutely no doubt that the PCG would like to make faster progress towards the target than has so far been possible, I am sure that it will recognise that the rate of increase in resources is far greater than practices in the area might have expected under the previous Government.

Of course, health needs are not always met just by increased funding; existing resources need to be matched to health needs. Currently, a health impact assessment is being undertaken in Clapham, which is expected to be completed in the autumn. Such reviews should enable the health community to develop appropriate pathways of care between primary and secondary care, ensuring that the right person delivers the right treatment at the right time in the right environment.

The concerns that my hon. Friend has raised about funding and health inequalities are those that drive the Government's policy to modernise primary care services. They are the very reasons why the NHS plan sets out the vision and the ambition that all PCGs will be in PCTs by 2004. The PCTs will have control of much larger budgets. They will have greater flexibility and influence over local health care decisions, as PCTs, rather than health authorities, will be responsible for commissioning services in the future.

I am aware that the PCGs in Wandsworth are considering applying for PCT status as one PCT for the whole borough next year. As I might well have to take a decision on that proposal in the future, my hon. Friend will understand that I should not comment further, but it is legitimate for me to say that, as part of any consultation on any PCT proposal in any part of the country, the question of how the trust intends to deal with health equality issues, patterns of under-provision and unequal access to services are perfectly legitimate issues to be raised by the public, local authorities, patients or others as part of the consultation process. Indeed, such issues are included among those that should be addressed in any application for a PCT. So there will be opportunities for such issues to be addressed as part of any PCT proposal in any part of London.

As part of the allocation to health authorities, more than £54 million was made available last year to improve access to primary care in the United Kingdom, of which London received £8 million. In Battersea, that has enabled an enhancement of the intermediate care team and packages of care; the extension of the falls prevention project; a reduction in waiting times for community-based physiotherapy; and the employment of a PCG-wide phlebotomist. It is good to see that, in that part of London, the additional funds allocated to primary care are being put to good use.

PCGs and, increasingly, PCTs play a central role in the development of primary care itself and in the future shape and direction of the health service. Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority has followed national policy in its funding allocation for 2001-02 and it is inevitable that, as with the national allocation in which there are over-and under-target health authorities, there may at any one time be over-and under-target PCGs and PCTs. The speed at which we can move health authorities towards their targets and the speed at which health authorities can move PCTs and PCGs towards their targets has to balance two issues: the desire to move health authorities progressively towards equity as represented by weighted capitation targets, and the need for across-the-board increases to maintain continuity and stability in the service and to make progress nationally in priority areas.

I hope that I have indicated to my hon. Friend that we are making progress nationally and in the health authority. Substantial additional funds are available to the national health service and, in the longer term, a review of the national funding formula that is under way will seek more explicitly to tackle the issues of health inequality that he raised in his speech.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes to Twelve midnight.*

# House of Commons

*Wednesday 25 April 2001*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### EU Aid Programmes

1. **Mr. Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire): If she will make a statement on EU aid programmes. [157642]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short):** European Community aid programmes have underperformed badly for many years. They have been poorly focused, with unclear objectives. Unfortunately, the previous Government increased the proportion of British aid going through the European Union from 12 to 30 per cent. and took no action to improve effectiveness. We have, in contrast, worked to get agreement on a radical, poverty focused reform agenda. That is now in place and implementation has begun. We will maintain the pressure for more rapid progress.

**Mr. Paterson:** The Blak report, published by the European Parliament on 28 March, made a devastating critique of the delivery of aid by the EU. If the reforms are not working, what is the Secretary of State doing to ensure that member states can spend more aid more effectively themselves?

**Clare Short:** I do not believe that anyone has made a more devastating critique than I have. The difference between Conservative and Labour Members—especially myself—is that we are doing something about the problem. The record of the hon. Gentleman's Government was to increase the spend and do nothing about effectiveness. Disgraceful!

**Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend believe that the European Union is giving sufficient importance to delivering primary education to all school children throughout the world, which is one of the main objectives of the British Government?

**Clare Short:** In the renegotiation of the Lomé agreement, now the Cotonou agreement, we obtained a commitment to the international development targets which includes the objective of achieving universal primary education. We have been involved with the EC in reforming its delivery mechanisms so that it can put its money behind such objectives. Progress is being made, but much more is needed much faster. However, I am pleased that the EU is moving on its objectives.

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): I thank the Secretary of State for her response on Myanmar. Is it the case that the United Kingdom is co-operating in and leading the work there? Is France involved in work in Thailand to create employment opportunities to rescue youngsters and others from prostitution?

**Clare Short:** My ministerial colleagues with responsibility for European Union development work would say that the UK has been leading the pressure and the effort that is put into such work. We published a reform agenda, much of which has been delivered. It is agreed and has to be rolled out across the world. No one should give up on their efforts. The situation is bad and reforming something that is malfunctioning takes time and effort. However, that is moving forward with, of course, the agreement of member states.

On French co-operation in Thailand, I do not know whether they are involved in rescuing young people involved in the sex industry. However, I shall find out and write to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): My right hon. Friend will be aware that 28 April is workers memorial day. This year's theme is the worldwide tragedy caused by the use of asbestos. Will she use her office to press to ensure that EU aid is not used to fund capital projects that use asbestos? Will she also press for the sensible implementation over time of a worldwide ban on asbestos?

**Clare Short:** I certainly give my hon. Friend that undertaking. I do not know whether the EU has rules about the use of asbestos in capital projects. I hope that it does, but I shall check and we will do all we can to deliver on a worldwide agreement not to use asbestos. I was in Sverdlovsk in Russia fairly recently. It produces asbestos and people there boasted about the large amounts that it could produce. I firmly pointed out the danger of that material. I shall look into the issues that he raises and get back to him.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): In the Secretary of State's first year of office, she said that she was taking action on the EU aid budget and that she was

"determined to ensure that this is spent more effectively."—[*Official Report*, 21 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 91W.]

In her second year of office, she told us that the good thing about something as dreadful as the EU aid budget is that it is quite easy to improve and that things can only get better. However, the report on her third year of office reveals the truth that things have got worse.

The Ruhle report from the European Parliament shows that in 1999, for the first time ever, more than half the EU aid budget went to countries that are not low income or the least developed. Out of the top 10 countries that get EU aid, only one was poor. Instead of making cheap jibes and blaming the Tories, will she have the courage to

admit that she has failed to keep her promises on EU aid, or is she just like the rest of her party—all spin and no delivery?

**Clare Short:** The hon. Lady gets worse, which is sad because one would think that in four years she would have learned something. I can tell her that 1999 was the second year, and anyone working in the field throughout the world who receives EU aid knows that major reform is in place. The situation has started to get better but it is very bad, and rather like her dreadful party it will take a long time to get better.

## HIV/AIDS

2. **Mr. Neil Gerrard** (Walthamstow): What outcomes she will aim to achieve from the special General Assembly of the United Nations on HIV/AIDS. [157643]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short):** Our aim at the United Nations General Assembly special session on HIV/AIDS is for a short, tightly focused and action-oriented political declaration that implements across the world effective programmes for prevention and care, building on the successful reduction of infection levels in countries such as Uganda and Thailand. As my hon. Friend knows, we have invited a representative of the British voluntary sector to join the UK delegation at UNGASS, and I would like to now invite my hon. Friend, as chairman of the all-party AIDS group, to join the delegation on behalf of parliamentarians.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Will she join me in welcoming the withdrawal by pharmaceutical companies of their court action in South Africa? Does she agree that it creates an opportunity for the UN to reaffirm the right of developing countries compulsorily to license patents where there is a national emergency so that they can have improved access to drugs, particularly to deal with opportunistic infections? However, that should be done in the context of dealing with the social and economic consequences of HIV, and not just providing medical care.

**Clare Short:** I certainly welcome the withdrawal of that court action, which was always ill advised, but it does not mean that we suddenly have an answer to the problem. Even at cost price, anti-retroviral drugs are more expensive than most African countries can afford. They might cost only $1 a day, but most countries in sub-Saharan Africa spend less than $5 a head per year on health care and most poor, infected people are not in touch with any health care system, as my hon. Friend knows. We need international co-operation between the pharmaceutical companies, the Governments of developing countries and the international community to put in place basic health care systems and deliver treatment for opportunistic infections, such as TB, which is killing more people than many other illnesses. I hope now that the court case is out of the way, we can make progress, but I hope also that no one will pretend that anti-retrovirals are the answer, because they are not.

**Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): I welcome what the Secretary of State has just said. There is indeed a great danger that drugs could be seen as the answer to the AIDS pandemic, but they could make it worse if they are not used properly. Does the right hon. Lady agree that while education and condom use are the only real answer in the short term, a vaccine against AIDS is the only long-term solution? The international AIDS vaccine initiative needs $1 billion to further its trials and continue research, so when she goes to the United Nations in June, will she persuade other Governments and our own to increase their contributions to ensure that the vaccine becomes a reality?

**Clare Short:** I agree with the hon. Lady. One thing that everyone should know is that infection rates are dropping in many countries. Uganda has led the way with public education and prevention work. Infection rates among young people in Uganda have gone down, and the same is happening in Kenya and Zambia. Things can be done if countries get organised, inform their people, supply condoms and so on. We have been supporting a lot of that work, and there is hope. We should implement all the lessons of success.

I agree that there can be a vaccine, and that is the view of the scientists. The hon. Lady knows that the UK Government were the first to contribute to the international AIDS vaccine initiative. I understand that there have been many other contributions since, and a shortage of funds is not currently the problem, but I shall check that and do all that I can to ensure that there are sufficient funds to find a vaccine as quickly as possible.

**Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): My right hon. Friend will be aware that this week 50 African heads of state and ex-President Bill Clinton are meeting in Nigeria to set the scene for the UN conference in June. She will be aware also of the remarks of the Minister of Health in Nigeria, who said that no one will escape the devastation in Africa, not least the 50 million who will die in the next decade as a result of HIV and AIDS. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights voted yesterday to support a Brazilian resolution for universal help for everyone with HIV and AIDS, so will my right hon. Friend ensure that the British Government give practical expression to that resolution?

**Clare Short:** I am not familiar with the Brazilian resolution. However, I repeat that most poor and infected people in Africa are not in touch with any health care system; if drugs were free, they would not get them. Since 1997, we have committed £1 billion to help support the building of primary health care systems across the world. That is what we need, along with prevention, care for those who are infected and treatment of opportunistic infections. We must then take up pharmaceutical companies' offer of cheap, anti-retroviral drugs, when that can be done responsibly. We are working on that strongly in the international community. I am glad that there is now a much bigger commitment from African heads of state than previously, so I hope that we can make faster progress.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. There is far too much private conversation in the Chamber.

**Mr. Bowen Wells** (Hertford and Stortford): Has the Secretary of State had the opportunity to read the report of the Select Committee on International Development on HIV/AIDS? Hon. Members may not be aware that 2.8 million people died of HIV/AIDS last year, three

times the number of people who died as a result of murder, violence and war; we are therefore dealing with an important question.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that she will be increasing the Department's expenditure on HIV/AIDS which, at the moment, amounts to only £1 million per annum? Will she reverse the decline in expenditure on HIV/AIDS in southern Africa? Has she concluded the programme that she was seeking to devise on a new compact or strategy within the Department to tackle the HIV/AIDS problem in Africa and throughout the world?

**Clare Short:** I have read a summary of the report, and I am afraid that the figures that the hon. Gentleman has just quoted are, unusually, wrong. My Department spent £100 million last year, not £1 million. We shall respond in the normal way; there is obviously some confusion. However, I am happy to confirm that those figures are wrong. We are a leading player in the international system, spend considerably and the budget has been growing. I am sorry that there has been a misunderstanding.

On the written strategy, we already have strategies on improving the health of the poorest people, as the hon. Gentleman knows, including our work on HIV/AIDS. A departmental strategy just on HIV/AIDs is about to be published; to be honest, I threw back the previous one, because it was written in impenetrable jargon which, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is a problem in this area of work, if not all others.

May I end with a genuine expression of respect for the hon. Gentleman's fantastic contribution to this area of work and his fine chairmanship of the Select Committee? We shall miss him greatly; I admire and respect enormously the work that he has done.

**Barbara Follett** (Stevenage): What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of calls from some of the large pharmaceutical companies for a Marshall plan to combat HIV/AIDS?

**Clare Short:** I have had considerable talks with the pharmaceutical companies and their embarrassment about the court case may have been helpful. Those who call for an end to all intellectual property rules are not being helpful, as we need a global agreement to provide drugs and basic health care systems in the poorest countries. We can then provide drugs cheaply at cost or even less, but that has to be in return for a deal involving higher prices in developed countries so that pharmaceutical companies can get some return on their investment, particularly their massive research budgets. Otherwise, we will not get new cures for things like malaria and other diseases of poverty.

I am therefore hopeful that we can get a global agreement—if that is what my hon. Friend means by a Marshall plan—involving Governments, international financial institutions, purchasing funds, agreements on intellectual property and agreements that drugs that are provided cheaply to the poorest countries will not be exported to the richest, otherwise we will dry up the funding of research. I am hopeful that we will get there.

**Mr. Gary Streeter** (South-West Devon): May I strongly agree with the Secretary of State in her tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), who has chaired the Select Committee magnificently for the past four years? On that point, will she reconsider her response to the report, of which she has read the summary, but not the main body? Whether the figures are, or are not, correct, does she not accept that the carefully considered report shows that there has been a dramatic decline in the United Kingdom's bilateral aid spend on HIV/AIDS in Africa over the past three years? Given the importance of the HIV/AIDS epidemic to people in many African countries, will she reconsider and make sure that that decline in spending is reversed in the next few years?

**Clare Short:** No. My respect for the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford is second to none. There will be the proper and normal response to the Select Committee's report. The Committee has produced many high-quality reports. However, the figures are false, as are the claims that are based on them. We shall provide full details so that the hon. Gentleman and others who read them will be persuaded that the figures are wrong.

**Mr. Streeter:** I shall make one further point before the Secretary of State goes to the United Nations to discuss HIV/AIDS in Africa. Does the right hon. Lady agree that partly the success in Uganda is because donor Governments have worked closely with the Government of Uganda in agreeing a strategy for that country? There has been more success in Uganda because of the acceptance of that strategy by the Ugandan Government, who are working with bilateral donors? Does the right hon. Lady accept that, as is so often the case, our bilateral spend is much more effective than much of the money that is spent through multilateral agencies? Will she not take the route of giving more to the UN and spending less bilaterally, and ensure that we are at the forefront of the attack on HIV/AIDS in Africa? We are looking forward to seeing the strategy document, which I hope will put the UK at the forefront in tackling a dreadful disease that is killing so many people in Africa.

**Clare Short:** If the hon. Gentleman discusses these matters with those who are working on them in the international community, I am happy to say that I think he will find that the UK is seen to be at the forefront. I agree that when Governments give the lead, from president through to every village in public education, there is behaviour change, of the sort that we have seen among young people in Uganda. When Governments give the lead—more are doing so in Africa now—we can be more effective.

I do not agree that we should be divisive and say that bilateral is always best. We should work bilaterally where we have our historical obligations, and we should learn our lessons. We should be working also to make contributions to the multilateral system so as to make it more efficient. We should aim for an efficient and competent international development system that is working throughout the world. If we confine ourselves to the UK effort, there will be many countries where we do not make a contribution. Working as we have been, our influence spreads, as does the improvement in effectiveness throughout the world. That is the right approach.

**Mr. Tony Worthington** (Clydebank and Milngavie): When my right hon. Friend goes to the UN General Assembly, will she say that when the target of

0.7 per cent. of gross national product was set for aid, that was pre-AIDS? We now need much more than a contribution of 0.7 per cent to tackle the problems in southern Africa. If we are to put in the basic services, every country that is in a position to do so will have massively to increase its aid.

**Clare Short:** As my hon. Friend will know, the world is going in the opposite direction. We have recently had the new preliminary figures from the Development Assistance committee in Paris, which monitors the world's performance. I am pleased to say that the UK is contributing 0.31 per cent. and is the world's fourth largest donor. That is a record for our country. However, overall international contributions are declining. I agree with my hon. Friend that that is terrible, especially in the face of the scourge of HIV/AIDS. We must do more to mobilise international public opinion. Public opinion is changing in the UK, and so we must make our contribution to the international effort. I agree with my hon. Friend.

## St. Helena

3. **Mr. Andrew George** (St. Ives): What recent assessment she has made of the transport infrastructure needs of the island of St. Helena. [157645]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Chris Mullin):** We are currently awaiting the results of a comparative study of air and sea access which will identify the least-cost solution to the island's future international passenger and cargo transport needs. The final report is expected shortly and its recommendations will then need to be discussed with the St. Helena Government. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has agreed, subject to the outcome of the study, that the Department for International Development would provide funding equal to the least capital cost option—that is either the cost of replacing RMS St. Helena or the estimated capital cost of an airport and related infrastructure.

**Mr. George:** In the Secretary of State's written reply to me on 27 March, I was told that the Department would be responding to the report that was available then within a week. The governor of St. Helena, David Hollamby, is in London this week. Surely there is an opportunity to make more rapid progress. What timetable can the Minister produce so that the matter can be resolved as soon as possible?

**Mr. Mullin:** In the written reply, the hon. Gentleman was told that we would comment on a draft of the report within a week. I understand that that happened. We expect the report to be delivered shortly. The matter will then need to be discussed with the Government of St. Helena. When we have done that, we will reach a conclusion.

**Jean Corston** (Bristol, East): Is my hon. Friend aware that in 1999, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association annual conference was held in Trinidad and Tobago? Most delegates were able to get home quite quickly, even those who lived in some of the Pacific archipelagos, whereas the St. Helena delegate said that it would take him three and a half weeks to get home. Does my hon. Friend agree that that does not assist the viability of St. Helena?

**Mr. Mullin:** The problem is under careful consideration. We must take full account of the costs involved. St. Helena is second among the overseas territories in terms of the amount of aid that we already give. There must, of course, be limits, which is why we say that we will fund the least cost option. The matter is being carefully thought about. Watch this space.

**Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): Does not the Minister recognise that hon. Members from all parts of the House who have met St. Helena delegates at Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conferences over the years consider it outrageous that people should have to travel three and a half weeks by sea from a Commonwealth country to Cardiff to exercise their democratic rights? At the beginning of a new century, is it not right that the Government should recognise their responsibilities to democratic representatives in Commonwealth countries, by ensuring proper air connections?

**Mr. Mullin:** St. Helena is a very remote island. That is a fact with which we all have to cope. The time taken to get there is the same under this Government as it was under the previous Government. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The House must come to order. The disruption is unfair.

**Mr. Mullin:** We are carefully considering the options. We are doing that along with the Government of St. Helena, but there is no magic solution to the problem. It is a matter of geographical location, which not even the Government whom the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) supported were able to resolve.

## World Bank Business Partnership

4. **Mr. Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield): When she will next meet the Development Committee of the European Parliament to discuss the World Bank's business partnership for development. [157646]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short):** We have met on a number of occasions with the European Parliament development committee to try to encourage stronger support for the reform of EC development efforts. In particular, we need to change EC financial regulations so that the Commission is able to collaborate with other international development institutions without first undertaking an audit. It seems fairly shocking that the EC of all bodies audits all other international organisations, whose performance is probably rather better, before it gives any money through them.

**Mr. Sheerman:** My right hon. Friend is aware of the excellent support given by her Department to the World Bank's new business partnership for development, and the great success that many such projects are having, including the one that I will chair from June this year. As my right hon. Friend knows, by 2010 6 million people in the developing world will die not of AIDS, but because

of traffic accidents, and 60 million will be seriously injured. I hope that she will speak straightforwardly to the European Parliament and the European Commission so that they can play an active part in supporting those innovations to stop such unnecessary loss of life and serious injury, and do that in partnership with business.

**Clare Short:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on being selected as chair of the global road safety partnership. He is right: 10 million people a year throughout the world are badly injured in road accidents, 70 per cent. of them in developing countries. In developing countries, that does not mean just disability; it often throws families into poverty. It is an issue that we need to take more seriously. Numbers will rise and we must all co-operate with the important World Bank work. I wish my hon. Friend well with his efforts.

**Mr. Nicholas Soames** (Mid-Sussex): Does the right hon. Lady nevertheless agree that the World Bank partnerships are extremely valuable, and that they deserve support, commitment and, above all, time to be made to work?

**Clare Short:** I agree very much with the hon. Gentleman. All such partnerships are about working with the private sector to promote development—for example, water, sanitation and better transport systems. The public sector cannot afford what the developing world needs in all those areas, but with collaboration, proper regulation and help with feasibility studies, we can get much greater investment into developing countries and improve people's lives. Such ways of working are helping to produce results.

## Somalia

5. **Mr. David Lammy** (Tottenham): If she will make a statement on Government aid to Somalia. [157647]

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short):** Somalia has had no Government since 1991 and is therefore suffering great poverty and instability. There is a growing demand among the people for the re-establishment of government. We support the recent establishment of the transitional Government and hope that they will secure order and development. We are providing assistance in Somalia through NGOs and stand ready to support UN peace-building programmes.

**Mr. Lammy:** I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's response. The transitional Government are making some progress, but as there has been no direct British aid since 1993-94, does she now believe that there is a greater case for support of the transitional Government and of the Somali people?

**Clare Short:** I am afraid that the transitional Government are based on an agreement to bring order and government, but that has not yet been achieved. We need to support this effort. David Stevens, the United Nations Secretary General's special representative in Somalia, is hopeful about the new arrangements. Through the UN, we need to support the transitional Government in creating order, and then some co-operation with Puntland, to move forward development in Somalia. I agree with my hon. Friend's objective, but we need a bit more progress before we can have full-blooded development.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [157672] **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 25 April.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair):** This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

**Mr. Robertson:** I have given notice of this question.

The Prime Minister will be aware of the explosion that took place last year at the Cleansing Services group, a chemical works in my constituency. The explosion occurred even though we had given the Environment Agency plenty of notice that the site was not safe. Given the company's total disregard for the environment and its neighbours, to the extent that even the fire and rescue service cannot guarantee that it would turn up at another incident on the site, does he agree that closure is the only safe option? Will he order a public inquiry into the Environment Agency's abilities to monitor such a site? Will he please action those things today?

**The Prime Minister:** The issue of closure is a matter for the Environment Agency. It has suspended the waste management licence, and it will remain suspended until the agency is satisfied that it no longer needs to be. If I can turn to the issue of a public inquiry—I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving notice of his question—this was, of course, a private company. We asked the chairman of the Environment Agency to take personal responsibility for producing the initial report, and he did so. As the hon. Gentleman will know, it was a very hard-hitting report on the lessons to be learned. We understand the concerns and calls for a public inquiry. A further agency report is due shortly. As soon as we receive that report, we will then make a determination as to whether there should be a full public inquiry.

Q2. [157673] **Ms Linda Perham** (Ilford, North): Is the Prime Minister aware that there is great concern in my constituency about street crime and youth vandalism, especially on local buses? Will he give the highest priority to continuing the drive to improve police recruitment and retention?

**The Prime Minister:** I am delighted to say that the number of recruits is up by some 77 per cent. There is the largest increase in police numbers for more than a decade. As I gather that some Opposition Members have been criticising the Government for spending money on advertising campaigns, I point out that this money is being used to get more teachers, nurses and police in our public

services. That is the difference between a party that is investing in our public services and a party that is committed to cutting them.

**Mr. William Hague** (Richmond, Yorks): Given that the Government have now spent more than £62 million of taxpayers' money on advertising themselves and their schemes in the first three months of this year—more in three months than ever before in history—how much have they allocated to the British Tourist Authority to promote tourism overseas in the light of the foot and mouth crisis?

**The Prime Minister:** We have already allocated, as was described the other day, some £6 million to the tourist councils. There is, however, more money that will be allocated to them, which we will be announcing in the next few days. As for the money that is being spent on Government advertising, let me repeat again that the vast bulk of this is for campaigns that either ensure that we recruit the people we need for our public services, or that we are making sure that, for example, people entitled to the children's tax credit get it. I might just remind the right hon. Gentleman that, a few months ago, the Conservatives were complaining about recruitment in the public sector and saying that we had to do something about it.

**Mr. Hague:** The Government spent £3.5 million on the anti-benefit fraud campaign, which, according to their evaluation, led to no increase in reporting benefit fraud. The Government's report stated:

"the result of the campaign was that respondents . . . perceived benefit fraud as easier to commit"

than they had previously thought. That report is available in the Library.

The sum of £3 million has been spent on promoting take-up of the minimum income guarantee. Again, the evaluation states that it has

"missed . . . 500,000 pensioners who are entitled to MIG but do not claim it."

It is therefore ludicrous for the Prime Minister to claim that such things are indispensable.

There are 1.75 million people working in the tourist industry. Bookings have decreased massively, and the BTA says that it needs £7 million now to stop bookings being cancelled. Is not it time that the Government stopped spending record sums on advertising themselves and spent some of it on advertising Britain?

**The Prime Minister:** Although it is true that some people have yet to take up the minimum income guarantee for pensioners—which, of course, Conservatives oppose—hundreds of thousands of pensioners throughout the country have that guarantee for the first time, thanks to the Government.

I agree that we need to do everything that we can for the tourist industry. Some £200 million of benefit to business is out there as a result of Government expenditure. The best thing that we can do for the tourist industry is help bring trade back to tourist areas. I ask the right hon. Gentleman and Opposition Members to help us by showing a responsible attitude to the countryside that allows it to be open where it should be and enables tourism to return to it.

**Mr. Hague:** It is no good agreeing with what we say but doing nothing about it. The Prime Minister does not appear to understand the urgency of the problem. Five weeks ago, I proposed to him an emergency interest-free loan scheme—an emergency loan scheme to help rural businesses—yet the Government have responded with an interest-charging scheme that would plunge more into difficulty. After five weeks of dithering, will he introduce an interest-free loan scheme and realise that there is a difference between spinning and delivering?

**The Prime Minister:** As I explained to the right hon. Gentleman, we believe that it is better to build on existing schemes rather than introducing an entirely new scheme, which costs £500 million according to his figures. Doubtless the shadow Chancellor has told him where he will get the money—or perhaps not. So far, more than £32 million has been allocated in rate relief and extending the small firms loan guarantee scheme has meant another £22 million and there is additional support for regional development agencies. There is £90 million of direct Government support and, as I have said, up to £200 million of benefit to businesses.

I have spoken to many people in the tourist industry—I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman has, too—and they say that they mostly need people to return to their areas. The position is not helped by people such as the shadow tourism Minister, who, when the case of the slaughterman with symptoms of foot and mouth disease—it remains unconfirmed—was announced, said that it was a massive setback for the tourism industry and would not help it. People in the tourism industry need less of that and more helpful talk from the right hon. Gentleman.

Q3. [157674] **Mr. Jeff Ennis** (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): Does the Prime Minister know about the new millennium clinic in Montagu hospital in Mexborough? Its waiting time for hernia and other minor operations is only four to eight weeks. Will he join me in congratulating all the staff, who have recently been awarded beacon status? Does not that underline what can be achieved under a Government who are firmly committed to the future of the NHS, unlike the Conservative party? *[Interruption.]*

**The Prime Minister:** Opposition Members are being a trifle hopeful vis-à-vis my hon. Friend.

As it happens, I know about the millennium clinic at the Montagu hospital in Mexborough, and my hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the waiting times are down to four to eight weeks. This is part of a programme throughout the country that is putting money into accident and emergency departments, building new clinics, hiring more nurses and doctors, and making sure that, year on year, we get the investment into the health service that it needs. It will take time to do that, but that money is now coming in and the investment stands in sharp contrast to

the commitment of the Conservatives to cut that money. As we know from the shadow Chancellor this morning, they are still opposed to the Government's spending plans.

**Mr. Charles Kennedy** (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Given one of today's reports, will the Prime Minister clarify the situation in respect of the future of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? Does he intend to scrap it, reform it, restructure it or change it in due course? What is he going to do?

**The Prime Minister:** The report in this morning's newspaper was nonsense.

**Mr. Kennedy:** May I, therefore, say to the Prime Minister that one of the lessons of the present foot and mouth difficulties that the country has been confronting is that a rural affairs ministry in the Scottish context has proved to give a more co-ordinated and integrated approach than the best efforts of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at Whitehall level? May I recommend to him that, if he is looking at the future of MAFF, he should look at that model?

**The Prime Minister:** Although I am pleased at the progress that has been made in Scotland, it has to be pointed out that in Scotland the disease is effectively only in one part of the country. In England, the disease has been in many different parts of the country, and has therefore involved a far bigger logistical and practical exercise.

I would also point out to the right hon. Gentleman that, as a result of the policy that has been pursued, the average number of cases per day now is about one third of what it was a few weeks ago. We are therefore slaughtering tens of thousands fewer animals every day. In relation to the normal food production chain, we are now back up to about 90 per cent. of pigmeat production, about 80 per cent. of cattle and almost 50 per cent. of lambs. There is still a long way to go, but we are making enormous progress. I remind Opposition Members that there were predictions that we would be up to 80 cases a day by about this point; in fact, we are nowhere near that, and the numbers are coming down.

Q4. [157675] **Mr. Desmond Browne** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): This morning, 3,100 skilled and productive Motorola workers and their families woke to the grim reality of redundancy. What immediate Government support is proposed for them? Will my right hon. Friend reassure them that they are not to be sacrificed because it is cheaper and easier to sack Scottish workers than their continental European equivalents? As Motorola will continue to be a very important manufacturer in Scotland, even after the Bathgate plant is closed, what commitment has it given to a continued presence in Scotland and to future investment?

**The Prime Minister:** First, I totally understand the concern in my hon. Friend's constituency and in many others at the loss of jobs at Motorola. In relation to the response of the Government, we are obviously working now with the Scottish Executive to see what we can do to help the workers affected. I would also like to quote William Dunn of West Lothian council, who said last night:

> "However, in the last 12 months, we have created over 7,000 jobs within West Lothian and we see that we can at least take some of these people into our economy . . . straight away."

We shall obviously have to work to make sure that that happens.

On consultation, we conformed fully with all the European Union requirements on this, including those on consulting about collective redundancies in European works councils. I do not think that that is the issue. Just in the past 10 weeks, in this sphere of industry, there have been 100,000 job losses worldwide. In many countries round the world, there have been job losses as a result of the downturn in that market. What we have to do is work very closely with the Scottish Executive and with the work force to make sure that those who are made redundant are found new jobs.

**Mr. Stephen Day** (Cheadle): Is the Prime Minister aware of the great surprise outside in the country at his reported proposal to supply free CDs to habitual young offenders? He is used to turning the meaning of the English language on its head. Does he not agree that this gives a whole new meaning to the phrase "He's got a record"?

**The Prime Minister:** I can only guess that it took the hon. Gentleman a very long time to think that one up.

There is only one problem with the premise of the hon. Gentleman's question, which is that it is completely false. There is no question of giving any incentives to young offenders. What I announced in respect of proposals to reward young people engaged in voluntary work is not for young offenders; it is for those young people who are undertaking voluntary work in their local communities. As ever, the Conservative party got hold of the wrong end of the stick.

Q5. [157676] **Mr. Clive Efford** (Eltham): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to figures published this month by the employment unit on the new deal for under-25s? They show that 380,000 people passing through the new deal have found jobs, rather than the 250,000 figure that we said that we would achieve at the last general election. Moreover, there has been an 80 per cent. reduction in youth unemployment in my constituency.

Does that not contrast with the "On your bike" policies of the last Government—"On your bike" being, of course, what the Tories are itching to say to their leader after the next election? Does it not also demonstrate— *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I think that the Prime Minister can answer the hon. Gentleman.

**The Prime Minister:** We have not yet extended the new deal to Leaders of the Opposition, but I note my hon. Friend's representation.

Long-term youth unemployment is down by some 80 per cent. There has been a huge reduction over the past few years, but it has been achieved not merely through the strength of the economy but through the new deal

itself. However much Opposition Members may oppose it, tens of thousands—indeed, hundreds of thousands—of young people and others have had, for the first time in their lives, some real hope and real opportunity, and a chance to make something of themselves. In a decent civic society, if we want responsibility from people we should also give them opportunity.

**Mr. John Redwood** (Wokingham): When, after the thousands of job losses that took place yesterday—not just at Motorola—the Prime Minister says, "No more boom or bust", how does he define an economic bust?

**The Prime Minister:** If that was a leadership bid, it was unfortunate. I can define a bust: it happened when the right hon. Gentleman was a member of the last Conservative Government. It happened not when debt was under control, unemployment was falling and interest rates were low, as is the case under this Government, but in the early 1990s when interest rates were at 15 per cent., debt was soaring, taxes were going up and public spending was being cut.

Q6. [157677] **Mr. Jim Dobbin** (Heywood and Middleton): Is the Prime Minister aware of a project in my constituency, where the area police team has established a mobile unit that it calls "the pod"? It is funded by the local authority and the Guinness Trust housing association. The pod can be moved rapidly from problem area to problem area. It provides a focal point for the community, raises the profile of the police and is working well. Will the Prime Minister consider using the same initiative in other areas? Will he also confirm that 13 additional police officers are on the way to Rochdale's Heywood and Middleton division this year?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure that the extra police officers are well worth it.

The pod scheme has been an immense success in my hon. Friend's area, and we are considering how it could be extended to other parts of the country. Ultimately it is a decision for local police and local authorities on the ground, but there is increasing evidence from around the country that youth offending can indeed be reduced provided that the right measures are in place—investment, and also the local strategic partnership that brings together police, local authorities, schools and others. That is one reason why overall crime is down by some 10 per cent. since the last election.

**Mr. William Hague** (Richmond, Yorks): Before the last election, the Prime Minister promised not to increase taxes at all. Will he now repeat his promise?

**The Prime Minister:** What I promised before the last election was that we would not increase the basic or the top rate of tax. We have not done that. As for any commitments we give at the next election, I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman will have to wait for the manifesto.

**Mr. Hague:** The Prime Minister knows that he did not just promise no increase in tax rates. On 21 September 1995, he said:

"We have no plans to increase tax at all".

On 2 August 1996, he said:

"Our proposals do not involve raising taxes."

On 8 January 1997, he said that the Labour party's programme

"does not imply any tax increases at all."

The reason that he cannot repeat those promises is that he knows that he has introduced 45 new taxes in this Parliament—the largest increase in any peacetime Parliament—and if he really believed that he had cut taxes, there would be no reason not to repeat those promises. Let us test whether even he believes the things that he has said. Will he repeat his promise of no tax increases at all?

**The Prime Minister:** I have already said what promises we gave at the last election. The right hon. Gentleman says that we said that nothing would change at all, but he forgets that we promised a utility tax to fund the new deal, and we implemented it. In fact, the tax burden rose in the period in which he was a member of the Cabinet. In the first part of this Parliament, it is true that tax revenues rose, because we had to deal with the huge deficit and doubled national debt that we inherited, but the other reason why the overall amount of revenue is higher now is that vastly more people are now in work than in the Tory years.

**Mr. Hague:** The Prime Minister will not repeat his promise because the truth is that he broke it and he knows that he broke it. He said that there would be no tax increases at all, but he has levied higher taxes on marriages, mortgages, petrol, pensions, savings, charities, insurance policies, house buying, cars, small businesses, large businesses and self-employment. Is not it the case that whether he makes yet another bogus pledge on income tax rates or not, the British people know that taxes have gone up under Labour and will always go up under Labour?

**The Prime Minister:** That would be slightly more credible were it not for the fact that the actual tax burden is lower than in six out of the 10 years under Mrs. Thatcher—if I can mention that person to the right hon. Gentleman. I have just explained to him how the tax burden went up in the last two years of the Government of whom he was a member. If the children's tax credit, the working families tax credit, the cut in the basic rate of income tax, and the lower national insurance charges—especially for those at the lower end of the income scale—are taken into account, many people have had substantial reductions in income tax.

More important than anything else is the fact that we have an economy in which, as a result of the prudent measures that have been taken, mortgages are running at half the level they were in the Conservative years. That is why the average mortgage holder is saving around £1,500 a year. The issue is not simply the amount of tax taken, which—as I said—is often a function of the number of people in work: it is also the strength of the economy and the number of jobs. In all those areas, we are in an infinitely stronger position as a result of the measures that we have taken. As I said to the right hon. Member for

Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) earlier, if we were ever to follow the path that he suggests, we would be back to Tory boom and bust and everyone's taxes would go up.

Q7. [157678] **Mr. Phil Sawford** (Kettering): Will my right hon. Friend give a warm welcome to the observations of the shadow Health Secretary who, after his visit to Kettering general hospital earlier this week, said that it seemed that hospitals in the area were not doing badly? In the past four years we have had massive investment, including a new endoscopy suite, a new orthopaedic theatre, a new ophthalmic unit and a new CAT scanner. I could go on. Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we carry on at the present rate, the Conservatives might some day recognise that we are doing very well in Kettering?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure that the local people will recognise that. The investment in the health service is matched by the record investment in schools. I am sure that my hon. Friend could have read out a list of schools receiving capital investment, and I know that Kettering will receive extra police as a result of our investment.

Before Conservative Members get too confident about their chances in relation to my hon. Friend, I remind them that we will go into the next election promising to carry on that investment in schools, hospitals, police and pensions. I shall remind them what they will fight the next election on because it was set out by the shadow Chancellor in a letter to *The Times* this morning, in which he repeated the fact that he will reduce the 3.3 per cent. increase in public spending, to which we are committed, to below 2 per cent. So that means—*[Interruption.]* "Yes", they are all saying. That amounts to the £16 billion in cuts to which we know that the Opposition are committed. The choice for my hon. Friend's constituents will be very simple. It will be between investments under us and cuts under them.

**Mr. Quentin Davies** (Grantham and Stamford): Does the Prime Minister recall my asking him at Prime Minister's Question Time on 2 December 1998 whether he stood by his party's commitment before the last election to legislate on age discrimination? His answer was:

"Yes, we stand by it."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 1998; Vol. 321, c. 879.]

Does he still stand by it? Does he still intend to legislate on age discrimination in this Parliament, or will that be just one more broken Labour promise?

**The Prime Minister:** I take it that that is a commitment from the Opposition to introduce such legislation—not that they did anything about it during their 18 years in office. In a series of agreements with employers, we have set out codes of practice to be followed by them in relation to age discrimination. We have not ruled out age discrimination legislation, but we thought it right to try the voluntary approach first, because that is what large parts of business wished us to do. I have no doubt that, had we introduced age discrimination legislation, he would have accused us of over-regulating industry.

Q8. [157679] **Ms Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North): What measures does my right hon. Friend have in mind for continuing the drop in unemployment, which has already resulted in the lowest unemployment rates in Wales for 25 years? In my constituency, it has resulted in a decline in youth unemployment of 70 per cent., and a drop of 90 per cent. in long-term unemployment.

**The Prime Minister:** What we will do, of course, is continue with the new deal, which helps into work those who are especially vulnerable in the labour market, such as long-term unemployed young people, lone parents, and so on. However, the single most important thing for the Government to do is to carry on running a strong and well-disciplined economy. The difficulty with the Conservative party's plans is that, because they mean that we would go back to the policies pursued in the early 1990s, very many fewer people would be in work and mortgages would be far higher. The only way that we are going to make sure that we keep the number of jobs in the economy that we have at present is by running a strong economy, with low inflation and low interest rates, with the national debt under control and with big investment in the public services that guarantees jobs in the future.

Q9. [157680] **Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): This week, the Government granted a permit for an incinerator in Guildford that is 10 years out of date. Until Ministers get to grips with the health risks of such incinerators—and the strategic need for them—should not we have a moratorium on them?

**The Prime Minister:** I am sure that this is a problem that Governments of all political colours have had to deal with for years. It is a difficult matter, but there is a need for such facilities, as the hon. Gentleman will understand. Of course such decisions are difficult, because people never want such facilities in their local patch. However, any Government in power would have to decide that such incinerators have to go somewhere. I am sure that we will listen to what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but the truth is that, irrespective of which party is in government, this is something that has to be done.

**Mr. Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Cammell Laird shipyard in my Jarrow constituency is the last working yard on the south bank of the Tyne? May I urge him to make every effort to ensure that the successful bidder for the yard continues the Tyneside tradition of shipbuilding and ship repair? Will he make extra efforts to ensure that the City spivs now circulating do not get their hands on the yard, which they will flog off and strip of its assets so that they can build yuppie houses for their friends?

**The Prime Minister:** I will deal with the Cammell Laird aspect of that question. Of course, I understand the concerns of my hon. Friend's constituents. Given Cammell Laird's continuing interest in Ministry of Defence work, it is important that we do everything that we can to help the company. In that connection, I know that my hon. Friend will be aware that there has been a huge boost in the number of apprentices at the yard, and elsewhere in the shipbuilding industry. However, it is obviously important that the yard competes for work on the same basis as other yards.

Q10. [157681] **Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): Following the Government's humiliating defeat in another place last night, will the Prime Minister finally agree with the views of medical charities, the British Medical Association and the Opposition and withdraw his mad plans to abolish community health councils?

**The Prime Minister:** No, we will not, because the replacement of community health councils by patient forums and patient councils is, we believe, and as the College of Health made clear earlier, a better way to make sure that patients' interests are represented. There has been a debate about community health councils for many years, but patient forums and patient councils will bring patients better into the machinery of decision making in the health service than anything before, which is why this move has been welcomed by the NHS Federation and the College of Health.

**Mr. Eddie McGrady** (South Down): The Prime Minister is experienced in the terrible consequences that follow when foot and mouth occurs in a locality. Will he translate that experience to Northern Ireland, a small geographical area which is totally dependent on agriculture? Some 75 per cent. of its livestock has to be exported, and the tourist industry is devastated. We will not be able to afford to pay consequential loss compensation out of our block grant, which is insufficient for those purposes. Given the £37 billion surplus in the Treasury, will he give an assurance that extra funding will be made available to Northern Ireland for the financial fallout of foot and mouth?

**The Prime Minister:** We are looking to see what we can do to help businesses that are suffering as a result of foot and mouth disease. However, I go back to the point that I made a short time ago. The only way to help tourist businesses is by bringing tourism to them. In respect of the overall situation, we have to ensure that the disease is eradicated. The measures that we have taken over the past few weeks, difficult and ghastly though they have been, with the number of animals that have had to be slaughtered, are the only way that we are able, and have been able, to bring the disease under control. Unless we can eradicate the disease quickly, there will be no swift return to normality for the areas affected. We will look at the help that we can give and some measures will be announced in the next few days, but the single best thing that we can do is to eradicate the disease as swiftly as possible so that life gets back to normal.

## Motorola, Bathgate

3.31 pm

**Mr. Speaker:** Private notice question. Mr. Dalyell.

**Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): May I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your thoughtful and considerate words, in answer to a point of order yesterday, to those who have lost their jobs at Bathgate, and for allowing me to put a question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, of which I have given him private notice—namely, if he will make a statement on the Government's actions in relation to Motorola in Bathgate?

**The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Stephen Byers):** I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) will share with me and, I think, most Members of the House, the feelings of regret and disappointment caused by Motorola's decision to close its plant at Easter Inch in Bathgate. This is a bitter blow for hard-working people and their families. In considering our response to this announcement, we need to be aware of the reasons for Motorola's decision and the steps that will need to be taken to help those individuals affected and the communities in which they live.

There is no doubt that Motorola is facing a difficult position with the sharp downturn in the market for mobile telephones. That was the reason given for yesterday's decision. As a consequence of this global decline, Motorola announced trading losses of £140 million for the first quarter of this year.

The closure of the Easter Inch factory is part of the wider rationalisation of global production capacity by Motorola personal communications sector—its mobile phones division. Since December, Motorola has announced plans to cut 12,000 jobs worldwide in this sector alone. It is closing two plants in the United States and cutting its work force in Brazil. In Europe, Motorola has sold its Dublin facility, with a major loss of jobs.

The Scottish Executive have been in constant contact over the past few weeks with Motorola both in the United Kingdom and in the United States. The Government have backed the Scottish Executive's efforts. The Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Secretary and I have all made representations to Motorola.

In the end, Motorola took a decision that it believes to be in the long-term commercial interests of the company. However, there is no doubt that this will be an extremely difficult time for all those affected by the announcement. It will be a devastating blow for individuals, the families and the communities in which they live.

The first priority must be to pursue with Motorola future options for the Bathgate site. We need to explore every possible future use of that excellent facility. There are a wide variety of options to explore with the company—ranging from sale as a going concern to, possibly, sale to a contract manufacturer or to another related business. The other alternatives include new employment for a new employer purchasing the site. Invest UK stands ready to assist the Scottish Executive in that task.

In order to assist the individuals affected, the Scottish Executive are setting up a taskforce, made up of Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian, the Employment Service, West Lothian council, the careers service, the Benefits Agency and the Scottish Trades Union Congress. The taskforce will draw up an action plan to meet the needs of the Motorola workers. Subject to the agreement of Motorola, that is likely to include an on-site jobshop, business start-up workshops and other support to assist people to find jobs—*[Interruption.]* The Conservatives may joke at the measures that we are putting in place to help those affected by the decision, but Labour Members and people in Scotland know only too well what the Conservatives did in the 1980s: they did nothing for the people of Scotland—that is the reality of the situation.

Because those individuals need assistance, the taskforce has been set up and has already begun its work to help them. The action plan will meet the needs of those individuals. The Scottish Executive are setting aside up to £10 million to help fund the action plan. It has been made clear to Motorola that it will have to pay back the £16.75 million in regional selective assistance that it has received for the plant during the past six years. That will be the largest clawback of RSA grant in the history of Scotland.

Although the Bathgate decision is a real body blow, we must not forget that Motorola will remain a major employer—and the largest electronic manufacturer—in Scotland. The company has given assurances that its semiconductor operations at East Kilbride and South Queensferry are unaffected by yesterday's decision; we welcome that. The company remains committed to a software development centre at Livingston and to the planned next generation of semiconductor technology in Dunfermline. Despite the decision, towards the end of last year, to reconsider the timing of the Dunfermline plan, Motorola has emphasised its underlying commitment to that project.

We would expect that workers from Bathgate, affected by yesterday's decision, will have the opportunity to retrain and to apply for those new jobs being created by Motorola in Scotland. The company has confirmed that it looks forward to building on its 32 years' association with Scotland, and that it sees Dunfermline as the cornerstone of its future investment.

It is clear that, at a time of globalisation, many sectors of industry are going through major restructuring, and that there are bound to be implications for us in the United Kingdom owing to the slowdown in the world economy, especially in the United States. However, we should not overstate our difficulties. Most forecasters expect manufacturing output to grow this year. The medium-term prospects appear good with productivity having grown at 6 per cent. Exports are also growing, with manufacturing export volumes up by more than 10 per cent. in the last year.

No country can ever insulate itself from world economic events, but it is because of the decisive action that we have taken—introducing tough fiscal rules, reducing the national debt, making the Bank of England independent and delivering the lowest inflation for 30 years—that British economic policy is much better placed than it has ever been in the past.

We are on course to continue to deliver stability and sustained growth, but it is an extremely difficult time for individuals and communities when jobs are lost as industries restructure in the face of change. It is even more frustrating when, as in this case, those losses arise because

*[Mr. Stephen Byers]*

of global managerial decisions based on financial problems in one sector, despite the success and the profits coming from the plant that has been earmarked for closure.

This will be a difficult time for all those affected by the announcement. The Bathgate work force are productive and highly skilled. I know that, working with local and national agencies and the Scottish Executive, the United Kingdom Government will do all we can to assist them to find new jobs.

The closure of the Easter Inch plant will take place over six to 12 months. Motorola, the Scottish Executive, the Employment Service and the Government will work together to ensure that employees are found new employment before redundancy takes effect.

Bathgate has suffered from job losses before. In the 1980s, unemployment reached 17 per cent. but, through hard work and commitment, the situation has been turned around. As a result, the current rate of unemployment in West Lothian stands at 3.8 per cent.—a great success story. However, I am the first to acknowledge that those figures will be of little comfort to the workers affected by the announcement. Many hon. Members will understand the anger and frustration that they will feel. We must do all we can to help them through the difficult months ahead. By working together with the Scottish Executive, I am confident that we will be able to meet the challenges that lie ahead and, as a result, offer real hope to those individuals, their families and the communities affected by Motorola's decision.

**Mr. Dalyell:** May I thank my right hon. Friend for the tone and content of his statement? Does he sympathise—I do not doubt for a moment that he does—with those who are having to face redundancy, not for the first, not for the second, but in some cases for the third, fourth or even fifth time in their lives? Does he recognise that the majority of the 3,200 people losing their jobs are youngish people, who—thanks, in part, to Motorola's first-class and caring training policies and, in part, to excellent schoolteachers and further education lecturers in central Scotland—are eminently employable?

Looking to the future, should we not co-operate with Motorola in getting the best possible redundancy terms for those who are losing their jobs? Is not the company's offer of four weeks' pay for every year of service four times the statutory requirement, and confirmation of the company's decency towards its employees?

Does the Secretary of State recognise that Motorola has a 32-year commitment to Scotland at East Kilbride and continues to work closely and constructively with many organisations and, in particular, with the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, my right hon. Friend the Member for East Kilbride (Mr. Ingram), who endorses my favourable attitude towards Motorola?

Does my right hon. Friend recognise that Motorola has provided 20,000-odd person years of quality employment at Bathgate, which will always be appreciated throughout the central Scotland community? Will he do everything in his power to encourage Motorola to develop and expand research and software facilities in my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's constituency of Livingston and to go ahead with the proposed semiconductor development at Hyundai in my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's constituency of Dunfermline, East? Does my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry agree with Bill Speirs of the STUC that the Government must do everything to keep Motorola in Scotland?

Albeit that there are legally obligatory repayments under regional selective assistance, when my right hon. Friend considers such matters, will he take into account the point that Motorola should in no way be scapegoated? Is not the truth that West Lothian has been resilient since the days of James "Paraffin" Young in the industrial revolution and that it is a vibrant industrial community, which has the potential to absorb many of the 3,100 skilled work force? Incidentally, is it not a fact that, according to Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian, although 800 redundancies were declared by Continental Tyres at Newbridge in late 1999, only 31 people of those people remain unemployed? I know from my first-hand knowledge that there are explanations for some of the cases that are included in that figure of 31.

Do we have the assurance that my right hon. Friend—along with the Secretary of State for Scotland, my right hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell), who is sitting beside him and whose constituency is affected, and the constructive and efficient members and officials of West Lothian district council and the Scottish Executive—will make sure that the full resources of Government are brought to bear to ensure that customised training will help to place these skilled workers as quickly as possible into alternative employment? I cannot sufficiently emphasise the importance of customised training, especially against the backdrop of a continuing skills shortage in our area.

Does my right hon. Friend share a certain unease that part of the trouble has been brought about by young analysts, operating in Wall Street and in the City of London? They have no great knowledge of industry and they are concerned about getting a quick buck. They know very little about the lives of the people affected and on whom they have such a great effect.

Does my right hon. Friend share my unease about the culture of blame that has developed in relation to redundancies in high-tech industries? Hindsight is a marvellous thing, and we might all be better if we possessed perfect foresight. Is it not true that, until Christmas 2000 when every primary school pupil in the playground seemed to have asked for a mobile phone, demand boomed? In six short weeks, the mobile phone has become a product that we replace only when we lose or bust it.

Can we count—I am sure that we can—on the sustained and intense co-operation that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister promised at 3.15 pm in answer to the pertinent question of my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne)?

**Mr. Byers:** My hon. Friend is a powerful advocate on this issue. For some time, he has been concerned about Bathgate's prospects and the possible decision by Motorola. He has set the right tone for the House. We need to be conscious of the needs of the individuals affected by the decision. They will be very uncertain about their prospects and need to know that their Government in Westminster and the Scottish Parliament and Executive want to put in place measures to assist

them. Motorola will remain a major employer in Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom. It is not a fly-by-night company; it has been in Scotland for 32 years.

We understand Motorola's difficulties. Some 21,000 jobs are being lost worldwide because of the downturn in the mobile phone market and Bathgate is paying a heavy price because of the industry's commercial decisions. We need to engage with Motorola and find a new owner for an excellent facility at Easter Inch. My hon. Friend mentioned the repayment of regional selective assistance. Motorola has been clear on that. It received the assistance subject to certain conditions and has been open in stating that if it does not meet them, it is only right and proper to repay the money. It said that in the last 24 hours.

I agree with the comments made by Bill Speirs of the STUC. This is an opportunity to work in a real partnership. My hon. Friend made an important point about the strengths of the work force in Bathgate. Many of the employees are young and have been through excellent training as a result of Motorola's efforts. It is true to say that education and training are probably the best economic policy that any community or country can have. Motorola's employees will be in a strong position to take advantage of the new opportunities that it is to be hoped will be available to them in the next six to 12 months. We have a breathing space to ensure that those opportunities exist for the people affected by Motorola's decision.

The Conservatives sneer when we talk about establishing a taskforce to help those people, but in the north-east, when Siemens closed its plant in my constituency and Fujitsu closed its plant at Newton Aycliffe further south, taskforces were set up and within 12 months the majority of people who were affected were in work. That is in stark contrast to the Conservatives' approach. They would simply say, "This is about market forces. Government should not intervene." We are following an active policy in which we make representations. However, if a decision is taken, of which we do not approve—as in this case—but which is in response to commercial realities, we want to work with the people and community affected so that we can be far stronger in addressing their needs and concerns. That is exactly what we will do in Bathgate. We will work with the Scottish Executive and Motorola to ensure that people affected by the decision will have new opportunities.

**Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory** (Wells): The job losses at Motorola are disastrous for the staff and work force, especially in the constituency of the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell). However, the effect will be felt more widely, both in Scotland and the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, the losses follow more than 350,000 manufacturing jobs lost since the last general election. That compares with 69,000 extra manufacturing jobs created by the most recent Conservative Government. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm those figures and that contrast? Will he also comment on today's CBI industrial trends survey, which shows that orders, output and business confidence are sharply down? The terrible job losses may be the latest but not the last in the sector.

Most importantly, will the disaster at Motorola finally shake the Government out of their complacency on employment? Last-minute emergency telephone calls from the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry do not repair the damage caused by four years of endless increases in business taxes and the piling on to British industry of more and more red tape and regulations, all of which has undermined our competitiveness. That will be particularly important if there is a worldwide economic downturn, which I notice the right hon. Gentleman is starting to blame for everything.

Will the Secretary of State today start to listen to what companies and industry have been telling the Government for four years about the need to retain competitiveness and the damage that will be caused to future jobs if that is not done? Will he start to stand up for the interests of British industry? Will he resist the endless Treasury demands for more and more revenue from business and industry which have reduced the Department of Trade and Industry to the role of a spectator as the job losses mount, month after month?

Finally, is it the case that Motorola was hit by the slow take-up and orders for its new GPRS handset, caused in turn by the £22.5 billion paid by the industry to the Treasury last year as the licence fee for the next mobile phone spectrum auction? That was a transfer of debt from the public to the private sector which weakened the telecom sector and threatened to put this country further behind in the whole technology sector.

**Mr. Byers:** I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman got his last point totally wrong. He was talking about a second-generation capability mobile phone, and of course the auction related to third-generation capability. Perhaps that is the sort of detail that he does not want to go into.

Most importantly, we should look at the reasons that Motorola has given for its decision. Let us listen not to the right hon. Gentleman or me, but to Motorola, which has made it very clear that the decision was made because of a downturn in the global mobile phone market. That is why 12,000 jobs are being lost worldwide—not only in Scotland, but in America, Brazil and Dublin. We are in a global economy and we feel the consequences of that.

The right hon. Gentleman made a comparison with the loss of manufacturing jobs. He was very selective in the period from which he quoted figures. He said that some 300,000 manufacturing jobs have been lost in the past four years under this Government, but he failed to look at the record on manufacturing of 18 years of Conservative Government. Let us consider that period—1979 to 1997. The right hon. Gentleman does not like it because he knows that 2.5 million manufacturing jobs were lost in that time. That is an average loss of 150,000 manufacturing jobs every year for 18 years, not just one or two years. That is why Labour Members will take no lessons from the Conservatives about our commitment to manufacturing. In Scotland, there are now 100,000 more people in work than when we came into office. In the United Kingdom, there are now 1.2 million more people in work than in May 1997. Those are the true figures, which the right hon. Gentleman will not allow to get in the way of his prejudice.

It was interesting that there was nothing in the Conservative spokesman's remarks, not even a sentence, about the steps to help the individuals affected by the decision, because the Conservatives simply do not care. We know that because we have been here; we know their attitude to the loss of manufacturing jobs. In Scotland, hundreds of thousands of jobs in manufacturing were lost

*[Mr. Byers]*

in the 1980s. We all know what the Conservatives did; they walked away and did not discharge their responsibilities. We will discharge our responsibilities to the workers of Bathgate and the people of Scotland. We are an active Government working in partnership, ensuring that people have a far better future.

**Mr. Joe Ashton** (Bassetlaw): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the collapse of the mobile phone industry is affecting not just Motorola in Scotland but 950 jobs at Ericsson in my constituency? Is it not time that there was an inquiry by the Office of Fair Trading into that industry's marketing? It costs £100 to make each mobile phone, yet the networks—Orange, Vodafone, BT and so on—are putting them on sale at £15 to £20, hoping to make their money from the cost of calls. They have expanded the market into a fashion industry, as phones are given as children's presents at Christmas. Kids are given phones only to find out that they cannot afford the £5 or £10 vouchers to keep using them. Suddenly, virtually overnight, a major worldwide industry has collapsed.

There should be some inquiry, even if it is conducted by a television company, into how a high-tech industry can pull that sort of stunt and put hundreds of people—indeed, thousands across Europe—out of jobs while being irresponsible about marketing. Will my right hon. Friend ask the Office of Fair Trading to conduct an inquiry into how the collapse came about?

**Mr. Byers:** I do not think establishing an OFT inquiry would serve the purposes about which my hon. Friend feels strongly. If there is any evidence of anti-competitive behaviour, clearly that should be referred to the OFT. However, there are wider issues. I fully understand my hon. Friend's concerns about Ericsson's decision in relation to his constituency. We are working closely with Ericsson to try to identify a new owner for that facility and its other facility just outside Scunthorpe. There has been a lot of interest from people wishing to acquire those plants. I hope that there might be some good news concerning those individuals. There are therefore issues that need to be addressed, but starting an OFT inquiry now will not serve the objectives that my hon. Friend wishes to achieve.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. In granting this private notice question, I realised that we have an Opposition day and are eating into Opposition time, so I appeal to the House for brief questions.

**Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): May I add my sympathy to that expressed for members of the work force and their families, and welcome the taskforce? May I ask specifically whether the £16.5 million repayment will be available to the taskforce to help retraining and assist the work force?

In the Secretary of State's discussions with the company, how did it explain the fact that it is closing its Scottish installation, but not its installation in Flensburg in Germany? Is that because the company judged that the German manufacturing environment is more competitive than ours for exchange rate or other reasons, or is it because the German plant is an R and D unit? Is not one of the lessons of the exercise the fact that our selective industrial policy has channelled large sums of money—a cumulative total of £6.5 billion in Scotland, I think—to subsidise jobs, rather than provide the added value and permanence of more developed approaches to regional policy?

Finally, since the Secretary of State, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor have been speaking to company executives about that commercial decision, what was the basis of their representation? Did the Secretary of State resist the pressures from the industry to change retrospectively the terms of their auction licences and allow anti-competitive mergers in the industry?

**Mr. Byers:** In the conversations that I had with the company, the cost of the third-generation auction was not an issue that it raised. The debate was always about the relative costs of the plant in Germany compared with those at the Bathgate facility. Those were not employment costs. The company was examining the totality of provision. In that context, it felt that there were reasons—partly because of the different nature of the facility in Germany—why on balance it made greater commercial sense for the Bathgate facility to be the one that should suffer from this decision.

As for the repayment of regional selective assistance, the Scottish Executive have already indicated that up to £10 million will be available to support the work of the taskforce. I am sure that when the money is repaid, it will be examining how it can use the regional selective assistance in a way that will support economic regeneration and job creation.

**Ms Rachel Squire** (Dunfermline, West): As someone who lived in Bathgate during the late 1980s and early 1990s, I saw for myself the devastation of communities under the previous Conservative Government. May I express my deep regret to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and to the communities that are so affected by the decision on redundancies?

My constituency suffered 10,000 job losses under the previous Government but has seen successful regeneration under the policies of the present Government. I welcome the announcement of the taskforce, and I welcome Motorola's commitment to the Dunfermline facility, which is within my constituency. That creates much confusion. Does my right hon. Friend agree, as I am sure my constituents in Dunfermline and West Fife would agree, that it is to be hoped that when Motorola opens its new facility in Dunfermline, some of the new job opportunities will be available to people who are now working at Easter Inch as well as to the people of Dunfermline and West Fife?

**Mr. Byers:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is worth reminding ourselves, as my hon. Friend has reminded us, of the number of jobs that have been lost in the not too distant past, including 10,000 in her constituency, and the change that we are seeing in the employment scene in Scotland. Although such figures represent the total picture, an individual on the production facility at Easter Inch will not derive great comfort from them if he is threatened with the loss of his job within the

next few months. That is why it is important that Motorola recommits itself to its Livingston facility as well as the one at Dunfermline, and provides, with the Scottish Executive and the Employment Service, customised training, as my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow requested, so that the vacancies that become available at these facilities can be taken up by people from Bathgate. They will be able to do so if they have the necessary training and skills.

That is how we must look forward. I know that it is especially difficult to do so within 24 hours of such a decision. We need to work together to provide new opportunities and skills and training for the individuals who are affected by Motorola's decision.

**Mr. Ian Taylor** (Esher and Walton): The worry for the families of those who have lost their jobs is evident. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) was right to say that Motorola has been an extremely important inward investor into this country, and has tried to treat its employees well. There is no doubt that such inward investment showed merits under the Conservative Government as well as under the present Government. I hope that the Secretary of State will draw the right conclusion, which is that inward investment creates jobs, but there can be risks to those jobs in an open world market.

Will the right hon. Gentleman undertake not to follow the reactionary policies being introduced in France, which are more likely to deter inward investment into France? Also, the Australian Government blocked Shell's acquisition of Woodside Oil only this week.

Will the right hon. Gentleman take note of the fact that one of the reasons why Motorola decided to continue in Germany rather than in Scotland is that there are significant tax advantages to the company through rolled-up losses in Germany, which shows that within a single market it is important to consider how one tax in one country relates to tax treatment in another country? Will the Secretary of State please put it on the record again that Sir David Brown, the chairman of Motorola, is not alone in British industry in understanding that the competitive problem of the United Kingdom is associated with the fact that we are not part of the eurozone?

**Mr. Byers:** The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point about the views of Sir David Brown, the UK chairman of Motorola, regarding the UK's membership of the single European currency. He has gone on record as saying that in his view, it would be beneficial to companies such as Motorola if that were the case. With regard to the particular announcement, UK membership of the single European currency was not an issue that affected the decision. Some 12,000 jobs worldwide are being lost as a result of the decision.

The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the nature of inward investment. We are an extremely favoured location within Europe for a number of reasons: one is the economic stability, another is our labour market regulation, and a third is the fact that we can attract companies to come to the UK as a bridge into the rest of Europe. It is important that we maintain that position and do nothing that would act as a disincentive.

The hon. Gentleman is right to flag up the difficulties that can arise. That is an issue to which the Chancellor of the Exchequer referred yesterday. At a time when world economies are beginning to slow down, there is always a danger that national Governments will move to protectionism, close off markets and adopt policies that may be popular in their own countries in the short term, but which in the medium and long term create real difficulties for economic growth and prosperity. History teaches us the dangers of that. We must make sure that we do not repeat those mistakes—and we certainly will not.

**Mr. Frank Roy** (Motherwell and Wishaw): Unfortunately, Motorola is well known for using employment agency workers, who are paid less and given fewer rights than others who work beside them. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that those agency workers will be given the same employment assistance as people employed by the company?

**Mr. Byers:** I will certainly do that. I am informed that all those affected are full-time employees, but we need to check that and make sure that some of the workers affected are not discriminated against because of their employment status.

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): I support the creation of a taskforce for an area that I know extremely well. Can the Secretary of State tell us whether the figure of £10 million, which has been announced by the Scottish Government, is a ceiling figure, or will the financial commitment behind the taskforce be as much as it takes to deal with an economic catastrophe on a substantial scale? The right hon. Gentleman sounded very confident about the future of inward investment. Can he tell the House anything more about the reasons for that confidence?

Finally, 32,000 fewer people are employed in manufacturing in Scotland now than in 1997. Many of the job losses have been related to the exchange rate, and many have been associated with non-membership of the eurozone. Why, then, is the Secretary of State so confident that no aspect of the decision was related to the eurozone, despite the fact that the decision was made to retain a similar plant in Germany?

**Mr. Byers:** On the latter point, that was because of conversations that we had with Motorola, and its public statements since the announcement about the reasons for its decision. The hon. Gentleman should consider the company's decision to close its facility in Dublin, which was clearly within the eurozone but still felt the effect of the global downturn. Those are the reasons that have been given by Motorola.

As for the work of the taskforce, the Scottish Executive said today that £10 million would be available. That is not a capped figure. More will be made available if necessary to meet the needs of the individuals affected. It is important that they should be aware that there will be support and training, and that the necessary steps will be taken to put them in a strong position to get the jobs that will be created in a strong Scotland in the future.

With regard to the Dunfermline facility, since the announcement yesterday Motorola has made it clear that although it announced a slowing down in the timetable

*[Mr. Byers]*

last year, it is still committed to developing the facility at Dunfermline as a cornerstone of the new technology that it wants to develop for the future.

**Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Inverclyde): I have to be honest, Mr. Speaker, and say that I missed the first two minutes of my right hon. Friend's statement. I was delayed in coming to the House.

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, but in that case, he is unable to ask a question.

**Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): I welcome the establishment of the taskforce. I have some practical experience, as I chair a taskforce in Dumbarton in relation to the J&B Whisky bottling plant, which closed three years ago with the loss of 500 jobs. With a partnership approach, fewer than 60 people out of the original 500 have not secured employment, and there are reasons why some of those who remain unemployed have not secured work. In the light of the experience of myself and others, does my right hon. Friend accept the fact that the private employer is the key to the taskforce? The private employer has to be committed, just as Diageo was in my constituency. I pay tribute to Diageo for its involvement. Motorola has to be centrally involved, so that it leaves the community an economic and social legacy as a result of its many years in Bathgate.

**Mr. Byers:** My hon. Friend, drawing on his personal experience, makes an important point about the role of the private sector. Given Motorola's 32 years of involvement in Scotland, and given also the nature of the company, I am sure that it will want to be involved in the work of the taskforce. I know from my experience in north-east England that, as my hon. Friend said, taskforces will be successful when the private sector is actively involved with the public sector. We welcome the fact that the STUC is a member of the taskforce. Partnership will often be the most successful approach.

**Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): Will the Secretary of State welcome the fact that the European Information Society Group, or EURIM—the all-party group that deals with Information Society issues—decided almost a month ago to set up a mobile working party? There is a meeting on Monday to deal with the issues. Will he consider carefully the fact that the payment of £22.5 billion by the networks has meant that they have not invested in current roll-out of the GPRS system? Motorola is the first company in the world to have made handsets available, but there is no network for them. That is a significant issue, as Motorola would have been manufacturing the handsets now if the networks could afford to make the investment and had not given £22.5 billion to the Chancellor.

**Mr. Byers:** I hope that the working party will deal with that point, as I think that the hon. Gentleman has got it wrong. The working party might be able to illuminate him about the exact consequences. I know that the Conservative Opposition have been trying to turn the proceeds of the auction—the £22.5 billion received by the Government for the third generation—into an issue. Companies took commercial decisions at the time. We took the view that it was far better to let the commercial decisions determine how much people were prepared to pay for the licences. Opposition Members now seem to be suggesting that some of the money should be paid back because the companies got a commercial judgment wrong. That is the implication of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, but the proceeds of the auction are a red herring in terms of Bathgate and Motorola. I want us to use this opportunity to discuss the needs of the individuals and the reality of the position in Scotland.

**Mr. William Ross** (East Londonderry): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that I had an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall only yesterday on job losses in the electronics industry in Northern Ireland? I think that those losses are, in total, of the same magnitude per capita for Northern Ireland as the loss announced today is for Scotland. Is he also aware that I was somewhat surprised not only to secure that debate, but to learn that he was to speak on the subject today, as we have devolution in the two affected areas of the United Kingdom? I am gratified that the Government are indicating through him a measure of responsibility for resolving the difficulties caused by such job losses. Will he assure me that whatever is done with regard to Motorola and Scotland will be done in every other region of the United Kingdom where such job losses occur?

**Mr. Byers:** As you know, Mr. Speaker, because we have communicated about the matter, some aspects are reserved. For example, we have direct responsibility for social security benefits and employment legislation, whereas industrial assistance issues are devolved to the Scottish Executive.

However, I have always believed that devolution is about maintaining a partnership approach, and that we achieve far more together. Some people do not agree, but we achieve more together than by claiming that matters are not our responsibility. I was therefore more than happy to talk to Motorola, and the Prime Minister believed that it was also his responsibility to do that. We cannot instruct a commercial company, but we can make representations. Sometimes they are successful and sometimes they are not, and we regret it. However, it is far better to make the effort on behalf of workers wherever they are in the United Kingdom—Scotland, Wales, England or Northern Ireland—than to stand to one side and do nothing.

**Mr. Michael Moore** (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Motorola has a huge presence in Scotland and the closure of the plant will be a massive blow to the whole country as well as the immediate Bathgate area. Does the Secretary of State accept that it is a warning of a wider problem in the telecoms sector? Signum Circuits in my constituency in Selkirk has laid off a significant part of its work force, and although the company had begun to repair the damage that Viasystems did to the borders region, it is now on short-term working.

Will the Secretary of State make available, not only to the Scottish Executive but to whoever needs it, money to assist companies that are having difficulty because of the

world downturn in the telecoms sector and the consequences of some of the bids that were made for third generation licences?

**Mr. Byers:** I am acutely aware of the difficulties, especially in the borders, that were caused by Viasystems' decision. We held a meeting some time ago to discuss what we could do about it.

Some sectors—telecommunications is only one—are experiencing global difficulties for some of the reasons that we discussed this afternoon. The best thing that the Government can do is to ensure a climate of economic stability. We operate in a global economy and multinational companies can go anywhere in the world. It is therefore clear that they will go to countries where there is some economic stability.

Clearly, there is market pressure on the telecommunications sector, especially because of the dramatic downturn in the American economy. We must do all we can to support companies, through R and D and further assistance of that nature. We are more than willing to work with the relevant industries, sector by sector, to identify the steps that need to be taken to ensure that they are in a strong position to meet the challenges ahead.

## Points of Order

4.23 pm

**Mr. Chris Pond** (Gravesham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I want to raise the falsification of a letter that was written by one of the most senior Officers of the House. A member of the public falsified the letter to support his wrongful allegations of misconduct and impropriety against me.

The Serjeant at Arms recently considered a complaint about letters that I had written on Commons notepaper to young people in my constituency. On 26 March, the hon. Member who had complained received a reply from the Assistant Serjeant at Arms. He passed it on to my political opponent, the prospective parliamentary Conservative candidate for Gravesham, Mr. Jacques Arnold, who was the original source of the complaint.

The reply exonerated me, but Mr. Arnold has now admitted to having removed a section of the letter from the Assistant Serjeant at Arms before circulating to the press a now fraudulent document, which still carried the letterhead and signature of the Assistant Serjeant at Arms. The passage that he removed stated:

"I do not see anything there inappropriate to House stationery."

Mr. Arnold circulated the falsified letter to the press in a press release, the first line of which reads:

"The Serjeant at Arms of the House of Commons has found Chris Pond, M.P. for Gravesham, guilty of inappropriate use of House of Commons stationery."

That incident raises serious questions about which I should like your guidance, Mr. Speaker. First, Mr. Arnold tried to compromise and use the office of the Serjeant at Arms to undermine the integrity of an hon. Member. What protection exists for Officers of the House, when one of the most senior parliamentary officials is misrepresented in this way? Secondly, does not it show contempt, especially by someone who hopes to become a Member of the House, to falsify for his own purposes letters issued on the Serjeant at Arms' notepaper?

Some may consider this a rather ham-fisted, if dishonest and deceitful, attempt at forgery by a Tory prospective parliamentary candidate. However, forgery for personal gain is generally considered a criminal offence. How does the House consider incidents of forgery for political gain, and what can Parliament do to make sure that this sort of practice does not continue elsewhere?

**Mr. Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. There is no action that I can take in relation to the particular occurrence that has caused him concern. I can, however, make it clear that I strongly deprecate the manipulation of correspondence from Officers of the House in a way that misrepresents its contents.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Of course I appreciate what you have said, as I am sure the whole House—certainly hon. Members on this side—will have done. Cannot this matter be pursued any further? If the person concerned has—as he clearly has—done what my hon. Friend said he had, surely further action is required. At one time, if I may remind you, Sir, those who showed such contempt

*[Mr. David Winnick]*

for the House were brought before the Bar of the House. My view is that this particular rather obnoxious person should be brought before the Bar of the House at your instructions.

**Mr. Speaker:** As I stated, the hon. Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) gave me notice of his point of order. I have given him what I consider to be a proper reply and I have nothing to add.

**Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours** (Workington): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you could answer a simple question. Has this gentleman personally apologised to the Serjeant at Arms' Office in the House of Commons?

**Mr. Speaker:** That is not a matter that I have any information on. [HON. MEMBERS: "He should."] Order.

**Mr. Gerald Kaufman** (Manchester, Gorton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. If this person were brought to the Bar of the House, would not that be the nearest that he got to the House?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

## BILL PRESENTED

EXTENSION OF SUMMER TIME

Mr. Nigel Beard, supported by Mr. Adrian Bailey, Liz Blackman, Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas, Mr. Howard Flight, Dr. Brian Iddon, Mr. David Kidney, Mr. Giles Radice, Mr. Syd Rapson, Sir Michael Spicer and Mr. Andrew Tyrie, presented a Bill to amend the Summer Time Act 1972 so as to provide for the maintenance of British Summer Time throughout the year: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 11 May, and to be printed [Bill 87].

# Age Equality Commission

4.28 pm

**Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision for the establishment of an Age Equality Commission to advise the Government on discrimination issues in relation to older people.

Almost a year ago, on 12 July, the House gave permission for the first time for Parliament to establish an age equality commission. As we had a shared background in engineering before we entered the Palace of Westminster, Mr. Speaker, I believe that you will appreciate why this civil engineering MP believes that all problems can be solved with the application of endeavour and resolution. An engineer will always relish the challenge of problem solving, and takes delight in selecting the correct tool for the job from his toolbox.

The hundreds of constituents who encounter the daily barriers of age discrimination face persistent and recurring problems that are a blight on their everyday lives. Across the country, thousands of ordinary British people hoped that they had every right to expect a fair deal as they got older. Far too often, the reality is quite different from those hopes and aspirations.

Working in Scarborough and Whitby with the local Age Concern group and the Association of Retired Persons over 50—commonly known as ARPO50—I have tried to set up challenges to the individual cases that have been brought to me in my constituency surgeries. However, this engineer feels that the lack of appropriate parliamentary tools for the job has made the whole procedure of trying to solve those problems far more complicated than it needs to be. That is why I hope that the House will join me in calling for an end, by law, to the discrimination against older people in work, health, public services and the consumer market. We need to have action in law as soon as possible.

I believe that the House should be doing all in its power to create new opportunities for older people to work, volunteer, learn and retrain where necessary, so that they can play the fullest possible part in our society. My constituency is well known as containing a large number of people aged over 50, and my constituency experiences tell me that we in the House should fulfil their hopes and give them a significant and vibrant role in the society in which they want to play a part. In health, housing and the care systems, we need to provide the opportunity of independence and security for all, particularly my elderly constituents. Let us be honest: many of us who are present now will eventually find ourselves over the age of 50. It would therefore be inappropriate for me not to declare a personal interest in that regard.

One year on, what has actually happened? I believe that there has been some progress, but it is modest progress. I commend the Government for tackling ageist attitudes and practices in our national health service, many examples of which have been brought to me in my constituency surgeries. A good start has been made, but, owing to the lack of the readily available parliamentary toolbox that I mentioned earlier, the battle against age discrimination is far from won. The issue needs a comprehensive focus: we need a comprehensive campaign to tackle it head on. I hope that my proposals for the establishment of an age equality commission will lead to a national crusade

against age discrimination, thereby changing attitudes in our public services to ensure that older people are given equal treatment.

I also commend the excellent work done at national level by Age Concern and its partners during the "debate of the age" programme last year. My Bill seeks to build on the successes of that programme, and the evidence that was gathered during the national consultation. It seeks to encourage and support the Government in the fight against age discrimination in which they need to engage.

Earlier this month, the employers forum on age, chaired by Howard Davies, produced an important yet simple manifesto entitled "End Ageism in Employment". I hope that the newly formed commission would see it as an early priority to consult and involve employers throughout business in order to develop effective, practical, workable age legislation before the deadline of 2006. The commission must focus on the implementation of flexible options at the end of people's working lives, and it must include a review of the age bars that exist in current employment law. Given that age discrimination in employment costs the country more than £26 billion every year, promoting age diversity in the workplace will be crucial to ensuring the United Kingdom's future competitive and economic success. That key part of the toolbox for our economic future is built into my Bill.

The simple fact is that people continue to live longer and healthier lives than ever before, many having left paid employment in their early 50s. Birth rates continue to fall, and far fewer people are coming into the labour market. Recent surveys across business have established that 91 per cent. of firms are affected by skill shortages, but many employers continue to base employment decisions on grounds of age. I deplore that.

I believe that the employers forum on age offers a promising start. The forum, set up by 170 of the major public and private sector employers, representing nearly 10 per cent. of the UK's work force, is correct to place ageism at the top of the political agenda. Ageism in employment just does not tie in with the country's economic prospects.

I hope that the House will send a clear signal to Government by supporting the Bill. I hope that that will encourage Ministers to review, as a matter of urgency, current employment practices not only in wider industry but, in particular, in the civil service, thereby promoting age diversity and increasing participation in that service by all individuals, irrespective of age. I hope that the Government will then share that practice with wider industry, so that proper legislative propositions may emerge from that test-bed.

I express a simple engineer's view that this debate is of prime importance to our nation's future, as well as very timely. Next week, the House will have further opportunities to consider similar issues raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) and by the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies). That cross-party approach to the issue of ageism will be appreciated by all hon. Members, and I am encouraged by the support that my proposals have received from members of all political parties in the House. I hope that my proposal finds favour with the House, and that the progress of the Age Equality Commission Bill will offer dignity, security and opportunity to many of our fellow citizens over the age of 50.

*Question put and agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Lawrie Quinn, Mr. Austin Mitchell, Ann Keen, Mr. Jim Dobbin, Ms Dari Taylor, Mr. Alan Campbell, Angela Smith, Mr. Richard Allan, Ms Rosie Winterton, Mr. Paul Burstow and Mr. Bob Blizzard.

AGE EQUALITY COMMISSION

Mr. Lawrie Quinn accordingly presented a Bill to make provision for the establishment of an Age Equality Commission to advise the Government on discrimination issues in relation to older people: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 11 May, and to be printed [Bill 88].

# Opposition Day

[8TH ALLOTTED DAY]

## Rural Economy

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal):** We now come to the main business today. The Speaker has selected the amendment standing in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.38 pm

**Mr. Colin Breed** (South-East Cornwall): I beg to move,

That this House notes that the current foot and mouth crisis has impacted upon a wide range of rural businesses and services, affecting almost every aspect of rural life; further notes that foot and mouth has hit a countryside already in decline as a result of years of neglect under successive Governments; urges Her Majesty's Government to provide realistic emergency support to the whole range of businesses affected to enable them to withstand this crisis; and calls on the Government to put in place long-term policies to regenerate British agriculture and to revitalise the rural economy as a whole.

What started as an agricultural crisis has quickly developed into a rural crisis, and now foot and mouth disease is affecting almost every region in the country, with tourism most badly hit. If nothing else, the present epidemic has emphasised the interdependence of so many businesses, especially those located in rural Britain. However, not even large cities have been immune from the effects of that terrible animal disease.

With the stench of burning cattle, the spectre of huge burial mounds and the disgusting sight of slaughtered animals lying for weeks on farms before disposal—and still more new cases each day—it is difficult to accept that the crisis is under control. That is even more true when so many farmers and businesses are facing a wipeout and everyone fears for their future.

**Mr. John Burnett** (Torridge and West Devon): Does my hon. Friend agree that my constituents should not have to bear the brunt of digging the Government out of the appalling mess that they have made of dealing with the foot and mouth crisis? Does he also agree that the burden should be shared and that unburied carcases should be disposed of in the numerous landfill sites up and down the country, not in pyres and huge burial grounds?

**Mr. Breed:** We all recognise the considerable problems faced by people in Devon. They bear a huge burden, given the enormous numbers of animals that have to be buried or burned. An enormous backlog remains. I suspect that Devon could not take all the animals involved. There must be different and quicker ways in which dispose of them: I do not believe that we can wait three or four weeks to deal with perhaps 100,000 animals.

Dealing with the crisis still appears to be more of an administrative and bureaucratic exercise run from Whitehall than a management job on the ground. Too often, confused and delayed instructions come out of London, and they sometimes contradict decisions made close to outbreaks of the disease. Comparisons with the way in which Scotland and Wales, under devolved Administrations, have handled the problem are pertinent. They reinforce calls from Liberal Democrat Members for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to be absorbed into a new department of rural affairs. That would give focus, co-ordination and speed to the decision-making processes, and enable co-ordinated policy making for our rural areas in the future.

However, it is still annoying that so many issues remain unresolved that should have been finalised weeks ago. What is to be done for farmers whose cattle have gone over the 30-month limit during the period of restrictions? What about other animals that have passed their prime and lost their value? What about the cows that are drying off because artificial insemination men are not being allowed access to the farms?

**Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): Does my hon. Friend accept that there is another question to be asked? Would not it be appropriate to consider easing the movement of animals in areas that are free from foot and mouth disease, but not unaffected by it? I am referring particularly to the movement of cattle from winter quarters to summer pastures, which at present is not possible. Does my hon. Friend also accept that cattle are being moved from my constituency for slaughter in places as far away as Somerset and Essex? Would not opening up local abattoirs make it easier to deal with those animals, and minimise the risk of spreading the disease?

**Mr. Breed:** There is clearly a case for lifting some of the restrictions, and for redrawing some of the maps to allow some animals to be moved. That would relieve the pressure on the welfare disposal scheme, although there must be no compromise when it comes to ensuring that the disease is not spread. I hope that the Minister for the Environment will deal with that when he responds to the debate, as many farmers find themselves in the situation that my hon. Friend has described.

Farmers who do not have foot and mouth on their farms are also still suffering. In fairness to the Minister, it has to be said that he has acknowledged that and has acted to assure them that they will be assisted. However, if farmers had known what compensation and support they would receive they would not have spent so many weeks feeling so desperate

However, not only farmers have suffered. Other businesses are suffering too, and for help for them we find ourselves turning to a plethora of Government Departments, including the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and of course the Treasury.

The financial measures so far announced by the Government are inadequate, given the depth of the crisis facing thousands of businesses up and down the country. The vast majority of businesses affected have nothing to do with agriculture directly, but foot and mouth has brought much collateral damage that is uninsurable.

The massive loss of business has been concentrated in areas of the country that not only are recovering from bovine spongiform encephalopathy but which are in any case among the poorest areas. The loss of income, jobs and business will devastate the rural economy and have a significant effect on urban communities.

It is therefore especially disappointing that the Government have failed to explain some of the details of their support package. For instance, will any tax deferrals

be subject to interest? I believe that the applicable rate could be as high as 8½ per cent. Will the Government provide any assistance for businesses deeply affected by the crisis which, despite being in or near a rural area, are not located in one of the parishes identified for support?

What about value added tax? The Government have said that the Treasury and Customs and Excise will be "sympathetic", but what does that mean? Sympathy was not what was experienced by one of my constituents who called the Inland Revenue and was told that if he did not pay up the bailiffs would be sent.

At any time of calamity it is right to try and learn lessons and seek new ways forward. However, in many respects, the country and the countryside are now at a crossroads.

**Mr. Brian Cotter** (Weston-super-Mare): Does my hon. Friend agree that the £200 million support package announced by the Government, reinforced two days ago by the Minister for the Environment, seems rather disproportionate given that we expect losses of billions of pounds in trade for tourism and small businesses?

**Mr. Breed:** The Government have said that that package is a start, and we hope that there will be further proposals, with perhaps some announcements today. The amount of money currently spent will be dwarfed by the cost of the problem: businesses that fail will lead to unemployment, resulting in more unemployment and social security benefits to be paid. If money is paid out to enable those businesses to continue, the Government will not have to find the money to pay for those benefits.

The countryside is at a crossroads. Many commentators recognise the need for a national debate on how to manage food production in the future and ensure that the important rural economy is supported and enhanced, not decimated by this disease outbreak. There will be little future for many farmers and rural businesses if they do not receive adequate emergency financial aid immediately. The Government's modest attempts at emergency support have failed to recognise both the depth and breadth of the problem.

The Liberal Democrats have already published proposals for a combination of rate and tax deferrals, interest-free loans of up to £20,000, repayable over two years, as well as proper compensation for farmers whose business has been affected by foot and mouth but who do not qualify under present compensation rules because their animals have not been slaughtered. Such farmers include those with cattle now more than 30 months old, those who have lost out on agreed sales because they cannot move their animals and those whose cows are now drying off because they have not had access to AI men.

The businesses affected are widespread in their respective activity, geographical location and size, but collectively they are vital to the local economy and must have access to proper packages of financial assistance. The Government's proposals create an artificial divide. It is simply not fair that some are able to receive financial aid and others are not. I hope that the Minister will be able to clarify some of the problems that have emerged since the Government's announcements.

Let us take a few moments to consider the crossroads at which our country stands and look back down the road whence we have come to our present situation. Over 40 years of recent history, the word "markets" has kept cropping up. First, there was the Common Market; it introduced the common agricultural policy which was designed to address the future needs of food production in post-war Europe. Its intentions were honourable, but no one now believes anything other than that it has failed and that the continued failure of politicians to carry out meaningful reform over many years has contributed to today's crisis.

The global markets and the growth of international trading, with the freeing up of trade barriers, have produced many benefits but also substantial risks and have played an important part in today's problem. It is obvious that over the years we have become complacent and lowered our guard against this disease because we had not seen it for several decades.

Supermarkets have produced considerable benefits for consumers but their current trading practices have greatly disadvantaged many primary producers. They have contributed to the trend of local cattle market closures up and down the country.

All those factors have combined to bring our agricultural industry and the rural economy to the point of collapse. We cannot turn back the clock to some nostalgic era of Old MacDonald and his farm. The chocolate-box image of country life is not realistic. Foot and mouth disease has created a hiatus in production and we must take this opportunity to consider whether we really believe that we can continue in the same direction with no further thought. Is this a road to national prosperity or is it the road to ruin?

Many people now believe that to continue in the same direction, which would bring about further farm amalgamation and reduction in employment with greater pressure on land and animals to produce more and more for less and less, is a recipe for disaster—both for the rural economy and for the country at large. That is unsustainable. The simplistic attitude that one cannot buck the market and that the lowest unit cost delivers the best consumer benefit would wipe out small family farms and change the fabric of the countryside and its environment, as well as destroying rural communities. Yet that is what we shall sleepwalk into unless we make a radical reassessment of our priorities and unless Government policies across all Departments are attuned to those new priorities.

For many years, the Liberal Democrats have argued that greater prominence should be given to the environmental and social considerations of agriculture. Economies of scale can be created through building farmers' co-operatives and sharing expertise and technology. Money can be recycled within communities by reviving local markets; from farm gate to processor, to retailer to plate—all in the same locality.

Liberal Democrat plans for agriculture include more money for rural development and a single countryside management contract for farm support. We would cut red tape and introduce an early retirement scheme for tenant farmers, linked to a new entrants' scheme, to reinvigorate the industry and bring in new, fresh ideas. We have constantly argued for balance in the UK economy—recognising the value of small business and the interdependence of rural businesses with agriculture at the heart—as well as paying attention to competitiveness and profitability. We need to reinvigorate the countryside and

*[Mr. Breed]*

not see it become dormitory accommodation for city workers, with more intensive methods of production and the loss of a genuinely rural population.

The rural economy is certainly under threat; it has become the victim of a thousand cuts over many years and is quite simply bleeding to death. This latest blow could be terminal, but I believe it is not yet too late—although we may not have much more time. Emergency measures in the wake of foot and mouth will merely stem the bleeding. Only radical policy changes will ultimately restore the countryside to full health. Inevitably, it will take time to achieve that.

What is needed first is a determined effort radically to reform the common agricultural policy; recent—almost cosmetic—changes are not good enough.

**Mr. Christopher Gill** (Ludlow): The hon. Gentleman has twice mentioned reform of the common agricultural policy. He knows as well as everyone in the House that to reform the CAP in any meaningful way requires unanimity among the 15 nations. How is he going to get that?

**Mr. Breed:** I was just about to suggest why we may get that co-operation.

The European Union must recognise the risks for everyone's economy in current trading conditions; any state—any European country—could be the next to suffer the same crisis as us. That reality will force more Ministers throughout the EU to realise that the CAP needs early reform.

Money in the CAP should be diverted from paying for production to paying for stewardship. Farm businesses must ultimately be self-supporting in their commercial activity, with Government providing only a safety net to weather storms. However, farmers are asked to do so much more—beyond such economic activity—and for that they must be rewarded.

Secondly, we need to recognise the risks of global trading and ensure that there are vigorous inspection procedures at all ports of entry to identify illegal and possibly contaminated food products, carried both commercially and by travellers, with prosecutions where necessary. We need to acknowledge that the rundown in so many sectors—such as port health authorities, Customs, farm inspections and state veterinary services—was a penny-wise, pound-foolish policy, and that greater resources must now be devoted to those important protections and that they must be maintained.

Thirdly, we need a proper labelling scheme to identify country of origin and to bring an end to misleading labels and practices. That, too, can be considered only on a pan-European basis because food has become such an international commodity. However, it can be achieved through firm negotiation.

Fourthly, we must use the existing options open to us to promote sustainable, safe and ethically produced food. That should include a more imaginative use of modulated funds for rural development to support the structure of family farms; an increase in the number of small, local abattoirs; and the creation of new local markets for their produce, recognising the important social, environmental and human health benefits that each can, in turn, provide.

The larger agribusinesses will, of course, continue, and their trading practices and scale of production will continue to make them best suited to supply the larger food processors and supermarkets. However, by supporting local markets, we will ensure greater consumer choice—not just a choice between Asda and Tesco, but the choice to purchase locally grown food from a range of local shops and markets or to patronise the supermarkets.

Our aim must be to ensure that in this country we grow safe, sustainable and ethically produced food that gives primary producers a fair return on their investment and a proper reward for their labour, after which competition should ensure that the consumer pays the lowest price. However, to achieve both those aims, the balance between supplier and retailer will need to be redressed, and there must be an end to the complex monopolies that were identified in the recent Competition Commission report on the supermarkets.

We need a retail regulator to be appointed, as part of the Office of Fair Trading, to ensure the dominance of one sector cannot be abused, with the consequences that we have seen in recent years.

A cheap food policy, which, every few years, entails massive compensation payments, business failures and the desecration of our environment, is in fact extremely expensive for the taxpayer and consumers, and makes life a misery for many small suppliers. It is, of course, very profitable for supermarket shareholders.

It is also time to review completely the uniform business rate, which now is subject to so many dispensations and anomalies and is so disproportionately unfair to small businesses that only a complete reappraisal of how we raise local business tax will do. The rural economy is made up almost entirely of small businesses, and they have been very hard hit by the UBR.

When this terrible crisis is indeed under control, it will not be enough to learn lessons about its administration and management. To write another report, such as that of 1967, the recommendations of which were observed for a few years and then forgotten, will not be enough. The end of the crisis will present an opportunity to build on a real vision of what the future of agriculture and the rural economy should hold. According to that, through a combination of sensible regulation, deployment of resources and a recognition of the vital part played by a balanced agricultural sector, we can deliver what the consumer wants, in a countryside that is attractive and sustainable, while ensuring that we do not again threaten the lives and livelihoods of those who rely upon this green and pleasant land.

4.57 pm

**The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Ms Joyce Quin):** I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'notes that the current foot and mouth crisis has impacted upon a wide range of rural businesses and services, affecting many aspects of rural life; further notes that foot and mouth has hit a countryside that has suffered from lack of investment under previous governments; agrees that the first priority must be the isolation, control and eradication of foot and mouth disease; endorses the Government's commitment to rural communities as set out in the Rural White Paper and the England Rural Development Programme; welcomes the extra financial help the Government has made available to farmers and rural businesses affected by foot and mouth,

including agrimonetary compensation for livestock farmers and the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme; welcomes the work of the Rural Task Force including its work to open up the countryside and business relief, deferral of tax and national insurance contributions, extension of the small firms loan guarantee scheme and new grants to Regional Development Agencies and tourism authorities; and calls on the Government to continue putting in place the long-term policies needed to regenerate British agriculture and revitalise the rural economy as a whole.".

I am sure that today's debate, which is entitled "The Rural Economy", will focus largely on the impact of foot and mouth disease on the rural economy. Indeed, that is reflected in the motion and the amendments that have been tabled. Foot and mouth disease has been an enormous blow to the farming community and the wider rural community.

All hon. Members feel huge sympathy for those farmers who have lost their animals and for all those who are suffering in rural areas and, in some cases, even beyond. Indeed, looking around the Chamber, I can see on both sides Members who represent constituencies that have been devastated by the disease. They have been greatly affected and have maintained regular contact with their constituents and, therefore, know at first hand the difficulties involved.

**Mr. Steve Webb** (Northavon): As the right hon. Lady looks around the Chamber, she sees Members with urban and rural constituencies, and my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) made the very good point that the businesses that have suffered are not necessarily in what the Government call rural constituencies. Will she extend the rate relief scheme to all the businesses that are suffering, regardless of the arbitrary authority in which they happen to be?

**Ms Quin:** The hon. Gentleman will know that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, who heads the rural taskforce, will respond to the debate. He made a statement in answer to a private notice question earlier in the week, and he will pick up the points made in this debate. However, the rural taskforce is doing a good job not only in the measures that it has already announced, but because it is taking stock of the situation as it develops. One point that has come home to us strongly is that, although some of the earlier predictions have come true, some of them were unfounded. Some attractions have done better than expected while others have done worse. For that reason, it is important continually to monitor the position and to be prepared to take measures as and when appropriate.

**Mr. Nicholas Soames** (Mid-Sussex): On that point, will the right hon. Lady clarify the position in Scotland and in England? Is she aware that in Scotland the insane policy of slaughtering the hefted Cheviot flock will result, if it continues at the present rate, in the destruction of the entire flock? It is an irreplaceable asset in the Scottish economy. However, I understand that a different method is being used in, for example, Northumberland. Will she clarify the position and explain whether it is the same north and south of the border?

**Ms Quin:** The hon. Gentleman said, "On that point", but his intervention raised an entirely different one. None the less, it is an important issue. As a Northumbrian, I am keen to ensure that the flocks of Cheviots on both sides of the border have the best possible chance of survival. That is why I support the measures that the Government have taken. He overstates the differences between north and south of the border. Discussions are taking place between the Administrations to try to ensure that we approach the problem in as co-ordinated a fashion as possible. However, we are conscious of the important issue that he has raised.

There are welcome signs that our efforts to bear down on the disease are achieving results. The continuing downward trend in the daily number of cases is particularly encouraging. It has gone down from an average of 43 per day in the week ending Sunday 1 April to 16 per day in the week ending Sunday 22 April. There were 13 more cases on Monday of this week and 13 yesterday. The House will be aware of some of the more encouraging statements about the course of the disease that were made last week by the Government's chief scientific adviser, Professor King. Following rigorous serological testing of all farms in the relevant areas, we have been able to lift infected area status from nine areas entirely. Others will follow in the days and weeks ahead.

**Mr. Patrick McLoughlin** (West Derbyshire): Will the Minister explain—perhaps later in her speech—the criteria for lifting the restrictions in certain areas? I have been told that restrictions have been lifted in certain counties that have had outbreaks but not in others. There seems to be inconsistency in the way in which the Government are lifting movement restrictions.

**Ms Quin:** I am not aware of an inconsistency in approach. Guidance is available, and information is available on the MAFF website. Information has also been published about how restricted area status can be lifted. If the hon. Gentleman has specific examples, I would be grateful if he would draw them to my attention or that of another Minister so that we can respond to him. An overall framework is in place—it is partly a European as well as a UK framework—and I have seen the clear advice that farmers have received.

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): I am sure that the Minister will agree that there is no cause for complacency and that we still face a crisis. In that context, when will the Government come to a decision on vaccination? Does she accept that the president of the National Farmers Union does not speak for all farmers and that the view that he advances is hotly contested by many in rural communities? The Government are there to lead; when will we have some leadership?

**Ms Quin:** I strongly agree with the hon. Gentleman that we must not be complacent in dealing with the disease. Indeed, one of the lessons of the 1967 outbreak of which we are very conscious is the fact that, during that outbreak, there was a lull and guard was relaxed. The disease broke out again, so we must be careful that that does not happen in this case.

I have discussed vaccination with farmers around the country and many are not in favour of it, so the president of the NFU is reflecting their opinions. However, farmers and other groups are divided on the issue, sometimes within the same region. Even people in the hot-spot areas are divided. That makes the decision difficult. Despite

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criticisms from other parties, I notice that they have not made a clear policy statement on vaccination. That has been apparent in their media interviews.

**Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours** (Workington): Will the Department seriously consider the vaccination of specialist breed sheep, in particular the herdwick sheep that will secure the survival of the breed? Many people in the Lakeland whom I respect have told me that that is possible without compromising our position on vaccination.

**Ms Quin:** That is an important aspect of the debate. However, other measures and guidance are being made available on rare and specialist breeds. In particular, we want to provide adequate bio-security measures so that the animals are kept separate from possible infectivity.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** Not hefted sheep.

**Ms Quin:** That could include hefted sheep if they are kept on their territory and separate from infectivity.

**Mr. Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire): The Minister will be aware that Ben Gill, the president of the NFU, is worried about the apparent inconsistency in the Government's policy on vaccination. That causes great stress in the countryside, especially among farmers. Will she seriously consider ensuring that a clear statement is sent to all farmers to explain the Government's position and the rationale behind it? I am sure that farmers would be grateful for that because the uncertainty is posing a considerable challenge to mental well-being in the countryside.

**Ms Quin:** That is either being done or about to be done. We are conscious of the need to communicate with individual farmers directly on this important issue.

**Mr. Eric Martlew** (Carlisle): I believe that no matter what the Government say, they will not persuade the NFU to accept vaccination. As an MP from one of the hot spots, I favour vaccination. Obviously we will try to keep cattle in sheds for as long as possible, but are the Government still considering a fodder policy?

**Ms Quin:** We are certainly considering the problems of fodder supply to some farmers in areas where they are being encouraged to keep animals housed for longer than usual.

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): I acknowledge that there are different opinions on vaccination, but does the Minister accept that many farmers, such as Graham Gulliver, a prominent farmer in Preston Bissett in my constituency, are worried that their motives are being unfairly misrepresented? Will she acknowledge that many of those farmers who are hesitant, to put it mildly, about vaccination are not being awkward or cussed; rather they are concerned about the future saleability of their stock and the importance of ensuring compensation for consequential loss?

**Ms Quin:** The hon. Gentleman's comments bear out my contact with farmers in different parts of the country. We have not been imputing particular motives to farmers. A genuine debate about vaccination is taking place. Many of the market-related concerns are, without question, important. They have been a factor in our consideration of the problem and our unwillingness to impose a policy about which there are so many severe doubts.

Government policy has been based at all times on the best scientific advice. That advice was that we needed to pursue vigorously the cull on infected premises within 24 hours and on neighbouring farms within 48 hours, which we have been achieving in many areas. Those policies have clearly been effective, as shown by the falling number of cases.

**Mr. Richard Livsey** (Brecon and Radnorshire): I was close to the Northumberland outbreak in 1967. Does the Minister agree that in that outbreak, immediate on-farm burial within 24 hours, rather than the use of mass burial sites, contained the disease? I have a huge problem on the uplands in my constituency, where 2,000 carcases were to be buried. That caused alarm, and there was a build-up of carcases when the spread of the disease could have been stopped.

**Ms Quin:** I understand the hon. Gentleman's point and the concerns expressed by his constituents. None the less, we cannot make a straightforward comparison with 1967, when there were many outbreaks over a long period. When farms were smaller and we did not have the current environmental regulations, on-farm burial was a different option. We would be severely criticised if we allowed on-farm burial contrary to the environmental regulations that the House has adopted and which in many cases are part of European Union directives that we have freely and willingly entered into. For that reason, disposal routes are complex and give rise to problems in many areas.

**Mr. A. J. Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed): May I draw the Minister's attention to communities, which she knows, around Widdrington, Chevington and Cresswell in Northumberland that have seen thousands of animals burned in a beauty spot at Druridge bay and 100,000 carcases buried at Widdrington? Does she recognise that they need a break because they have been dealing with the problems of the whole region? There could also be some compensation, such as a council tax reduction for a year. There must be a mechanism by which we can recognise that those people have borne the brunt of the sacrifice.

**Ms Quin:** I know the area well and I understand people's concerns, but I must say that the conditions under which animals were disposed of there were not unilaterally thought up by the Ministry of Agriculture but agreed by all the parties concerned, including the Environment Agency. Various requirements for siting were met, including those on wind conditions. Wind does change direction, but it is easier now than in 1967 to predict it, and we have used that knowledge very effectively.

We have made good progress in the last week or two towards clearing slaughter and disposal backlogs. It was clear that we were not keeping up with the numbers

reported, but now there is a serious backlog only in Devon and that is being reduced by the day. There are no significant disposal backlogs in other areas.

**Mr. Burnett:** As the Minister knows, there is a problem in my constituency and in Devon more widely. She said that we should not be complacent. It is reported today that her Ministry's director of operations for the south-west has moved. Who is the new south-west director of operations?

**Ms Quin:** I have not seen that report, but the directors of operations, who have been working very hard, are entitled to a break in their activities. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the operations directorate in Devon is a crucial part of the fight against foot and mouth disease. The arrangements in Devon to co-ordinate the efforts of the Ministry, the Army and the veterinary service will be fully effective and his constituents will not lose out from any temporary changes in the occupancy of the regional director's office.

**Mr. David Curry** (Skipton and Ripon): The right hon. Lady will agree that it is important to try to keep rural businesses going in the crisis. Hon. Members have mentioned rural abattoirs. Is she aware of the extent to which the welfare slaughter scheme is dislocating the market for slaughter of animals for human consumption? There are abattoirs in the north of England that cannot obtain stock for slaughter even under the Government's rules because the prices under the welfare slaughter scheme, in which animals are bulked up and priced deadweight, are much more advantageous than those offered for live weight in the marketplace. Small businesses will not be helped if they cannot get hold of the animals, even when encouraged to do so.

**Ms Quin:** Thanks to the television in my office in the Ministry of Agriculture, I followed the interesting exchange on that subject earlier this week between the right hon. Gentleman and my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, who explained our approach to the welfare scheme, and particularly the reason why we introduced a new complementary scheme to allow meat to go into the food chain from infected areas. My right hon. Friend outlined various ways in which he wanted to proceed with the welfare scheme, and I know that he may well have more to say about that in the next few days.

On disposal, I should like to repeat the assurance that public safety must be our first priority. The Department of Health is leading work on the safe disposal of carcases; it is providing advice for those involved in disposal and, of course, additional guidance for the public. Last week, we announced further measures to ease farm welfare problems. I have just responded to the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) regarding the movement of healthy animals from surveillance zones; those animals can now be slaughtered for human consumption. Farmers will be able to move animals in a wider range of circumstances than previously. Although the movements require licences, local veterinary inspectors can now issue those.

We are aware that the livestock welfare disposal scheme made a slow start, but we are now getting on top of the backlog and expect to clear it in the next few weeks. I believe that approximately 53,000 animals were disposed of under the scheme in the first week of April, but the figure rose to 150,000 last week, which is a considerable improvement, and I acknowledge the efforts of everyone involved.

**Dr. Peter Brand** (Isle of Wight): The Minister will realise that my island constituency has been free of foot and mouth so far, and we hope to keep it that way through rigid barrier controls at our ferry ports. However, there is a problem, as it costs at least £300 to take animals from farm to abattoir, irrespective of the number taken. A collection point proposal has been put to her office but, apparently, the response was that, so far, there has been no time to consider such a proposal. Will she look at the proposal because the issue is becoming a serious problem for my farmers?

**Ms Quin:** I will look at that issue again and write to the hon. Gentleman. However, our earlier reservations about collection points were based largely on veterinary advice on disease control. I will check whether that advice has changed, but I am not aware that it has.

A minute ago, I said that I would like to pay tribute to those who, in many cases, are working round the clock in disease control centres. I should very much like to stress that point, partly because of the many dispiriting and negative stories that affect people on the ground. I know that bad news is news and that good news is not news but, none the less, many things have been handled well, correctly and sensitively. Often, the people who carry out that work do not get the recognition that they deserve. In a previous incarnation I had ministerial responsibility for prisons, and I remember that people who often work in difficult circumstances on rehabilitating prisoners day in, day out get little public thanks, but the minute that something goes wrong, they find themselves all over the media, which can be distressing. There are parallels with the problem that we now face.

It was good to see in one of my local newspapers recently a notice inserted by a family whose animals had been lost as a result of foot and mouth thanking Ministry staff for the way in which they had dealt with that. I was rather amused to note on a visit to the Intervention Board that someone had faxed an ode to the staff to thank them for the way that they had dealt with his application under the livestock welfare scheme.

**Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): Will my right hon. Friend accept that there have been great difficulties with the Intervention Board? I represent a Welsh area, and it is difficult to find an official who deals with Wales. I have had problems that involve one of my constituents, Mr. Barry Lewis. After two weeks, he found that his application form had been lost. Eventually he had his stock slaughtered, only to be told the next day that it would be slaughtered this coming week. There have been serious problems, so will my right hon. Friend undertake a serious review of the board's workings?

**Ms Quin:** What I said was said sincerely. I was not trying to disguise the fact that there have been difficulties and problems. Problems have been referred to me and to other Ministers. I am prepared to consider lessons of organisation. None the less, Ministry and Intervention Board staff have had to operate many different schemes at short notice—for example, the short-term movement

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scheme, the long-distance movement scheme and the livestock welfare disposal scheme. They have had to deal also with the slaughtering and disposal of infected animals and the problems related to contiguous farms and premises. It has been difficult to deal with those issues.

**Mr. Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire): I agree with the right hon. Lady when she pays tribute to those who are working so hard and who have answered our calls with great courtesy. However, on organisation, will she clarify the exact relationship between the Prime Minister, COBR—Cobra—the Ministry of Defence, MAFF and, above all, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, which controls the Environment Agency? There seem to be conflicting claims and differences of opinion on who takes decisions.

**Ms Quin:** Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I do not find this difficult. Many Departments are involved when there is such an outbreak. He referred, for example, to health, environment, agriculture and Army issues. Given the Army's involvement, the co-ordination that COBR provides is important. Given the scale of the problem that we face, it would be astonishing if my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister were not personally fully engaged.

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): Will the Minister give way?

**Ms Quin:** I am conscious of the need to make some progress. I will give way for the last time. If I continued to give way, I would be denying Members the chance to speak.

**Mr. Heath:** The right hon. Lady has been extremely generous in giving way and I am grateful to her.

The right hon. Lady knows that the Ministry has made draft proposals, which I support, for banning the feeding of swill to pigs. However, the draft orders appear to include whey feeding, which is crucial to the pig industry and the cheese-making industry. There seems to be no evidential basis for banning the feeding of whey to pigs. Can she assure me that the Ministry does not intend to crucify those industries for no good reason?

**Ms Quin:** I can assure the hon. Gentleman that we are not out to crucify the cheese-making industry. Knowing the excellence and variety of British cheeses, I am keen to see the industry expand. The consultation period on pig swill has expired, and we are considering the results. The issue that he mentioned has been raised, along with others, and an announcement will be made shortly about the results of the consultation and how we intend to proceed.

I conclude by referring to the part of the motion that concerns the need to consider long-term policies for agriculture and the rural sector. Both the motion and the Government's amendment mention long-term policies, although the official Opposition's amendment, which simply refers to immediate measures, does not. The long-term perspective is important. The Government are already active in that respect, both within the United Kingdom in terms of developing agriculture and rural policies, and in the European Union, where we are building specific alliances.

Despite the reservations expressed in an earlier intervention, agricultural reform is gaining momentum in the European Union, partly because of changes in attitude among certain Governments in Europe, partly because of the pressure from the World Trade Organisation, partly because of the expansion of the EU to take in countries of central and eastern Europe, and partly because of the concerns of the consumer and environmental considerations.

The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) rightly mentioned the various aspects of agriculture. Agriculture is about food production, and we are keen to ensure that our producers identify markets and opportunities for the future. At the same time, agriculture is about stewardship of the countryside, and we believe that the countryside and environmental aspects need to be factored even more fully into policy, particularly European policy.

I am optimistic about that. We have a better chance of agricultural reform in that direction now than at any time that those of us who have been dealing in various ways with the common agricultural policy can remember. That is encouraging. I can assure the House that we will be extremely active in pursuing that debate.

I welcome today's debate. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture hopes to make a statement on foot and mouth disease tomorrow. I believe that we are tackling the disease, as the figures now show. I believe that we are supporting the wider rural economy and taking forward the debate on the future of agricultural and rural policies in our country. For all those reasons, I strongly commend the Government's amendment.

5.26 pm

**Mr. Tim Yeo** (South Suffolk): I congratulate the Liberal Democrats on holding this afternoon's debate. It is the first chance that the House has had to consider foot and mouth disease after a two and a half week gap, part of which was the Easter recess. It is disappointing that in the nine weeks since the crisis started, there has not yet been a single debate in the House in Government time. There have been two full days of debate provided by the Conservative Opposition, and now half a day provided by the Liberal Democrats. Whether, contrary to what the Minister of State said, that reflects some reluctance on the Government's part to deal with the issues in Parliament and to be accountable to Parliament, others will judge.

I warmly welcome the more hopeful signs that have emerged in the past few days in relation to the scale of the crisis. Any progress that is being made towards getting control of the outbreak is very good news. I shall examine in a moment the extent of that progress and the reasons why it may have taken place.

In the two and a half weeks since the House last debated foot and mouth disease, there have continued to be a great many heart-rending stories of its tragic effects. I am sure that the entire House will want to join me in sending a clear message of sympathy and support to every family in the land who have suffered as a result of the disease or who may still face a threat from foot and mouth disease as it approaches their farm. That support must also extend, as the right hon. Lady said, to those who are working to contain the outbreak and clear up the terrible backlog of animals awaiting slaughter and of carcases awaiting disposal.

That backlog results directly from the Government's failure to act more promptly and effectively in the early stages of the crisis. It results from their refusal to bring in the Army at the time when we suggested it, and their refusal then to give the Army full control of operations on the ground, which seems to be happening belatedly and by stealth. The efforts made by service personnel, as well as by vets, slaughtermen and many others at the sharp end, are very much appreciated.

This week's news that a human case of foot and mouth disease may have occurred is, however, a worrying new development. The risks to personnel who are dealing with carcase disposal, and in particular with carcases that may explode, cannot be ignored. I hope that the Government will review the procedures that are being followed in order to minimise the risk of further human cases of foot and mouth disease.

I need hardly say that the confirmation that foot and mouth disease can affect humans, which contrasts with some earlier official statements and assurances, risks undermining some of the efforts that have been made in the past couple of weeks to boost the fortunes of our flagging tourism industry.

**Ms Quin:** I do not think that the hon. Gentleman's comment is justified. He will know that there is on record a case of foot and mouth that occurred in a human in the 1967 outbreak. Thus, although such an occurrence is extremely rare, it is not impossible, and I do not think that anyone has said otherwise.

**Mr. Yeo:** I am afraid that one of the mistakes that the Government have made almost throughout the crisis is to sound too optimistic and complacent about what is happening. Those of us who genuinely have the long-term interests of the tourism industry and rural businesses at heart know that nothing causes more damage than raising false expectations, which especially affect the tourism market, whether in north America or elsewhere. It was claimed frequently that the disease was under control when the number of cases was a tiny fraction of that which was reached at the end of March, but the fact that those claims were so patently unfounded at the time when they were made has reduced the effectiveness of the efforts of Ministers and other officials to try to rebuild confidence. Ignoring problems that are occurring, such as the one to which I have just referred, does nothing whatever to stimulate demand for visits to this country in places such as north America.

At the start of April, I set out the four criteria that should be used to judge whether the crisis has been resolved. First, the number of confirmed cases that arise daily should be on a clear downward trend. Secondly, the 24-hour report-to-slaughter target time for infected animals should be met. Thirdly, the geographical spread of the disease should be reversed. Fourthly, the movement restrictions on healthy animals should be lifted. When all four criteria have been achieved, farming can be said to have returned to normal. *[Interruption.]* I hear someone on the Labour Benches saying that all those conditions have been met. I can only say that that is an extraordinarily ignorant comment, and exactly the sort of remark about which I complained earlier. Anyone who has travelled in the countryside, especially in the west country, will know such a view is very far from correct.

Let us examine each criterion. First, as the Minister of State pointed out, progress has now been made on the number of cases that are confirmed daily. That is good news. However, will she or the Minister for the Environment tell us whether the presentation of today's figures is consistent with that of earlier ones? On Monday, Baroness Hayman wrote to my noble Friend Baroness Byford. Her letter stated that, although there had been 1,435 confirmed cases, there were 5,385 affected farms, so the number of farmers whose animals are being slaughtered is obviously substantially greater than the number of confirmed cases. On the same day, the chief veterinary officer was giving different figures to the Agriculture Committee. In view of that discrepancy, will the Minister of State confirm that no change has been made to the basis on which the figures are calculated?

On the second of my four criteria—the 24-hour report-to-slaughter target for infected animals—progress has again clearly been made, but it is hard to judge precisely how much, as the daily data for the past few days do not appear entirely credible. After several weeks when the daily reports suggested that approximately 30,000 to 40,000 animals a day were being slaughtered, Government figures appeared to claim that 700,000 animals were slaughtered in four days. That is approximately five times the rate that had been achieved previously.

After weeks of carcase disposals at a maximum rate of 40,000 a day, Government figures suggested that more than 1 million carcases were disposed of in five days. I assume that the figures involved some catching up, and that under-recording in the earlier period has led to bunching. However, that reduces the value of the figures, at least for the time being. It would be helpful if the Minister of State could confirm that the basis for the calculations has not been changed. I hope that that is case. If so, perhaps the Government could publish backdated daily figures that incorporate the revisions so that we can judge the trend. We cannot do that at the moment because of the bunching. If the data have been revised, it should be possible to produce more accurate daily figures. That would enable us to judge the trend more confidently.

The daily figures are relevant to assessing whether the target of 24 hours from report to slaughter is being met. I hope that information will continue to be given to hon. Members. On three occasions during the last three days before the Easter recess, I asked the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for an assurance that daily statistics would be published throughout the recess. We received no answer to those requests, and the daily figures were discontinued in the first week. After several days of widely reported protests from the Conservative party and others who were worried about the matter, the Government relented and began publishing the daily totals again. Discontinuing the information makes it hard to judge what the current pattern shows. Figures should be published on the same basis as in the early period.

It would also be helpful if the Government broke down the confirmed cases by constituency. I appreciate that individual Members of Parliament are notified, but if we are approaching a general election campaign, it is important to provide public information about the constituencies where cases are confirmed. Thus all the candidates can be informed in the same way as Members of Parliament are currently notified.

*[Mr. Yeo]*

The third criterion is the reversal of the geographical spread. Again, I acknowledge that some progress has been made and that the Government have published a list of areas that can be declared free of infection. However, some setbacks have occurred, for example, in Glamorgan, which was previously free of infection. The overall picture is therefore mixed. Matters are improving, but the trend is not all one way.

The fourth criterion covers the movement restrictions on healthy animals. Again, I welcome the steps that have been taken to reduce them, but the Minister of State knows that curbs remain in place in many areas. They are needed and it is right to maintain them. I agree that there is a risk of premature relaxation, for understandable reasons, and that there is much pressure to lift the restrictions. No one wants to make the mistake that was made in the previous outbreak, when restrictions were relaxed too quickly in some places. The disease might begin to spread again as a consequence. We therefore support the retention of controls until it is clearly safe to lift them.

However, until the restrictions are lifted, it cannot be said that farming has returned to normal. Many farmers are finding it difficult to run their businesses as they would like, taking account of the seasonal factors.

**Mr. David Borrow** (South Ribble): Does the hon. Gentleman now believe that the outbreak is under control? He talks about lifting movement restrictions. If he were Minister, under what circumstances would he lift restrictions completely? Would he wait until there were no further incidences, or for a period after the final outbreak? Under what circumstances would he deem that movement restrictions could be lifted and therefore that the outbreak was under control according to his definition?

**Mr. Yeo:** I believe that most members of the public would judge whether the crisis had been resolved according to the criteria that I have set out. I share the Minister of State's view that it is impossible to lift all movement restrictions as quickly as some people would like because we rightly do not want to run any risk of a renewed spread of infection. However, it is impossible to say that the crisis has been resolved while those restrictions remain. A significant number of farmers are unable to operate their businesses as they normally would while such restrictions exist, and to claim that everything is back to normal when restrictions of that sort are still in place seems quite unreasonable.

Taking account of all those criteria, I do not believe that it is possible to say, as of today, that the crisis has been resolved or even that foot and mouth disease is fully under control. It is certainly not under control in Devon, to which I paid a visit last week. There, in particular, the problem of carcase disposal is still enormous. That is a symbol of the Government's failure to take control of this problem quickly. In Devon, there is still a huge backlog of carcases awaiting disposal, and it cannot be ignored. To ignore it would be environmentally damaging.

The rendering option, which was initially the Government's preferred solution, sometimes involves taking infected carcases through uninfected areas, running a risk of spreading the infection. In any case, the rendering capacity is clearly unable to deal with the scale of problem that now exists. Incineration, which appears to be the Government's other preferred option, is also environmentally hazardous, as people now increasingly recognise. Mass burial also carries its own health and environmental difficulties, and raises important questions about local consent and the acceptability of some of the proposals that are now under consideration.

We have said several times—and I remain of this view—that the better option, right from the start, is on-farm burial. That was the clear message of the 1967 report. The Minister of State quite reasonably made the point that environmental concerns have evolved since then. Nevertheless, what should have happened at the earliest stage of the outbreak was immediate consultation between the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Environment Agency. The agency should have been asked to identify areas where it would not be possible to have on-farm burial because of a high water table or other factors. On-farm burial should have been the preferred option everywhere else.

On-farm burial allows the problem to be dealt with in manageable proportions. Instead of hundreds of thousands of carcases being transported to one particular site, a number of much smaller-scale sites could be used. Indeed, there could be more than one site on one farm if necessary.

**Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire) *rose—*

**Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend) *rose—*

**Mr. Yeo:** I shall give way in a moment.

On-farm burial would have been the right option. That was the conclusion in 1967, and it was the recommendation that we gave. Unfortunately, our advice was ignored.

**Mr. Luff:** I entirely agree with what my hon. Friend said about on-farm burial. The failure of the Government to implement that policy has landed my constituents near Throckmorton airfield with a mass burial site that will have to take upwards of a quarter of a million carcases, and possibly many more if the absolutely abhorrent proposal to bring carcases from Devon to Worcestershire is pursued by the Government. The Government are not making their task any easier by failing to answer my parliamentary questions on the subject. Before the recess, I tabled about 30 questions and I have had no substantial answers to any of them. My constituents adjacent to that site are extremely anxious.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. Interventions are meant to be brief.

**Mr. Yeo:** My hon. Friend raises a most important point on parliamentary questions. I have checked, and I have 15 questions to the Minister outstanding, nearly all of which were tabled before the end of March. After the recess, it was quite reasonable for Members on both sides of the House to expect that the questions that they had tabled some time earlier would have been answered on Monday this week.

The other point of which my hon. Friend reminds me is that if there are concerns about on-farm burial, it would be interesting to know whether the Environment Agency has carried out any studies to find out what the long-term effects were of the on-farm burial that was successfully carried out in 1967, and to see whether any damaging effects have occurred.

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** Does the hon. Gentleman not realise that there have been huge changes since 1967? Furthermore, as far as I am aware, the Environment Agency scoured the countryside in the infected areas in Wales to find suitable burial points, and failed to do so. The hon. Gentleman has underlined just how difficult it is to deal with the problem, and he should admit that the Government have done a damned good job in very difficult circumstances.

**Mr. Yeo:** I do not think that anyone looking at the piles of carcases in Devon could agree with that last sentiment. I understand that the chief executive of the Environment Agency has said that a number of sites that could be used are not being used at present.

**Mr. Paterson:** The hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) may be interested to know that I held a meeting with vets who had worked during 1967 and vets working currently. When large numbers of cattle were buried on-farm in Cheshire and north Shropshire, no detrimental effects on human health were recorded. My hon. Friend is right to ask for an investigation of whether any records were kept for those sites, and what the environmental consequences were. That was the clear recommendation of the 1967 report, and of the vets in Wem four weeks ago.

**Mr. Yeo:** I entirely agree. I certainly do not consider it adequate, nine weeks into the current outbreak, simply to parrot the objection that on-farm burials involve environmental difficulties, unless it is backed up by proper studies and assessments that reveal risks of which we were not previously aware.

Let me now turn to measures taken to curb the spread of the disease. It appears that, belatedly, slaughter on suspicion—for which, again, we called at an early stage—is now being employed, and that it has been crucial to better progress.

**Ms Quin:** Slaughter on clinical signs—in other words, slaughter on suspicion—was taking place before the hon. Gentleman suggested it.

**Mr. Yeo:** That statement will, I think, be disputed by a great many farmers.

Will the Minister of State explain some things to me? A case that may have appeared to be a confirmed case of foot and mouth disease may not have been recorded as such, because slaughter has taken place before confirmation of the infection has been obtained. If, in such circumstances, there has been a slaughter on suspicion, is there then a cull on contiguous farms, even if the infection has not been confirmed? When a case is confirmed and a cull on contiguous farms takes place, are the animals culled on those contiguous premises tested? If those animals are burned, is it the case that evidence that could show whether foot and mouth is under control or is still spreading may sometimes be destroyed by incineration?

The abiding impression gained by those who visit problem areas such as Devon—this is not just my experience, but the experience of every visitor to whom I have spoken—is that, even now, no one is really in charge. The Ministry is saying one thing, the vets are saying another, and the Environment Agency is saying something else. Unfortunately, when I was in Devon last week the Minister blocked my request to talk to Ministry vets. Two days before my visit I checked with the Minister's private office, and was told that I would not be allowed to enter the regional office in Exeter. I was not seeking any confidential information; if I had been, I would of course have approached the Minister himself. I simply wanted to hear the assessment of vets on the ground in an area where matters are clearly not under control.

Foot and mouth disease is not just a problem for farmers with infected animals; others are threatened too, and I am afraid that the Government's dither over vaccination has not helped. I accept that this is not an easy decision to make—opinion is divided among farmers, among vets and among scientists—but it is the job of Ministers to make such difficult decisions.

Some weeks ago, I set out three tests on which to assess whether vaccination should take place. Will vaccination eradicate foot and mouth disease more quickly than the present policies? Will vaccination reduce the number of animals that eventually have to be slaughtered? Will vaccination bring forward the date on which Britain regains disease-free status? I said then, and I say again now, that if the answer to at least two of those questions is yes, vaccination is clearly the right policy. If the answer to two or more of those questions is no, vaccination is not the right answer. If the Minister accepts that those are the right tests, what scientific advice has been given about them? If the Minister does not accept that those are the right tests, what tests are the Government applying to determine the policy?

It is now nearly four weeks since Downing street said that a decision on vaccination would be made in 48 hours. We are still waiting and the delay suggests confusion at the highest level in Government. Last week, the Government appeared to be edging towards a policy of vaccinating dairy cattle in Cumbria and Devon, without explaining how that would help or how it would work. Now they are backing away from that, in the face of a seeming veto exercised by the NFU. Who is making the policy? Is it the Minister, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Defence—who apparently now chairs the Cobra meetings—or is it the president of the NFU?

**Mr. Borrow:** Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Professor David King, the chief scientific adviser who is advising the Prime Minister on vaccination, made it clear that he would only support vaccination were it to be supported by the vast majority of farmers? In his scientific advice, the consent of the farming community is crucial. Is it also crucial to the hon. Gentleman's decision making?

**Mr. Yeo:** I find that an extraordinary way to make policy. A policy is either right or wrong. I have set out three straightforward tests by which the policy should be judged. If the Government think that those are the right tests, let them tell us what the advice is. If the tests are wrong, the Government should tell us what tests they are

*[Mr. Yeo]*

applying, but they should not have a policy that they are afraid to introduce if some people disagree with it. That sums up new Labour Government.

Many uninfected animals are suffering as a direct result of the foot and mouth crisis. Healthy animals cannot be moved because of the movement restrictions. Lambs are in the wrong places, pigs suffer overcrowding and much distress is caused. The Minister of State will recall that my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) proposed a welfare scheme in the first debate we had on this subject, on 28 February. The Government's scheme, when it emerged some weeks later, was welcome, but the evidence is that it is not working very quickly.

I heard this week from a farmer whom I visited in November, long before the foot and mouth crisis began. That farmer is within 3 km of an infected premises and, therefore, could not move any of her pigs. In a letter she faxed to me on Monday, she described the horrifying consequences of the overcrowding among her pigs, including tail biting and fighting. She was running out of money and feed, she could not borrow any more money and she had already extended her feed credit. She had written twice to her Member of Parliament, who had not replied. She contacted me because she had entered her pigs on the welfare disposal scheme three weeks ago and, as of Monday morning when she faxed me the letter, she had not received a response. I telephoned her, because her experience is by no means an isolated one. I am glad to say that matters have been resolved, because she has had a form D imposed and her pigs will be slaughtered on the farm.

**Mr. Bercow:** Who is the guilty Member?

**Mr. Yeo:** My hon. Friend tempts me, but I shall not say. I wish to proceed courteously, so when I have had the chance to inform the Member concerned I may consider advising my hon. Friend.

One way in which to help to unblock the logjam of welfare cases would be to give local vets a greater role in authorising movements, and I believe that the Government have now adopted that suggestion. I am concerned that the Government have still not offered compensation to farmers who are prevented from selling their cattle as they approach the age of 30 months. Through no fault of their own, those farmers suffer an irrecoverable drop in the value of their stock when cattle pass that age and they deserve to be compensated for that loss. I hope that the Minister will address that issue quickly.

The Minister for the Environment is to wind up the debate, and it was he who announced some weeks ago that an inquiry would be held into the foot and mouth disease outbreak. I hope that he will be able to tell the House this evening about the nature and form of the inquiry that he has in mind.

It is now nine weeks into the crisis. Foot and mouth disease has inflicted hideous damage on farmers, tourism and the rest of the rural economy. The taxpayer is left with a huge bill. Our environment has been disfigured. Millions of animals, many of them healthy, have been slaughtered. Many other animals have suffered. The public have understandably been angered by the waste and distress involved. In due course, it will be possible to judge whether much of that suffering and damage could have been avoided. It is noticeable that in Ireland a swift, effective and co-ordinated response to the disease prevented a large-scale national catastrophe of the kind that we have experienced in Britain. I fear that it is already clear that if the Government had examined the lessons of the 1967 outbreak, taken the steps that I and others suggested at each stage in the crisis and reacted quickly on the scale and with the urgency that was needed, the disease would never have been spread so far, the cost would not have been so great and the damage would not have been so devastating. The time will come when those events are analysed and those responsible are called to account.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. If those hon. Members wishing to contribute to the debate make their contributions brief, more will be able to catch my eye.

5.56 pm

**Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours** (Workington): The House, and the country, will have noted that the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) did not tell us whether he was for or against vaccination.

The foot and mouth outbreak has been the most difficult issue that I have faced in 22 years as a Member of Parliament. I have more than 50 cases in my constituency, and the local tourism industry faces a crisis. Some 47,000 people in the county of Cumbria are directly or indirectly dependent on tourism. The trade is worth nearly £1 billion a year to our county. Some 20 per cent. of the total work force in Cumbria is involved in activity related to tourism. I believe that in terms of the effect on tourism, I have probably the worst affected constituency in Britain.

There has been no post-Easter recovery in my constituency. We have had a couple of good days, but we still have a real crisis. The figures that are reported to my office daily vary between a 60 per cent. and a 90 per cent. reduction in turnover, and the laundries and catering establishments in my constituency, which give me important information about the situation, report a substantial downturn in trade.

Cumbria has reacted positively. We have given evidence to the national taskforce through our own taskforce and we have called for a rural action zone. The meetings held in Kendal by the Cumbria taskforce are extremely important to Members of Parliament, and we are pressing its case for support for infrastructure costs in the future.

**Mr. Burnett:** The hon. Gentleman is making a powerful speech, and I can tell him that the circumstances that he is adumbrating are mirrored on Dartmoor, which is at a standstill.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** I understand that the hon. Gentleman's constituency is in a similar position. The answer is the restoration of trade, but we could introduce interim measures. Cumbria Crisis Alliance, a grassroots organisation that has sprung up in my constituency,

and the local chambers of trade have produced some innovative thinking, some of which has already been reported to Ministers. We are thankful for the first stage measures introduced by Ministers on rate relief and tax concessions, and I have several recommendations for second stage measures that I hope the Treasury will seriously consider.

First, there should be an extension of the hardship relief from business rates scheme, especially in the Lake district national park. The period is currently three months; that needs to be extended, and soon.

I should like the £12,000 rateable value limit on property to be lifted. Tax assessments should average profits for the tax years ending in 2000 and 2001. That would allow current losses to be reflected as early as possible in tax payments.

I do not accept the Conservative proposition that a new borrowing scheme should be set up. However, I accept the principle behind that proposal, which is that there should be subsidised interest rates. The Treasury should seriously consider setting a borrowing ceiling of £10,000. Under certain conditions that I shall describe later, subsidy should be made available to help offset interest rate costs on borrowings made through established institutions.

I should like a job retention subsidy to be introduced to help keep people in employment in the tourism industry and related sectors. Such a subsidy would apply especially to live-in staff in restaurants and hotels in the Lake district. That would make a major contribution towards helping existing businesses retain the staff who work for them, or who have done so until recent weeks. A worrying advert appeared in my local newspaper only about two weeks ago. A firm in Edinburgh was advertising in Keswick for chefs. The implications will be readily identified by the House.

I should like free—if possible—or concessionary public transport arrangements to be established throughout the Lake district national park. Dealing with the crisis calls for real measures, but not necessarily a great deal of money. I should like all car parks in the Lake district that are open at present to be free of charge. I should like there to be free access—or, failing that, access at concessionary prices—to all environmental attractions, and even to lake cruises. That would be a major help in attracting tourists back to the area.

I should like help to be made available with the insurance premiums paid by businesses in my constituency. Such help would be of great assistance to guest houses, which, as commercial premises, pay substantially higher premiums than private houses.

I should like subsidies to be introduced to cover the advertising and promotion budgets of many businesses in the Lake district national park. Such subsidies should be based on the expenditure in those businesses' last two years' accounts, which means that vast amounts of money would not be involved.

I should also like the membership subscriptions to tourist associations and the Cumbria tourist board to be paid for many of the business in difficulty in my area. We should also consider underwriting the budgets of those local associations completely, if it is felt that that would be a better way to provide support.

How can we select the people to help? We have imposed on local authorities a requirement to asses the level of hardship where it occurs. I hope that the relevant criteria will be applied to the additional arrangements that I am calling for today.

My proposals apply to the Lake district, but they would also be valid in parts of Devon and central Wales. They would not be expensive. They are highly targeted, and do not amount to compensation. Someone should put a price on the package of measures that I have set out, as my resources are too limited for such a task.

I shall be leaving the House at the next election, but another hon. Member may well make the same speech in a couple of months, because the crisis will not go away. Everyone—people in Cumbria, hon. Members, and Ministers too—is trying valiantly to overcome the difficulties, but we face a major crisis. It must be dealt with, and I hope that my right hon. Friend, when he winds up the debate, will accept a proposition that I made the other day. That was that the organisations in my constituency that are wrestling with the problems every day should be allowed to give evidence directly to the national taskforce. I attended a taskforce meeting two weeks ago, and I was very impressed. The taskforce, with all its multi-ministerial representation, has a vital role to play.

Finally, I want to say something about vaccination. Peter Greenhill, chairman of the Mitchell's auction company in my constituency, has given me valuable advice about herdwicks, a variety of sheep. I advise Ministers to keep in contact with him, as he has a lot to say, especially about special breeds.

I do not know what the row over vaccination is about, especially with regard to meat consumption. Most cattle are vaccinated, and there is nothing new about that. If it is suggested that there should be special labelling of vaccinated animals, does that mean that all meat should be similarly labelled if the animal that it came from has been vaccinated? If so, almost every chop and other piece of meat in this country's butchers' shops would carry a label saying that the animal had been vaccinated.

As I understand it, some 40 vaccinations are already in use, and they apply right across the board. What is the difference between the foot and mouth vaccine and any other? The argument about vaccination and the need for compensation in connection with milk is nonsense. Vaccination is already an established practice, and vaccinating for foot and mouth would not amount to any change.

6.6 pm

**Mr. David Curry** (Skipton and Ripon): I shall begin by pretending for a moment that there has been no outbreak of foot and mouth disease, and sketching the situation in agriculture and the rural economy that obtained before the outbreak began.

It is worth remembering that agriculture was already experiencing the worst economic crisis for a generation, and 24,000 jobs had been lost in the sector. The total income from farming in 2000 was at its lowest for 25 years. According to Countryside Agency figures, per capita income declined from £10,600 in 1998 to £7,800 in 2000. Significantly, agriculture's contribution to the national economy is now below 1 per cent. That puts the cost of dealing with the crisis in context.

*[Mr. David Curry]*

The value of tourism to the English countryside is estimated at £12 billion, £9 billion of which derives from day trippers. Tourism supports 380,000 jobs, and in Yorkshire alone, 135,000 people—7 per cent. of the work force—earn their livelihood from tourism. The total revenue generated from tourism is £3.34 billion, and rural tourism generates £1.7 billion. Those figures also put the matter in perspective.

Before the foot and mouth crisis began, the tourist industry was already suffering from the high pound and poor weather. In addition, the fuel crisis and flooding problems had already made this a very difficult year for the industry.

One third of all England's businesses—just under 600,000 enterprises—are in rural areas. They are often very small, offering part-time or casual employment on a seasonal basis. Such businesses are now subject to a new set of impositions that have nothing to do with foot and mouth disease. In my constituency, for example, the aggregates tax will hit the quarrying industry, and the climate change levy will also have an effect.

The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) set out the circumstances encountered by people in his constituency, and the situation in my area is similar. Employers who must pay additional fuel costs will not get them rebated through national insurance contributions because they do not pay such contributions in respect of a significant number of their part-time work force. In addition, local employers are having to deal with the red tape of administering tax credit, and there is a new threat that fuel prices will rise again. The cost of car use to rural households is estimated to be 25 per cent. higher than it is to urban households.

In addition, access to technological infrastructure is often difficult in rural areas. A constituent of mine in Malhamdale wanted to have an integrated services data network line installed to help him pursue his business, but he has been told that the cost would be in excess of £300,000.

In many rural areas, the quality of secondary education is extremely high—that is especially true in North Yorkshire—but the further education structure is often less good and requires real work.

There are also the particular problems of what I call the countryside's great hidden industry—the residential home and nursing home sector. Those problems arise from the inadequacy of funding for local authorities, which determine the level of fees payable to such homes. In North Yorkshire last year, 500 beds were lost. There has been an 11 per cent. increase in the national minimum wage. One can argue that such an increase is justified, but it cannot be passed on by a sector that greatly depends on fees paid by a public authority.

That sector is crucial in offering employment. It often buttresses employment in agriculture. The farmer's wife, for example, might work part-time in a care home, because care homes are the largest employers in some of the villages in my constituency. This is a crucial sector upon which the health service depends enormously to provide "seamless" treatment for people from hospital back in the community, and it is seriously under threat.

All that happened before the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. There is not a single case of foot and mouth in my constituency, but it is under siege because until very recently, every square inch of it was a restricted area, so no normal activity could take place. I have spent a lot of time recently going to Wharfedale, Grassington and Ingleton—the villages that depend on tourism. With due respect to the Prime Minister, York is not the gateway to the countryside. My constituency, like that of the hon. Member for Workington, is much more dependent on rural pursuits such as walking and access to the countryside.

The level of cancellation is over 80 per cent., and the results of that spin down to the local pub and the local restaurant. The patterns of delivery for the Theakston and Black Sheep breweries show that there is the opposite of an accelerator right through the rural economy. This is the deceleration effect that comes from the crisis in the tourist industry.

**Sir Patrick Cormack:** Will that not persist right through the summer? The agricultural shows will have been cancelled in my right hon. Friend's constituency, as they have been in mine. People who depend on those for revival will not have them this year.

**Mr. Curry:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The royal show is being cancelled, as are all my little shows in individual dales. They are a great focus of local activity.

It is important that the Minister for the Environment realises that the summer has already been shot to pieces for many of those businesses. The clients who would have booked for their summer holidays have already booked elsewhere. Businesses may be able to hang on over the summer, but come the back end of the summer and next winter, many will be in serious difficulties. Any help may almost be more relevant six or nine months from now than it is at the moment.

As for the Government's help, the suggestions on my list are very close to those made by the hon. Member for Workington. Although my constituency was a zone excluded from the list of benefits that he hopes to see introduced, our economic circumstances must be very similar. The £12,000 ceiling on the rateable value for businesses does not make sense. Indeed, it excludes some properties such as the larger pubs, which employ more people. They are having to lay off staff, but they want to hold on to their work force.

Many businesses are paying council tax and not business rates, and that needs equivalent relief. The Government aid to local authorities in respect of business rate relief for businesses with a rateable value of more than £12,000 is 75 per cent; for values below £12,000, it is 95 per cent. As for the wonderful principle that because businesses must pay 5 per cent. when the relief is 95 per cent., that means ownership of the scheme, my businesses would happily dispense with that particular proprietorial notion.

Craven is a tiny local authority, one of the smallest in the country, with a budget of between £5 million and £6 million. Without advertising the rate relief scheme yet, it has had 388 applications, 65 of which relate to properties with a rateable value of more than £12,000. If it were to grant them all, that would cost the authority £52,500. That may seem small beer, but against a total budget of less than £6 million, it is a significant sum. The resentment caused by the levels of relief offered in Wales and Scotland is intense—and I say that as someone who,

as the hon. Member for Workington knows, is not inclined to play a particularly English nationalistic card in this matter.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): My right hon. Friend has raised an important point. I wrote to the Minister for the Environment a fortnight ago on behalf of Stroud district council, which is very similar to the authority that my right hon. Friend has mentioned. A fortnight ago, Stroud council reckoned that it would be unable to reclaim £250,000 from the non-district rating pool. This is a very serious problem, and if the Government do not remedy it, the council tax payers in those small rural areas will have yet another year or two of council tax increases way in excess of inflation.

**Mr. Curry:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have the identical situation in my constituency.

The Government must realise that devolution is not just about Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but about England as well. There is real concern at their apparent unwillingness to match the English interest with what is being offered elsewhere.

The eleemosynary instincts of the Inland Revenue are extremely welcome and very rare. However, for many of my businesses, going to the Inland Revenue and being charged for the privilege is not particularly relevant to their circumstances.

The Bellwin relief scheme ought to apply to local authorities, because this is an emergency. It cuts in when more than 2 per cent. of the budget has been spent. In North Yorkshire, in view of the money needed for flood relief and the effects of the Selby rail disaster, local authority expenditure is extensive. However, a local authority's normal expenditure depends largely on the number of teachers that it employs. It is curious that the Government's aid in connection with foot and mouth disease depends on the number of teachers on a local authority's books.

The climate change levy should be deferred. It is a pure imposition on small businesses in the tourist sector, because the national insurance rebate does not affect them. I agree with the hon. Member for Workington about support for payroll costs. Businesses want to keep their staff in work and keep them available. Those people often greatly need the extra income that those jobs provide. That would be the single most crucial piece of help that I could identify in my constituency, where businesses are under terrible pressure.

Providing investment grants towards the capital investment required to rebuild businesses would be a helpful contribution. If there are to be loans they will have to be interest-free or subsidised, because there is not the cash flow to service loans raised at the normal rate of interest.

**Mr. Paterson:** My right hon. Friend touches on cash flow, which is surely the most pressing issue facing those businesses. In the equestrian sector, a large riding school in my constituency, with 70 horses, has no cash flow at all. The arrangements for rates will be helpful down the road, but such businesses need a cash injection fast.

**Mr. Curry:** I agree with my hon. Friend. We have seen well publicised stories of riding establishments having to slaughter their horses because they cannot afford to maintain them. That is particularly telling in an epidemic in which the images of lambs in the mud, and calves, have featured so prominently.

Above all, we need the restoration of normality as fast as possible. However, we need to look beyond that, at the exit strategies from the crisis. There will have to be a recovery strategy. In agriculture, the costs of stock replacement may exceed the levels of compensation paid for stock. There will be a period before farms can be restocked, in which farmers must have a livelihood.

A great deal of nonsense has been and will be spoken about the impact of all this on the common agricultural policy. The Liberal Democrats' Ruritanian naivety—cliché-ridden naivety at that—was a singular non-contribution to this debate.

Diseases such as BSE and foot and mouth will push agriculture further in the direction in which it already knows that it must go. It must move into the environmental market, it must move into the recreational market, and it must move upstream and produce more quality food. In other words, the task of public policy makers is to define what those public goods are and how we pay for them, so that we are not dependent upon contradictory policies that promote production while also seeking to promote and support policies that militate against production.

When we come to that debate, I hope that people will show some sense and realism about the directions in which agriculture must go, and will not chase some new form of Elysian dream that will not have the faintest bearing on reality. In the meantime, very many businesses are suffering acutely. They will continue to do so for the rest of this year and beyond, and the aid must stretch to them while the crisis lasts.

6.19 pm

**Mr. Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter): I am pleased to follow the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who as usual spoke a great deal of sense—if he does not mind my saying so. I was also pleased that he broadened the debate a little beyond the immediate impact of foot and mouth. The debate is on the rural economy, and if we were not holding it against the backdrop of that disease it might be rather different. For example, in my part of the world—Devon and Cornwall—unemployment is at a record low, whether in urban or rural areas. There is still big migration from urban to rural areas—those people are not moving to rural areas because life there is intolerable, but it is understandable that we are holding this sad debate against the backdrop of the current crisis; I shall restrict my remarks to that.

I was pleased with what my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, said about the trends of the outbreak. However, I am slightly puzzled by the approach of the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), who constantly lectures the Government that they need to learn the lessons of 1967. I fear that he may have to eat his words. According to the current epidemiological projections, if the present trend continues, this outbreak will have been far more successfully and quickly contained and eradicated than the 1967 outbreak, which went on for eight months with far more cases. The hon. Gentleman should be more careful when he draws parallels with 1967.

*[Mr. Ben Bradshaw]*

There seems to be some general confusion in the House about the meaning of the term "under control". My understanding is that the scientific definition of a disease being "under control" is when one outbreak generates fewer than one further outbreak. Under that definition, the disease has been under control for at least two weeks—even in somewhere like Devon—contrary to the suggestion made by the hon. Member for South Suffolk.

That is not to say that we do not have enormous problems. My right hon. Friends the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and the Minister for the Environment will be aware of the particular problem in Devon of carcase disposal. However, although the hon. Member for South Suffolk says that he has visited Devon, he does not seem to have learned very much. He displayed the most extraordinary ignorance of our geology and of the fact that, after the wettest year for 300 years, our water table is at a record high. In the constituencies that are most badly affected, such as that of the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett), there is the highest proportion of people with private water supplies. All the experts and the Environment Agency say that the suggestion made by the hon. Member for South Suffolk for on-farm burial is the worst possible environmental solution to the problem. I do not know where he gets his ideas.

During this crisis, most Members have learned that often there are no simple solutions and no easy answers. I know that, in Devon, the Army and MAFF have been working around the clock to try to find appropriate disposal sites. It has been incredibly difficult. We have not had the luxury of the large disposal sites in Cumbria. Sites have now been found, but as the Government and authorities have—rightly—listened to the concerns of local people, there has been a delay in the sites coming on-stream.

I associate myself with the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon that the Government should consider the possibility of taking away some of our carcases. I realise that Ministers would tell me, "You would say that, wouldn't you?", but there is now spare capacity in other parts of the country. The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), who, sadly, is no longer in the Chamber, seemed rather reluctant to receive any of our carcases. I point out that, during a large part of the outbreak, we in Devon were taking carcases from his area into our rendering capacity, so there could be a generous quid pro quo. I urge the Government to consider that proposal. The situation is terrible. Human health problems could arise—as they have already done in some cases—with all those undisposed carcases left in the Devon countryside.

The crisis has been devastating and distressing for the farming community. It has also been hugely devastating for other industries—especially tourism, as has already been said. I am especially sorry for the small tourism industries in the areas most immediately affected and on Dartmoor, which do not automatically receive compensation. They face going out of business during the next few weeks unless more is done.

We were fearful about the Easter holiday. However, I am glad to say that we had a far better Easter than we had originally expected—partly thanks to some of the initiatives taken by the Government before Easter to encourage people to visit Devon and Cornwall and return to the countryside. In fact, takings in Devon were between 80 and 90 per cent. of those for the previous Easter. That is phenomenal achievement, given the terrible backdrop—*[Interruption.]*—although, as my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ) points out, the good weather helped.

That relative success masks a huge disparity. In cities like mine, Exeter, takings were up on the previous Easter; indeed, during the Easter weekend, one of the hotels had to send away 30 couples because it was full. The coastal resorts did extremely well. I spent much of the recess walking around the coastal path, where there were crowds. However, on Dartmoor and in the rural areas immediately affected by the disease businesses had a terrible time.

I associate myself 100 per cent. with the suggestions made by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), who, as usual, made a wholly constructive speech. It was full of practical, constructive suggestions, which I hope the Government will take on board. If they do not do so, some excellent tourism businesses on Dartmoor and in the rural areas of Devon will go to the wall. We have built up a high quality tourism industry during recent years; it brings enormous benefit not only to people from outside the region, but to people who live in cities such as Exeter, who like to go out and enjoy the countryside.

Those businesses will go to the wall unless they are offered some short-term help. More than anything, businesses want their customers back; they must get their customers back. We need a vigorous and well-funded marketing campaign for the rest of the year. Easter may have been better than we anticipated, but another bank holiday is coming soon, with another one after that. One swallow does not a summer make.

We need a vigorous marketing campaign—we also need access. I spent some time during the Easter recess trying to walk in Devon. I say "trying" because far too many footpaths and public rights of way are still unnecessarily closed—as is too much of our woodland. I implore the Government to step up pressure on local authorities, the National Trust and the Forestry Commission—or Forestry Enterprise, as it has been renamed—to open much more land to public access. That must happen in time for the May day bank holiday weekend in 10 days time. The limited reopening of footpaths just before Easter was crucial. If that had not happened in Devon, we would have experienced a far worse Easter and everyone would have gone to Cornwall or Dorset instead. I am sure people in those counties would have been pleased, but we would not have been.

I implore my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment to keep up the pressure on the Department of Trade and Industry for at least one extra bank holiday—preferably in the autumn. I know that it is not on the Government's agenda—as he repeats each time I ask him—but will he tell the DTI that we in Britain have fewer bank holidays than people in any country in the European Union except the Netherlands? Furthermore, our workers take less holiday—by an average of about a week. It is a complete myth to suggest that giving people more holidays makes them less productive; the opposite is the case. All the research shows that productivity is associated far more with investment in technology and training than with holidays. A work force who are not

well rested and who are stressed perform far worse. As well as a much-needed fillip to our tourism industry, an extra bank holiday would go down extremely well with the public at large. That should be in our manifesto, as the Fabian Society suggests.

The medium and long-term situation also needs to be addressed. At present, I think it is too soon to put a price tag on how much the crisis will affect us. Two conflicting reports have been produced by universities in Devon. The first was issued by the university of Exeter early in the outbreak—when we all thought that it would be far worse than it probably will be—and suggested that it would cost the county 10,000 jobs. Since then, research has been carried out by the university of Plymouth, which is much less pessimistic. However, I urge the Government to make a close study of what they think the impact will be, and to listen to the suggestions made by my hon. Friend the Member for Workington.

I am sure that on both sides of the House we all hope that the medium and long-term impact of the disease will not be as bad as we feared at the beginning. It is very good that the disease has been brought under control and eradicated more quickly than many of us—even the most optimistic—expected two or three weeks ago, but we are certainly not yet out of the woods.

May I make a plea for a couple of things? The first may not be popular in the countryside, but we need to hold such debates openly during times of crisis such as this: we need planning in rural areas. It is extraordinary that 75 per cent. of our land is in agricultural use, but accounts for only 1 per cent. of our gross domestic product—as the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon pointed out. Yet there is a housing shortage. It is not a popular thing to say, but we need more homes. Ministers may be aware of the storyline on the BBC Radio 4 programme, "The Archers", in which there is a big debate about a new housing development in Ambridge. I am with Roy and Hayley on this one. They are a young couple who are about to get married and desperately need a home, but the NIMBYs in Ambridge are trying to stop them getting one.

Our rural economy would be helped if we could have more homes. Farmers would also be helped if they were allowed to build two or three homes on their land. They would not then need taxpayers to compensate them for some of the losses that they have incurred. I hope that Ministers will take that on board. I know that it is a controversial suggestion, but we should debate such things; we should not be shut up by organisations such as the Council for the Protection of Rural England.

We need to restructure the Departments. That is not a slight on the work done by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, nor on that done by the Ministry. She is absolutely right—her staff have been working absolutely tirelessly in incredibly difficult conditions. They have worked miracles and, with hindsight, they will be judged much more fairly and favourably than they are currently being judged in the media.

It seems to be nonsense that a Department is dedicated to an industry that is responsible for just 1 per cent. of our gross domestic product, whereas tourism, which is far more important economically, is the responsibility of a small part of another Department, with no budget and very little clout. I hope that the Government will grasp that nettle after the next election. I am not sure what the answer is, nor whether I agree with the Liberal Democrat party's recommendations, but we need to consider that matter extremely seriously.

Finally, on the reform of the CAP, all power to my right hon. Friend's elbow. I agree with her that the change of Minister in Germany is hugely important. I know Renate Künast from my time as the BBC correspondent in Berlin. She is a very sensible woman, and I am sure that the Minister can do business with her. If we can get the Germans on board for a radical reform of the CAP, despite all the clouds and the gloom of this crisis, there could be a very bright silver lining.

6.31 pm

**Mr. Ronnie Fearn** (Southport): Never before has the importance of tourism to the rural economy of the United Kingdom been more apparent; never before has the industry been so much in the forefront of the news; and never before has the future, the core and the infrastructure of tourism been so thoroughly under threat.

Britain's tourism industry, as we have heard, is the fifth biggest industry and comprises 120,000 businesses, more than 80 per cent. of which employ fewer than 10 people. The tourism industry makes £64 billion a year, of which rural tourism provides £12 billion. In rural England, tourism supports 380,000 jobs. A quarter of all holidays taken by British people in England alone are in the countryside, and those rural areas contain 39 per cent. of the known accommodation capacity in England, provided by 25,000 establishments.

Because of the crisis, British tourists have withdrawn into their own home territory, or they are booking holidays abroad, encouraged by other European countries, which have ploughed into our markets, advertising walking and rambling holidays. There is no need to withdraw from our own holiday pattern—beaches, rural areas, country bordering rural areas and, indeed, most holiday spots inland are accessible.

Much in evidence have been scenes in newspapers and on TV, both here and abroad, showing Britain on fire and the Army moving in, none of which has helped to stem any fears that tourists might have. In the USA, "Come to Britain" holidays have taken a nose dive. A wrong strategy was taken by the Government, who simply failed to realise that tourism would be hit far more than farming in the long term.

The lack of information supplied to tourism businesses in the first weeks of the crisis was absolutely appalling. The information is still inadequate and red tape surrounds many aspects of business. Why not ease the pressure by requesting the regulatory impact unit to carry out a snapshot study, with the Government acting quickly on the findings?

The British Tourist Authority now estimates that, in 2001, inbound tourism will be between 10 to 20 per cent. short of its original forecast. That will involve a likely drop in revenue of between £1.5 billion and £2.5 billion. In Cumbria, the trade is facing 350 redundancies, with many more in the pipeline, and 193 tourism businesses and attractions have reported losses to the Cumbria tourist board. Not only hotels and shops, but food suppliers, petrol stations and restaurants are beginning to see no light at the end of the tunnel.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

*[Mr. Ronnie Fearn]*

The Youth Hostels Association, with which I am closely associated, faces losses of almost £6 million after being forced to close almost half its hostels. In Cumbria, 17 out of 24 youth hostels have shut down, yet I visited the area just after Easter and found the lakes and many countryside beauty spots thronging with visitors, acting very responsibly and enjoying themselves, too. I met hoteliers to discuss the future of tourism. They, and those in other businesses throughout Britain, have suffered a collapse in bookings and a drastic drop in cash income. That is exemplified by statistics that show that the inquiry rate from 19 February to date is about a third of that in the same period last year.

The statistics certainly show a drastic drop in bookings for September, October and into early next year. That was also highlighted on my visits to Torbay, Bath, Welshpool, Eastbourne, Weston-super-Mare and my own constituency—Southport. Tourist boards in all those areas are fighting back with positive moves, but they need more Government help. In Devon, the county council estimated that 1,200 jobs would be lost in agriculture and ancillary rural industries, while 8,700 jobs could be lost from its tourism sector and allied businesses. The reduction in income in the tourism sector was estimated at £196 million.

Nationally, the Liberal Democrats called immediately for a grip to be taken when we saw how easily businesses could head towards bankruptcy. We asked for a moratorium on VAT, or for it to be reduced, which would not only help the tourism industry, but bring us more in line with other European countries, especially Ireland, where an immediate upsurge in tourism occurred when VAT was lowered. We asked for a moratorium on business rates and suggested that repayment of arrears could take place over a long period.

We contacted the banks and an immediate response came, stating that full consideration would be given to those whose cashflow was in difficulty. The possibility of help with the payments for specific essential services, such as gas, water and electricity, was taken up and an agreement was sought for the banks to provide loans or grants, with lower interest rates than the Government's loan guarantee scheme.

Liberal Democrats have also urged that the recently published Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill should be implemented soon, instead of waiting until April 2002. An alarming aspect of the 50 per cent. mandatory relief is that it will not initially apply to pubs and garages. That needs to be amended urgently to protect those in rural areas who could go out of business very soon.

The British Tourist Authority has put a lot on its website, detailing a visitors' charter on which 1,100 attractions have already been entered. The BTA targets overseas visitors coming to the United Kingdom and has received a commitment from the Government for £2.2 million in additional funding towards its planned recovery activity. However, the BTA has made it clear to the Government that that is only the first part of further substantial investment. The second instalment of money, totalling £8 million, is already required to undertake tactical advertising and further PR activity. That £8 million is needed now, so why do the Government not release it?

The English Tourism Council has also prepared a recovery plan for tourism in the United Kingdom. It has been submitted to the Government in support of a bid for £35.5 million—the sum estimated to be needed to carry out the recommendations contained in the plan. Delivery will take place nationally and regionally. Together with the regional tourist boards, the ETC has received £3.8 million to implement the short-term measures identified in the plan, of which it has passed on £1.4 million to regional tourist boards—but where is the Government's total commitment to the sum of £35.5 million?

In Devon, the county council has sought to compensate for the loss of visitors from within the United Kingdom by diversifying into the overseas visitors markets, the objective of which is to increase the number of visitors, and visitor spends, from the overseas markets to the rural sub-region. That will sustain employment opportunities and raise the quality of Devon and Cornwall's tourism sector. We applaud that, but much more needs to be done. Better communication is needed between the Government and the regional tourist boards so that contact is easily maintained and the situation is monitored directly. An additional bank holiday would assist small businesses to recuperate some of their financial losses, and that would be best timed in the autumn towards the end of September.

The impact of foot and mouth on rural tourism businesses, as defined by the North West tourist board, will affect the ability of regional boards to raise money for marketing this year. The industry will not have the funds to partake in marketing activities. Attractions also will not have the resources to take part in the national quality assessment scheme and accommodation will withdraw from the accommodation inspection scheme. The long-term effects of that will be a reduction in the quality offered and a downward spiral in our competitiveness. Subsidies already announced must extend throughout all those sectors. Tourist boards need to develop the case for compensation for tourism businesses, highlighting the scale and extent of foot and mouth's disastrous impact on visitor expenditure, local economies and special circumstances.

I particularly take on board the suggestions made by the Cumbrian representative, the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell–Savours). All such remedies will help rural tourism, which must and will survive.

6.41 pm

**Mr. Matthew Taylor** (Truro and St. Austell): This has been an important debate. It has given the House a chance, after the Easter break, to discuss the biggest issue to have hit the countryside in possibly a generation. It has highlighted the real crisis in the countryside and Members—such as the hon. Members for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw) and for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) and my hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn), as well as the Minister of State, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo)—have understandably focused on that. I suspect that it will be my hon. Friend's last speech in the House as he is retiring when the election is called. As ever, he fought hard for the tourism industry.

It is not simply foot and mouth that is at the heart of the economic problems facing the countryside. The problems have been built on top of a crisis that is of longer making.

Between autumn 1996 and autumn 2000, agricultural employment fell by 85,000. It fell by almost 20 per cent. even before foot and mouth hit home. In 2000, farm incomes fell to as low as £7,800 per capita—the lowest figure for 25 years, as the Chairman of the Select Committee on Agriculture rightly pointed out.

The crisis is not merely confined to farming. As my hon: Friend the Member for Southport pointed out, it has hit hard at tourism. The whole rural economy has been affected, as I and all hon. Members, whatever their party, will know from their constituents who face serious difficulties as a result of the impact of the disease. For example, there has been a huge impact on the St. Austell brewery because of the loss of trade in its pubs in Devon. Teagles, the agricultural machinery manufacturers, has had to lay off workers near Blackwater in my constituency. The problems have spread throughout the rural economy, so I cannot agree with the hon. Member for Exeter who said that, without foot and mouth, the debate would have been about how well the rural economy is doing. People in rural areas would not recognise that picture.

**Ms Candy Atherton** (Falmouth and Camborne): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Taylor:** I shall make a bit of progress and then give way to the hon. Lady.

Rural post office closures have continued at the rate of 200 a year since the 1997 general election; rural pubs and shops are in decline; 70 per cent. of parishes are now without a general store; and 43 per cent. have no post office. Outside the commuter belt, rural Britain is characterised by lower incomes, more part-time work rather than bread-winning full-time jobs, a huge gap in areas such as my own between house prices and incomes and lower access to public provision for transport, hospital services or whatever. The hon. Lady may recognise that picture.

**Ms Atherton:** We all accept that foot and mouth has caused particular problems, but would he be kind enough to tell the House what has happened to unemployment in his constituency since 1997?

**Mr. Taylor:** Unemployment has fallen, as it has in the rest of the country. However, as the hon. Lady knows, unemployment remains higher in our part of the country than in many others. Incomes remain 20 per cent. lower than the rest of the country and the gap in funding between our area and others has widened.

I do not want to suggest to the House that the problems started in 1997. The worst feature of this debate has been the amnesia of Conservative Members. They suggested that only a Labour Government have faced problems in rural communities. The truth is that the recession in farming started six years ago on the back of the BSE crisis that was so appallingly mishandled by the Conservatives when they were in office. Their bare-faced cheek in criticising this Government for their handling of foot and mouth is extraordinary.

Conservatives started the rundown of rural services, cutting schools, hospitals and bus services. They started not hundreds but thousands of post office closures. Worst of all, they established, although Labour has failed to reform it, the funding of public services formulae that mean that remoter rural areas—precisely those that have been hit hard by the foot and mouth crisis—receive lower levels of Government funding for education, health and local government than the national average let alone that received by the more privileged commuter areas that Conservative Members represent. In education Cornwall receives £100 less per pupil, and £100 per person less for the NHS than the average. Formulae introduced by the Conservatives have yet to be reformed by the Government.

Although it may be true that many Labour Members often show too little understanding of rural areas—Conservative Members make that allegation and they are not always wrong—the fact is that Conservative Members, who claim now to defend the countryside, first let it down because they took it for granted. As a result, it is no wonder that more Liberal Democrats represent the poorest rural constituencies than Members in any other political party.

Foot and mouth should now be the moment for change. The good news from the debate is that people in all parties have argued that case; the question is whether we shall see action. First, there must be a change in the Government's approach to helping businesses hit by foot and mouth. During the crisis in the countryside, I have not engaged in petty politics as to whether the Government, did something a day or two late or a day or two early. The truth is that any Government faced by this crisis would have struggled, so we have sought to make constructive suggestions on how they could do better. It is always easy, when looking in from the outside, to find such suggestions, but the measure of a Government is whether they respond to them. In many cases they have but, in too many others, they have yet to do so.

I understand that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will make a statement tomorrow and it is a shame that we did not hear it before this debate. The House should have the chance to debate—and not simply question—that statement. We provided the opportunity for that to happen and, if the Government choose to make the statement after the debate, they should find their own time to allow for debate and for proper questioning of whatever measures they introduce. I hope that their policies will go along the lines of those that we have suggested.

The message that we read one day from the Prime Minister in the *Western Morning News* and that we hear in the statements that other Ministers make to the House is that more is yet to come, but that message is wearing rather thin. That is why the *Western Morning News* launched its "SOS SouthWest" campaign. People are frustrated to be told that help is on its way when they do not see it in place. They need to know whether they will have a job or a business in the future.

Like the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Workington outlined a perfectly reasonable set of proposals. However, the Government have not yet shown that they have taken full measure of the economic crisis, although they have demonstrated that they appreciate the scope of the foot and mouth epidemic. I hope that the number of cases will continue to drop off so that we know that the epidemic is coming under control. The devastating knock-on economic impact on farms that continue to suffer consequential losses is not under

*[Mr. Taylor]*

control. We called for those businesses to be supported when the crisis started in February, but there is still nothing from the Government.

The Government do not understand the scale of the crisis that is affecting businesses, especially those that are not in the earmarked, designated rural areas. It hits as much in south Somerset, south Gloucestershire and Torbay as it does in the most rural parts of Cornwall and Devon. The impact is especially notable on tourism. That is why we argue for 100 per cent. rate relief for all affected businesses. Uniquely, we have drawn up plans for detailed interest-free loans of £20,000 to be provided over two years, similar to the model recommended by the hon. Member for Workington. There is no need for the Government to find the capital sums, as the Conservatives suggest. They must, however, help with interest payments, for which they could use existing models, such as career development loans. There is no reason why they should not do that for the businesses affected by foot and mouth.

The crisis is severe and the need for long-term reform is the issue on which hon. Members have been brought closest together. Even BSE did not achieve that. For the first time, there is general agreement that we need a model of farming that supports people in their jobs and family businesses and protects the countryside. We do not want a system that simply pays out for production, money which ends up in the pockets of supermarket chains, which make billion pound profits, and in those of the big agricultural businesses, but never in the pockets of those who most need it—the small farmers in the most difficult rural areas.

The Conservatives ask how we would achieve common agricultural policy reform, but how would they? Their policy is not to leave the European Union, although one Conservative hon. Member who complained about our approach seemed to suggest that it was. I agree that while it is necessary to have unanimity in the Council of Ministers, we are unlikely to achieve the far-reaching reforms that we need—there is always a vested interest that blocks them. We need to change the processes in Europe to undo those difficulties so that a single country with a single vested interest cannot block reforms that are in our best interests and those of many other European countries, on which we can find a great deal of common resolve.

It is not possible to maintain for ever the unfair funding formulae that discriminate against rural areas. Although they are not the Government's fault and they say that they want to reform them, Labour is four years into its term in office. There is no excuse for the fact that the Government's formulae assume that children, patients and businesses are worth less in far-flung rural areas. I hope that the Minister will respond to that problem, because long-term reform is needed.

6.53 pm

**The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher):** I congratulate the Liberal Democrats on their choice of debate and the discussion has been useful. Although the Government should be held to account for what might be the most difficult crisis of the past 20 or 30 years—perhaps the worst within the lifetime of most hon. Members—the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) was right to remind the House that it has occurred against the background of BSE. He also reminded us about the rundown of services in rural areas, which is not a recent event, but one which has been going on for a long time. Indeed, services deteriorated markedly under the previous Government.

The hon. Gentleman and others said that there has been no Government debate on the subject. I do not know how many statements my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has made, but I have delivered two and they allow for extensive and detailed questioning. Having been on the receiving end, I can confirm that that is a more effective way to hold Ministers to account than a more general debate.

I pay tribute to what the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) said. I assure him that VAT deferrals are not subject to an interest charge—that is a canard. The same applies to income tax that is deferred because of foot and mouth. It does, however, have to be demonstrable that that outbreak was the cause of the problem.

I have sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's comments on reform of the CAP, which was also mentioned by other hon. Members. The appointment of Renate Künast will undoubtedly change the centre of gravity in the Agriculture Council.

Tighter inspection at ports and identification of the country of origin of food products is largely covered by EU rules.

Hon. Members talked about returning to normality, but what do we mean by that? What is sustainable agriculture? Those issues will be discussed when the foot and mouth crisis is over and the Government intend to take a lead in those debates. Discussions have already begun on the regeneration package for the rural economy that we intend to introduce. Indeed, it was discussed by the rural taskforce this morning and will certainly be discussed again. However, we have deliberately held off because it is right to emphasise the importance of the eradication of the disease. We cannot get sidetracked.

Circumstances today are different from what they were before Easter, but we are not complacent and accept that we are not totally in control of the disease. That will not be the case until there are zero new cases. Considerable progress has been made, however, with 13 new cases in the past three days, 13 the day before and nine the day before that, which compares with the reported 40, 50 or even more cases that were occurring only three or four weeks ago. Although the takings in the rural economy over Easter were not as great as last year, they were at a much higher level than many people had feared. There have been losses, some of which are grievous, but this Easter most rural businesses took between 70 to 80 per cent. of their takings last year.

We have repeatedly said that the best way to assist rural businesses in trouble is to get the customers and visitors back. I hope that I carry every hon. Member with me in that sentiment. We have been trying extremely hard to achieve that goal. All or most rights of way are open in a fifth of local highway authorities. Even Cumbria, one of the hardest hit areas which has experienced great difficulties, opened 100 footpaths before Easter. Surrey and Norfolk have opened half or more of their paths. Some 1,000 miles of towpaths along the canals have been opened; East Sussex has opened Ashdown forest; the royal parks have reopened;

and the National Trust has opened many of its most popular properties. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes), today announced that the Government are providing an additional £4 million to local authorities to assist in opening footpaths and to provide fences, publicity and temporary staff where needed.

Disposal was mentioned throughout the debate. On-site farm burial was of particular concern. The Government's priority is clear. We are absolutely in favour, first, of rendering; secondly, of incineration at industrial plants where that is available and, thirdly, of burial on registered landfill sites. The problem with Devon is that none of those options is immediately available because full capacity has been achieved in each case in the county and adjacent areas. The only other alternatives are pyres or burning in open fields.

Burial on site is not possible for the reason given in the debate, namely the extremely high water table. We are considering moving carcases to landfill sites within a reasonable range, although we have to take account of the environmental impact of doing so. If there are 175,000 carcases—recent statistics indicate that the figure is probably lower, as most people believe, but it is still substantial—we cannot leave them lying in fields leaching disease into the ground, so we have to find a method of immediate disposal. If we cannot safely take carcases to alternative landfill sites, the only way to dispose of them is to burn them. I believe that we will complete that process fairly quickly, as we have done in Cumbria. The Government are doing everything possible to remove that backlog.

**Mr. Breed:** Has any consideration been given to burial at sea?

**Mr. Meacher:** As far as I know, we have not considered burial at sea, but I doubt that it would be environmentally acceptable.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) misunderstood on several counts. It is true that the series of figures on the website was discontinued for a short time in the first half of April. It was reintroduced on Good Friday and has continued ever since. The hon. Gentleman was right to say that the reduction in the number of animals awaiting disposal represented a catching-up exercise by the regional centres in recording the numbers that had been disposed of. That has allowed more accurate figures to be published. I am sure that he has a suspicious mind and is assuming, although he did not say so, that we are fiddling the figures. Perhaps that was such a common occurrence under the previous Government that he assumes that we are doing the same, but we are not.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned contiguous farms. In a slaughter-on-suspicion case, all susceptible livestock on the premises are slaughtered, but we do not cull on contiguous premises until we get the lab results. If the results are negative, a form B is served and restrictions are lifted, but of course no livestock are left on the farm. If the results are positive, we convert the slaughter-on-suspicion status to a confirmed case and then cull on the contiguous premises.

**Mr. Burnett:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Meacher:** I am running into extra time and I do not want to get to a penalty shoot-out, but since the hon. Gentleman is a Liberal Democrat, I will give way.

**Mr. Burnett:** Will the Minister help the House and my constituents by stating how many carcases remain to be disposed of in Devon and how many the Ministry stated were awaiting disposal yesterday?

**Mr. Meacher:** I cannot provide those figures now, but we will provide more accurate and up-to-date figures. The latest figures available indicate that the number is substantially below 175,000. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture will deal with that point tomorrow.

**Mr. Bradshaw:** Will my right hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Meacher:** I am sorry, but I really cannot because I still have a few remarks to make and we are running into the time for the next debate.

The lifting of restrictions in surveillance zones is covered by EU rules, and the procedures that we are following to lift infected area status reflect veterinary advice based on draft EU directives on foot and mouth.

My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) gave a constructive, fair and reasonable speech such as we have come to expect from him. He spoke of the financial assistance that he wants the Government to provide. I shall not detain the House now by giving the details of our £220 million package, but I will say more about two or three of the specific measures that he mentioned. We are prepared favourably to consider the averaging of profits to reduce tax, provided that it is understood that it may well turn out to be less helpful than many people expect. The same goes for the job retention proposal. We would need to seek agreement from the Department of Social Security that rather than paying benefits to people who are made redundant, the money should be used to keep people in work if possible. We are considering whether that is possible and consistent with the general social security framework.

I want to pay a compliment to the Cumbria taskforce. When I visited the county, I was very impressed by its work and by the practicality and range of its proposals. I hope that there will be further such proposals. I am always very glad to see my hon. Friend at those meetings.

The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) referred to the £12,000 rateable value threshold, but if I cannot have his attention, I will not go on. *[Interruption.]* I do not have time now, but later I will tell the right hon. Gentleman what I was going to say.

My hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw) asked about taking the carcases in Devon elsewhere. We are considering that because it is a better alternative than pyres if we can find a method of doing so that is environmentally acceptable. We are giving short-term help to businesses to get back customers. We are stepping up the pressure on local authorities to open their footpaths and facilities. I made that point again to the Local Government Association at the rural taskforce meeting this morning.

*[Mr. Meacher]*

Unhappily, the hon. Member for Southport (Mr. Fearn) made his valedictory speech to the House on tourism. The Government have just extended mandatory 50 per cent. rate relief to pubs, garages and village shops. On Monday, we will have the Second Reading of a Bill to extend it further. On extra tourist grants, I can say that the Government have already made available £6 million to the English Tourism Council for the tourist boards. As the hon. Gentleman said, we have given £2 million to the British Tourist Authority, and we are taking its advice about what more is needed. Last week, we had a very successful visit from travel operators from the United States and other key markets. That cost about £100,000, and the BTA said this morning that it thinks that its benefits already run into tens of millions of pounds.

The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell painted a picture of decline, but I must point out that many villages and small settlements depend on rural post offices. The hon. Gentleman neglected to say that the Government have made available £270 million to prevent all avoidable rural post office closures. That is an important commitment. I agree with him that the foot and mouth disaster is an opportunity for change, and that is why we will be introducing a new package not only to kick-start the rural economy but to tackle the whole question of the future of agriculture.

I apologise for the length of my speech, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Government will take on board all the points that have been made. I have no doubt that there will be further discussions about the issue. We are determined not only to eradicate the disease in this country as soon as possible but to regenerate and revivify the rural economy in a manner that we have not seen for many decades.

*Question put,* That the original words stand part of the Question:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 43, Noes 305.

**Division No. 195]** **[7.9 pm**

**AYES**

Allan, Richard
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Norman
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Fearn, Ronnie
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
McCrea, Dr William
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Willis, Phil

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Bob Russell and Sir Robert Smith.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chaytor, David
Church, Ms Judith
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*

Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thompson, William
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Don Touhig and**
**Mr. Mike Hall.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes that the current foot and mouth crisis has impacted upon a wide range of rural businesses and services, affecting many aspects of rural life; further notes that foot and mouth has hit a countryside that has suffered from lack of investment under previous governments; agrees that the first priority must be the isolation, control and eradication of foot and mouth disease; endorses the Government's commitment to rural communities as set out in the Rural White Paper and the England Rural Development Programme; welcomes the extra financial help the Government has made available to farmers and rural businesses affected by foot and mouth, including agrimonetary compensation for livestock farmers and the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme; welcomes the work of the Rural Task Force including its work to open up the countryside and business relief, deferral of tax and national insurance contributions, extension of the small firms loan guarantee scheme and new grants to Regional Development Agencies and tourism authorities; and calls on the Government to continue putting in place the long-term policies needed to regenerate British agriculture and revitalise the rural economy as a whole.

## DEFERRED DIVISION

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** I now have to announce the result of the Division deferred from a previous day.

On the motion on Road Traffic, the Ayes were 176 and the Noes were 282, so the motion was disagreed to.

*[The Division List is published at the end of today's debates.]*

## Foreign and Security Policy

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** I should announce that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.23 pm

**Paddy Ashdown** (Yeovil): I beg to move,

That this House believes that in environmental, foreign affairs and security policies only a collective and multilateral approach will now succeed; regrets the unilateral decision of the United States to refuse to adopt the Kyoto Protocol and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to use every effort to persuade the United States government to reverse that decision; asserts the universality of human rights and calls upon Her Majesty's Government to recognise that respect for human rights should be at the centre of a foreign policy with an ethical dimension; and reaffirms its support for a reformed, fully-funded United Nations equipped to respond swiftly to oppression and the systematic abuse of human rights.

To be frank, I move the motion with a little sadness. That is not, of course, because there is any deficiency in the motion, which was drafted by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), and is therefore perfect in every detail. It is because I suspect that this is the last time that I shall have the privilege of moving a motion on behalf of my party. [HON. MEMBERS: "Shame."] I agree with that, but it was not said before today.

Nearly 100 years ago, Lord Curzon was speaking on foreign affairs. He was Viceroy of India then, and said:

"Frontiers are the razor's edge on which hang suspended the issue of war or peace and the life of nations."

He was speaking, what was, for his time, no more than the truth. He was speaking at the end of a century that took the rather new idea of the nation state and raised it to sophistication and at the beginning of a century when it became the engine of two of the most destructive wars in human history. The nation state that he was talking about was the arbiter of all things. There was nothing in international affairs except nation states. If a country was not a nation state, it was nothing. Nation states and their sovereign institutions were sovereign and not subject to interference from anywhere else. Their governments proposed and disposed; their parliaments were sovereign and did not have to acknowledge anybody else. Such parliaments were the means by which we governed ourselves, by which we ensured our common wealth and by which we established our identity. Nation states meeting in solemn conclave with other nation states drew up treaties, established borders and disposed the order of the world.

So it was, but so it no longer is. Things have changed fundamentally in our world in ways that I believe that we in the House and people in other nation state parliaments are reluctant to acknowledge. Nevertheless, such changes are facts of our lives. It was no more than 80 years after Lord Curzon uttered those words when, in 1992 or 1993, the United Nations calculated that there were about 87 conflicts throughout the world, of which only two were between nation states and about borders. All the rest were within the borders of nation states or across them, and concerned conflicts among tribes, ethnicities, religions and communities. Lest it be thought that I am talking about some far-flung corner of the world more primitive than our own, let us remember that one of those 87 conflicts was in Northern Ireland.

Things have changed fundamentally. The position of the nation state as the single monopoly that proposes and disposes all and whose institutions are all-governing and entirely sovereign is no more. That monopolistic position has been eroded by two of what I think, internationally, are the greatest events of our age. They are the migration of power from the nation state up to global institutions and into the hands of the global players, and the atomisation of its power down to the communities that make it up and into the hands of individual citizens.

I shall give the House a small illustration. In September 1998, I was in the little villages of Suva Reka, near Pristina, when they were being bombarded, shelled, looted and burned by the main battle units of the Yugoslav army. I will not bore the House with the details, which are probably reasonably well known. However, two little things caught my eye. It was a sort of paradigm that illuminated a much larger event. Every Albanian village had a graveyard—there were too many of them—with freshly dug graves, and every Albanian house, be it extremely poor, had a satellite dish.

I noticed amidst the mayhem and misery that while all the graveyards pointed, according to Muslim tradition, towards Mecca, all the satellite dishes pointed towards Murdoch. I fell to wondering which of those two facts would more greatly influence the lives of the people round whom the war was raging. The answer was that Murdoch would affect their lives more than Mecca. I was seeing the globalisation of influence. Power was being handed up to the global players, to whose operations frontiers and borders are irrelevant. They are unconstrained by any of the institutions that we have created and beyond any code of practice. They operate at least amorally if not immorally. I do not say that they operate immorally but they operate outside any moral code. If that is the case, in due course some of them will, if they have not already, operate amorally.

Power is in the hands of satellite broadcasters, transnational corporations, commodity traders and currency speculators who can influence economies and destabilise regimes even as powerful as our own, as we remember with pain from black Wednesday. International problems accompany the globalisation of international power. That includes good things and bad things. We cannot tackle drugs or international crime unless we are prepared to do it internationally. Power has migrated from the institutions of nation states into the hands of global players. Problems have migrated there, too. More and more in the world today, it is not the power of this nation or that but the interrelationship between them that matters. It is our interdependence that is the most important factor. The institutions that we create to manage global events will determine whether we live in peace and prosperity. We must work together, across borders, because we can no longer resolve inside borders the problems from which our citizens suffer. In short, we must learn to pool our sovereignty.

That is something that we in the House, especially those on the Conservative Benches, fail to understand. The Conservatives believe that pooled sovereignty is somehow diminished sovereignty. That is astonishing. Have not the Conservatives been telling us for 50 years how important NATO is? That was the first revelation of the need to pool our sovereignty. What more fundamental sovereignty does a nation have than the sovereignty to defend itself? Straight after the last war, we realised that

unless we pooled our sovereignty in defence, we could not assure the defence of our own country and the security of its citizens.

I fancy that that is happening elsewhere, too. We cannot create a secure economy unless we are prepared to operate in a global marketplace on a larger scale than we currently do. We cannot secure a safe environment—pollution is no respecter of borders—unless we learn to work with our neighbours. I expect that that will be true of the pound, as well.

There is an argument according to which we will lose our sovereignty if we enter the euro. The opposite is the case. If the British pound, relatively small, is positioned mentally somewhere in mid-Atlantic, between the most powerful currency in the world, the dollar, and the second most powerful currency in the world, the euro, we will have all the sovereignty of a cork bobbing along in the wake of two ocean liners.

We will have to work with others, even on defence. We have discovered—a revelation of the 1980s and 1990s—that even collective security is not sufficient. We must have common security. In the era of weapons of mass destruction, our destiny rests with not going to war, for winning a war by using mass destruction would destroy ourselves. The great statement of John Donne:

"No man is an Island . . . any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind"

has been elevated from a poet's vision to an imperative of international affairs. It is the only means by which we can survive.

One such means is the creation not just of global institutions, but of regional institutions—supranational institutions at a regional level. It was not the intention of the founding fathers of the European Union, but by chance we have created in Europe what is effectively the world's first operating international test-bed for supranational institutions. It is not insignificant that the rest of the world is following our lead, nor that the rest of the world is regionalising, too. We have seen it in the summit of the Americas recently in Quebec, we have seen it in the North American Free Trade Area and inevitably we will see it in the Pacific region.

Europe is our region, and we must be part of that. Why? Not because one must believe in some transcendental vision of European unity, or because one is impressed by the great mechanisms that we have created to govern Europe, but for the simple and practical reason that it is only by working with our colleagues in the European Union that we can deliver for our citizens in this country the things that we want them to have: security, a safe and clean environment, a context in which to operate our industry, and a framework for a stable currency, which is a pressing need. That is not to excuse in any way the failures of democracy or the excessive bureaucratisation of the European Union. Of course it is a flawed institution. This place is a flawed institution, God knows. That is not a reason for abolishing it, but for reforming it. That is what we must do.

Let me be clear. We are living in a rather febrile period before a general election, so I am aware that my words might be taken out of context. Heavens above, that such a thing should happen! I am absolutely not saying that the nation state will disappear. It will remain the most important context for our identity and for our governance. I am merely saying that we must consider a re-assembly—a redistribution—of power.

Some of the power that we used to hold uniquely to ourselves must be distributed upwards to global institutions, because that delivers what we want for our citizens, and some must be distributed downwards to devolved institutions. The latter point is as true for Britain as it is for Macedonia. The devolution of power to local communities will be the most important matter.

I come to the second point—not globalisation, but atomisation. We have seen power passed down to individual citizens in our society, who trade in the global marketplace, oblivious of borders, who use the internet, and who are capable, sometimes frighteningly, of suddenly coagulating together in ways that are not recommended by Governments and frighten them to death. We saw that in the fuel protests. We saw it, probably, at Diana's funeral. We saw it in the Danish referendum.

One of the things that we have discovered, and of which we should be aware, as it has a profound implication for foreign affairs, is that the old idea of a singular identity springing out of the unitary nation state has gone. The last time that we heard it expressed was in Norman Tebbit's cricket test. *[Interruption.]* The foreign land speech is another example, as the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) says.

People are discovering other identities for themselves, apart from that of the nation state. They are finding common cause with their community, their religious group, their ethnic group. When that happens, the motivations that are unleashed are not always good. Incidentally, that applies not just to other nations or to Albanians living in Macedonia. It applies to me, too.

Almost two decades ago, when I first entered the House, if I had been asked who I was, I would probably have said that I was British, and that would have been sufficient. If I am asked today who I am, I have to give a rather different answer. I am Irish by extraction, and proud of that fact. I am west country by love and choice. That is where my constituency is. I am British, of course, but I am also European. Unless I can express my identity in that more complex way, I cannot describe the space in which I want to live and, above all, in which I want my children to live.

Here is the point. If we force upon people the unitary identities of their nation states, the result is blood, almost always. If we force the Catholic to say in Belfast that he cannot have an attachment to the island of Ireland and be Catholic and British at the same time, we will have blood on our streets, and we have. If we force the Muslim in Sarajevo to choose between his Yugoslavian and his Muslim identity, there will be shells in his city and in Srebrenica in his neighbouring communities.

The world is no longer as Curzon saw it. In the 18th century, the apogee of the nation state, there were only two conditions: nation statehood or nothingness. The world today is much more complex. I sat down in the margins of a Balkan conference recently with our ex-ambassador in Belgrade and for fun, doodling, we came up with the new institutions that we had to deal with. Of course, there were states, but there were also what we called non-internationally recognised state-like entities, or NIRSLES. There are lots of them about. Kosovo is state-like, but it is not internationally recognised, and we have to deal with it. The Palestinians and the Albanian community in the Balkans are further examples.

*[Paddy Ashdown]*

Then there are partially internationally recognised state-like entities, or PIRSLES. Taiwan is partially internationally recognised and clearly a state. There are also internationally recognised non-state-like entities. Bosnia is internationally recognised and we declare it a state, but it is manifestly not: it is two states. I make the point not just for levity, but to show the complexity of the matters with which we must deal. Using the language of the 18th century and speaking of states or non-states, as we still do, and not altering our way of thinking means that we cannot resolve some of the problems that confront us.

I apologise to the House, but at this stage I am extremely pessimistic. The theory is that at the end of the cold war, having avoided global destruction, we live in safer and more secure times. I do not believe that to be the case. I think that we live in times of almost terrifying dissolution and change. The old institutions are breaking down. The old structures no longer apply. I fear that for the next two or three decades, the world will be very unstable, full of conflict and very frightening.

The words that echo in my head are those in A. E. Housman's great prophetic poem, written before the first world war, in which he said:

"On the idle hill of summer,
Lazy with the flow of streams,
Far I hear the steady drummer
Drumming like a sound in dreams.
Far and near and low and louder
On the roads of earth go by,
Dear to friends and food for powder,
Soldiers marching, all to die.

I am very worried about an era that may be characterised by the death of creeds—what great creeds are there today? I fear that it may be characterised also by the dissolution, incapacity and disconnection of institutions that do not seem to work any longer.

So, what do we have to do? Fundamentally, we have to change our way of thinking. We must break ourselves out of the language and conventional thinking of the old nation state. We must start thinking in more different ways. That is not new. Many times in our history, power has broken out of the institutions that we created to ensure accountability. It happened in Magna Carta, in Cromwell's time and when the Reform Act of 1832 took effect. We, too, are in a period in which we must create new institutions capable of dealing with power in the places to which it has migrated. That means one thing: accepting the globalisation of power and creating the instruments for global Governments of one sort or another.

I ask hon. Members to note that I do not refer to a global government, or to some parliament of the United Nations, although it has a part to play. We need to create all sorts of multilateral and international institutions to begin to cope with the problems that confront us. For example, it is unreasonable that we should ask the World Trade Organisation, which was created and formed to deal with trade, to deal also with environmental problems. We need to create a parallel institution that is capable of thinking about how it preserves the world's environment.

My next conclusion is that the power of individual, unilateral action by states will diminish, however powerful they are. Increasingly, what matters will be the effectiveness and powers of the multilateral institutions that we create, which should be capable of dealing with the world's problems.

I think also that regional organisations will increasingly develop. Incidentally, I think that one of the effects will be the counteraction of the move towards free trade. As regional organisations grow, there will be a strong tendency towards the re-erection of tariff barriers. That must be resisted. The point is, however, that in terms of supranational regional organisations, ours is Europe. It is essential that we play our part in that.

If someone asked me what Europe must do in the next two decades to keep secure, I would answer that it had two primary foreign policy aims. The first is to maintain the Atlantic relationship through a period of great change and enormous tension, and the second is to assure the survival and ascendancy of democracy and the free-market system in the Russian Federation. We in Europe can do neither of those things unless we get our act together and work in a more co-ordinated fashion.

I believe that the Atlantic relationship will come under very severe pressure as the areas of interest, in terms of the euro on the one hand and of the dollar on the other, inevitably come into competition. As we get our act together, the handling of that relationship will require great skill and subtlety. I believe that the reform of NATO is crucial, as is the creation of what we were talking about as long ago as Kennedy and Kissinger—a twin-pillar NATO in which Europe and the United States work as equal partners. For instance, that is why it is our essential that we get our act together in a European common defence force.

Of course, all that is difficult and we will not necessarily have a smooth path, but it is, to my mind, more certain that the Atlantic relationship will be threatened if we in Europe do not begin to bear the burden of our own defence and cope with our own problems in our backyard. If we continue to call in the United States every time we have a problem and ask it to risk its treasure and the blood of its young citizens to solve Europe's problems on its borders in places such as the Balkans, we may be sure that the Atlantic relationship will sunder, and it will deserve to do so.

I believe that there will be an opportunity at some future time for us to think even more widely. One of the most significant problems in our world today is the instability that is created by currency speculation. We cannot recreate the Bretton Woods agreement, but is it impossible for us to consider establishing at a future stage some relationship between the euro and the dollar? Such a relationship could not only copper-fasten the political relationship that remains the axis of assuring effective preservation of western values in the world; it could also provide some stability against speculation, thus creating twin currencies that might act as the most effective trading currencies in the world and dampen the instabilities that are created by currency speculation. However, that is probably something for a long time in the future.

I have two other points, the first of which is about Europe itself. I think that we cannot go on living in a never-never land and having a free ride; we pretend that we can be an economic giant, as we are with respect to

the euro, but remain a political pygmy that is incapable of getting its act together. That is an impossible position. The euro gives us an area of influence, things to protect and views to proselytise and propose. We will have to invest. Europe's current problem is that it has created a very tight economic institution—the euro—that is set within a very weak political institution. We will have to strengthen the political institutions of Europe. For instance, we will have to protect power around our borders to be able to secure them.

We will also have to adopt what we have failed to adopt in the Balkans so far: a co-ordinated regional European approach. We cannot go on dealing with Balkan nations piecemeal. When we dealt with Croatia, we thought that we had solved the problem, but in so doing, we blew up Bosnia. We solved Bosnia in Dayton, but forgot Kosovo. When we finished in Kosovo, we forgot to set it within a regional framework in the southern Balkans, and—lo and behold—Macedonia is now at the edge of war. We in Europe must have a co-ordinated Balkans policy that applies to the region and recognises that it is not the individual nations that matter in the Balkans, but the interconnection between them.

My last point is that I think that we will discover in the very near future that the security of nations—even medium-sized ones such as ours—cannot be secured except within a framework of international law that is clear and understandable, and which is policed and enforced. Let us not get too worried about our pace in assembling that framework. Frankly, we have not done terribly well, but no body of law springs from a single pen or technical textbook. Law is created by practice and precedent. We have slowly and untidily invented new rules for international intervention. We saw them in Kurdistan and Kosovo. We have invented new ways of going about things.

I can tell the House that when I returned from my trip of September 1998, which I mentioned earlier, I went to see the Prime Minister. I said that I thought that we must use air power immediately, and that if we did not do so, Milosevic would seek to clear out Kosovo completely. Of course, that was the terrifying Operation Horseshoe that we saw later. The Prime Minister said that in the absence of a Security Council resolution, which we would not get, we had not yet assembled a case under articles 1 and 5 of the UN charter to proceed legally with such a proposal. I think that he was right. We had to wait until the humanitarian situation got worse, which it did in due course, before we intervened. However, the fact that we did it legally under articles 1 and 5 makes it easier to do in future. We have created a precedent for international law. Part of that has to be an international court that is capable of dealing with war crimes tribunals. It is essential that we establish such an institution.

The day after I had been shelled by the Serb units, I went up to the Dulje heights and spoke to some of the Serb artillery commanders. At that stage, they were more frightened of an indictment from The Hague than of bombs from NATO aircraft. If we had used such means then, it might have been the only way in which we could have constrained their actions. That same day, when I went to see President Milosevic, I gave him a bag of the cherries that I had collected from his citizens who were living in the forest and who had lived on nothing else for six weeks. However, I also took him a copy of the Geneva convention with marks against the paragraphs in respect of which I believed that his forces—and him, as he had now been informed of it—had specifically contravened international law, for which he would subsequently be indictable, as indeed he was. That is an essential component of the international institutions that we must create not only to ensure justice after crimes have been committed but to act as a means of restraining the worst activities of those who, in due course, would probably fear the international court in The Hague more than the use of arms.

All has changed except our way of thinking and the language that we use to try to resolve our problems. At a time of huge instability, great tension and strong dissolution, the only way in which to create a secure, peaceful and prosperous world for the future is to establish multilateral instruments that are capable of achieving it.

Curzon's days are gone, and I prefer to use a text by Gladstone. I suppose that I can say that he was my great predecessor as party leader, although that is slightly self-aggrandising. During the second Midlothian campaign, when he was seeking to be Prime Minister, at a time when British forces were invading Afghanistan, he spoke the following remarkable words:

> "Do not forget that the sanctity of life in the hill villages of Afghanistan, amongst the winter snows, is no less inviolate in the eye of Almighty God than can be your own. Do not forget that he who made you brothers in the same flesh and blood, bound you by the laws of universal love and that love is not limited to the shores of this island, but passes across the whole surface of the earth, encompassing the greatest along with the meanest in its unmeasured scope."—

a statement of moral principle for his time, and, I suspect, a code of survival for ours.

7.51 pm

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Brian Wilson):** I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

> "believes that the United Kingdom's national interests are best served by addressing the challenges of the modern world in constructive partnership with other countries and international organisations; further believes that human rights and protection of the environment are important global issues which are central to Her Majesty's Government's foreign policy; and welcomes the Government's full support for the work of the United Nations and initiatives to improve UN peacekeeping and the effectiveness of the Security Council."

The right hon. Member for Yeovil (Paddy Ashdown) made a fine, extremely thoughtful speech. However, it is worth placing on record as a comment on the state of modern British politics the fact that not one Tory Back Bencher was present before the welcome arrival one minute ago of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine). At 7 pm, that is no accident. If the boycott was meant as an insult, the right hon. Member for Yeovil is entitled to take it as a compliment. If it was intended to demonstrate the modern Tory party's discipline, it showed only its puerility.

Excellent co-operation on foreign policy has been established between the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats, and it can be established on many other subjects. I refer in particular to the close working relationship, which the right hon. Gentleman was involved in establishing, and which has continued between my right

*[Mr. Brian Wilson]*

hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). The work of the Cabinet joint consultative committee on the United Nations and on Europe attests to the success of the relationship.

There will always be differences between parties; that is the point of political debate, but there can be agreement and co-operation and values can be held in common, especially on the great international issues to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. If, to some extent, we have broken a mould of sniping and one-upmanship, we have contributed to a new path built on consensus. That is good for politics in this country and for Britain's place in Europe and the world. When we speak with one voice on international issues, our message is heard louder and clearer. The key to that success has been readiness to listen and to pool ideas and expertise. I commend that approach, at least to the saner spirits in the Tory party.

I am pleased to acknowledge the contribution to that process of the right hon. Member for Yeovil. His knowledge of the Balkans, which was reflected in his speech, and his commitment to the cause of peace and democracy have been and will continue to be a national asset. He was one of the first in this country to speak out on the horrors of ethnic cleansing and to argue for a more robust United Kingdom policy.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was in Kosovo. Today, he was in Montenegro. I know he would wish to join me in paying tribute to the right hon. Member for Yeovil, who has visited both places so many times and to such good effect in the last troubled decade.

We have now got the consensus out of the way. I stress that speaking with one voice on international issues does not mean that we can neglect differences when they occur. However slight they may be, they lead to disagreements that are expressed through the normal procedures of the House. In any debate it is therefore important to be clear about the terms that we use and to capture the full complexity of the issues. We do not agree that

"only a collective and multilateral approach will now succeed",

as the Liberal Democrat motion states. Sometimes, a country may need to argue its case in the face of collective opposition. The important point on such occasions is that the issues are approached in the spirit of constructive partnership with other countries and international organisations. That is the true hallmark of the Government's approach to the important global issues of our time.

Before I consider some of the subjects that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned, I want to update hon. Members about developments in Zimbabwe. We have received reports tonight from our high commission in Harare of serious disturbances that are aimed at foreign business interests. Several European-owned firms have been invaded by so-called war veterans who claim that they are acting on behalf of the ruling ZANU-PF party. Money has been extorted from the businesses, and staff have been detained and beaten by the veterans. The police have not intervened, and that is a worrying development in circumstances that we all find deeply disturbing.

Our high commissioner in Harare expressed his strong concern to the Zimbabwe authorities this afternoon and is liaising closely with the local British community. I stress that we have received no reports of serious injuries to UK nationals. We shall continue to monitor events closely and we will advise UK nationals to contact the high commission if they need further guidance. I shall consider the further action that we should take tomorrow morning as circumstances become clearer. I believed that it was my responsibility to advise the House of those developments as early as possible.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell** (North-East Fife): I am sure that the House is grateful to the Minister for the information that he has provided. A direct consequence of the events that he described may be that people who live in Zimbabwe feel compelled to try to come to the United Kingdom. I hope that the Government will adopt a generous attitude towards anyone who seeks asylum from Zimbabwe.

**Mr. Wilson:** I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's comments will be noted in many quarters. I do not want to raise the temperature or inflame difficult circumstances. The advice that I gave British nationals to contact the high commission if they require further information and guidance is appropriate at this stage.

Let me revert to the Balkans, one of the major themes of the speech of the right hon. Member for Yeovil. He knows, as we do, the scale of the challenges that face the people of south-east Europe. He also knows how much has been achieved by them and by the international community in reconstructing their society since NATO intervention, which was justified by the need to prevent an overwhelming humanitarian catastrophe, stopped ethnic cleansing in its tracks two years ago.

Milosevic thought that he could get away with wiping the Kosovar Albanians off the map; he was wrong. The Government and many who supported our actions determined from the outset that we would not tolerate further ethnic cleansing. Britain stood firm against the Kosovo death squads, and the west stood firm with us. We halted the tide of hatred and helped turn it back so that public anger eventually consumed Milosevic himself.

Under United Nations protection, and with our help, the people of Kosovo have repaired much of the physical damage. Repairing the damage to society will take imagination and painstaking efforts to break out of the destructive cycle of ethnic violence. However, the prospects are much brighter than they were four years ago for Kosovo and for the whole region. The key now is for Kosovo's Albanians and Serbs to disown extremism and revenge and to start to re-engage with each other to build a better society. The elections there later this year will be an important step along that path.

Today, all five states that emerged from the former Yugoslavia have elected democratic, moderate leaders. There is a realistic prospect of the region becoming, with much hard work, a normal part of Europe. That would not have been possible if we had allowed Slobodan Milosevic to claim a place in history as the victor of Kosovo. As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made plain in Belgrade earlier this month, today we extend the hand of friendship and assistance to Yugoslavia, and that must be a two-way partnership. The people of Yugoslavia must, in turn, help the international community. We shall have unfinished business until Milosevic has stood trial in The Hague. We welcome the fact that there is now talk of

charging him in Belgrade with his crimes against the Serb people. They will quickly come to realise that Milosevic was not a great Serb nationalist but a great enemy of the Serb people.

However, a trial in Belgrade cannot replace the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's obligation to hand Milosevic over to The Hague tribunal, and I hope that the Serb people will come to see, as increasing numbers of them are doing, that it is in their own interests for that to happen, so that he can also face trial for crimes against the other peoples of the region. It was right to stop Milosevic in his tracks, and if we had not done so he would probably still be in power. There are lessons to be learned from that reality that should not easily be forgotten if similar situations should arise in future.

One of the lessons of the Balkans war, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred, is that the world needs a permanent mechanism for securing justice against dictators and war criminals. Britain has put that lesson into effect by becoming a leading advocate of the International Criminal Court. The tragic paradox of the last century was that those who murdered one person were more likely to be brought to justice than those who plotted the genocide of millions. We all have a responsibility to make sure that the world does not provide an opening for another Milosevic.

That is why the Government have brought the International Criminal Court Bill before this Parliament. I hope that the overwhelming support for the court among the nations of the world, and the bipartisan support in the House for the principle, will be matched by support for the Bill in the House. There is no point in supporting it in principle and obstructing it in practice. Swift passage of the Bill would allow Britain to be among the first 60 countries to ratify the treaty and thereby bring the court into existence. The Bill will be one of the most enduring legacies of this parliamentary term. It will be by no means the only one.

My aim is to make our commitment to upholding global values irreversible. I know that that aspiration is shared by both our parties. Never again should it be possible for a British Government to argue that human rights are none of their business. Crimes against humanity are the business of all humanity. We should not listen to the argument that upholding human rights is sometimes in conflict with our interests. There should be consensus that it is never in British interests to turn a blind eye to human rights abuse. I have just come back from Bahrain, where I had a robust discussion on human rights issues. Governments who are democratically accountable will be more reliable partners for peace, and Governments who respect freedom of expression will be more honest as trading partners. Countries that accept the rule of law at home are more likely to accept their international obligations against organised crime and weapons of mass destruction.

Nowadays, every nation state is as interdependent as it is independent. The fact of globalisation is beginning to dominate our domestic politics as much as it does our international relationships. Old definitions and dividing lines are being reassessed. A more revealing measure of political outlook is how people react to the new global reality of interdependence. The progressive political forces will be those that are cosmopolitan, outward-looking and comfortable building international partnerships, and that respect people of different ethnic identities. They will offer solutions that recognise that national security requires international alliances, and that domestic prosperity requires the dynamic pursuit of external economic co-operation.

Those progressive forces will consist of those people who welcome foreign contact as enriching, not threatening. I strongly endorse what the right hon. Gentleman said about multiple identity, the need for all of us to embrace it and, even more important, for all our children to embrace it comfortably. No one should try to pin people down to being one thing or another: all of us in the Chamber, in our society and throughout the world are many things and should be proud to be so.

The reactionary political forces will be those who are isolationist and inward-looking, and who feel more comfortable clinging to the comfort blanket of a false idyllic past. They want to build barriers between Britain and the rest of the world at a time when Britain needs bridges, not barriers. They offer isolation when Britain needs to play a leading role in the world.

Few issues are higher up the international agenda today than climate change. I can assure the House that the Government remain committed to tackling climate change through constructive engagement with the international community. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister strongly supported the Kyoto protocol in New York last week. We have also raised the issue directly with the United States: my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has raised it with Secretary of State Powell, and we shall continue to raise it with our US counterparts. Through engagement and detailed discussion with all parties, including, of course, the US Government, we shall make progress on this key issue. Working with the international community, rather than against it, is the way forward. That clearly demonstrates that protection of the environment is at the centre of the Government's policies.

Britain must also be fully engaged in the work of the United Nations. No task is more important or urgent than maximising the effectiveness of United Nations peacekeeping. The Labour and Liberal Democrat parties spoke with one voice on this subject in the recommendations that the United Kingdom put forward at last autumn's millennium summit in New York. There have been more peacekeeping operations in the past decade than in the previous four. Increasingly, conflict within, not between, states is changing the environment in which our peacekeepers operate. Ambassador Brahimi's report has shown us the way to address this new environment. I particularly echo his call for more robust rules of engagement. Carrying out mandates impartially must not imply remaining neutral between good and evil, and UN peacekeepers who witness violence against civilians should be mandated to halt it.

If our peacekeepers are to act with determination, we must equip them with the capacity to do so. UN missions need a headquarters unit capable of rapid deployment within a few weeks, not months, of a Security Council resolution. Each of us must develop a number of troops who are trained in the principles and practice of peacekeeping, and be prepared to deploy them rapidly and effectively. That is why Britain has proposed that there should be a staff college for UN peacekeeping. We have offered to act as the host country for such a resource, if that would be welcome to other members.

*[Mr. Wilson]*

Reform of the United Nations must begin with reform of the Security Council itself. We need a more modern and representative Security Council: a body that represents the world of the 21st century, not that of the middle of the 20th. However, it is not only in the composition of the Security Council that we must seek reform. The Security Council must be more willing to engage across the full conflict prevention agenda. It must engage with all the relevant players at all stages. We need to mainstream conflict prevention in the work of the UN Security Council and the whole UN system.

Our permanent membership of the Security Council reflects our historic weight in world affairs, but it also confers grave responsibilities. We must use our position to tip the balance against tyranny and oppression. That is why, for instance, we shall continue to work in the United Nations towards a solution to the problem of conflict diamonds. There is an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall tomorrow on that important issue. Following a UK initiative, we are now on the verge of a world certification scheme, which will ensure that rough diamonds cannot be traded from countries in conflict unless they are validated by the legitimate Government.

Equally important is our work on small arms and light weapons. The self-loading rifle is today's real weapon of mass destruction. The Government have been, and will remain, in the forefront of international efforts to curb the spread of such arms to non-state actors and rebel groups. We have put forward the suggestion of an international arms surrender fund to support the collection and destruction of surplus arms in return for development aid. We will not opt out of our international responsibilities, nor will we surrender our national interests within the United Nations or within the European Union.

Our vision of Europe is one that we share with many Liberal Democrats. The Government have transformed British relations with the European Union. One has only to look back a few years to the chaos and the damage that was done to this country by the attitudes and the prejudices of the previous Government. We intend to stay engaged: we want a successful European Union because it is the only way to deliver the prosperity, quality of life and personal security that our people demand.

The Tories say that the Nice treaty, with its provisions for EU enlargement, is bad news. It might be bad news for the Conservative party, but it is not bad news for the people of Britain, who will see a stronger Britain in a wider Europe. It is not bad news for the people of the rest of the European Union, who will share the benefits of the reunification of Europe, or for the people of the applicant countries, who know that accession to the EU is now in sight. By standing up for Britain at Nice, the Government stood up for stability and prosperity across our whole continent.

We fully recognise that the EU raises vital issues that affect us all. That is why the Government have been at the heart of the debate on the future of Europe, but we need a healthy and mature debate. We need to get beyond sterile arguments that look for ways to turn the clock back. It is time to stop fighting the battles of yesteryear, and time for Britain to play a full part in shaping the future of Europe. This Government are equipped to lead Britain into a confident future in Europe and in the world.

8.10 pm

**Mr. Richard Spring** (West Suffolk): I welcome the opportunity to debate the issues raised in the motion, and to examine differences in approaches to the way in which the world is currently developing. We have a new Administration in Washington, continuing tragic violence in the middle east, tensions in the Balkans, and a China that is becoming more assertive; so there is much on which to reflect. First, however, let me use this opportunity to acknowledge, freely and warmly, the way in which the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Paddy Ashdown) has sought over many years to highlight important foreign policy issues in the House as a distinguished parliamentarian and party leader. I also take the opportunity, personally, to wish him well in the future.

**Mr. Donald Anderson** (Swansea, East): Will the hon. Gentleman explain his party's motive for boycotting the right hon. Gentleman's valedictory speech?

**Mr. Spring:** There was certainly no boycott. I think it rather churlish of the Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs to make such an unfortunate and inappropriate remark.

The complexities of globalisation demand multilateral approaches today, but nations and networks, not greater integrated Government structures, make that possible. A new world of nations and networks is replacing the old world of blocs and hierarchies. That is one reason why the Conservative party formed a commission on the Commonwealth to examine ways in which that often overlooked and undervalued organisation could be of real benefit to its members in the future.

In this new world, the bedrock of stability, security and prosperity is the self-governing nation state, which enables societies to understand their roots and character in a way that integrated supranational constructs and multilateral organisations simply never can. Constantly resorting to higher and higher levels of supranational government, as the Liberal Democrats' ideas incessantly do, reflects a fundamental lack of confidence in Britain as an important player in the world, and—that elusive democratic deficit again—a fundamental reluctance to ensure that accountable forms of government, our best option in times of rapid change, remain to the fore. Those views, regrettably, are powerfully echoed by the Government.

Given our range of assets across the world and our influence through our language and culture, Britain has a role to play, not as a pale shadow of the United States, or simply as a component of European foreign policy, but as a strong and independent force for good in the world. A unique British role is particularly possible in the context of the Kyoto protocol, but, given the Deputy Prime Minister's apparent keenness to express anti-American sentiments, it is a role that this Government cannot fulfil. No wonder the right hon. Gentleman found himself sidelined during his recent trip to Washington. We too will be sidelined, as a country, if we adopt the right hon. Gentleman's course. Sabre-rattling by the Government will certainly not solve the problem. We will achieve a solution by agreement, not confrontation.

Of course the United States' decision was regrettable. Conservative Members support action to tackle climate change and implement the Kyoto protocol. That is why

the next Conservative Government will act as a bridge between the United States and Europe in climate change negotiations, rather than simply encouraging animosity towards the United States.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), the shadow Foreign Secretary, returned from Washington only this morning. He had meetings with the Vice-President, the national security adviser and the deputy Secretaries for Defence and at the State Department. A view was confirmed that many are happy to promote—a view of the United States becoming simply isolationist. That view is utterly misplaced. In reality, in the new Administration we have an ally whose outlook extends throughout the world, and it is in our interest that that position remain. We must do nothing to jeopardise it.

With our allies across the Atlantic and across the channel, we have the basis for collective action in foreign policy, in maintaining our security and in tackling environmental concerns that know no geographical bounds. A multilateral organisation like NATO is the bedrock of our security. However, as the right hon. Member for Yeovil will know, NATO's decisions are not made on the basis of majority voting.

For 50 years the Atlantic partnership has been one of the most powerful forces for good in the world, but today I believe that it is at risk. Why do both the Government and the Liberal Democrats favour a European Union defence structure which in practice will be separate from NATO, and will risk weakening the Atlantic alliance? Is it not the case that a tried and tested multilateral arrangement is being bypassed by a developing European Union foreign and defence policy—a move that is supported not only by the proponents of the motion, but by the Government?

What the Americans really want, and are not materially getting, is greater burden-sharing. Multilateral co-operation must be flexible to succeed; by contrast, co-operation based on doing everything together at the same speed is a recipe for failure. Truly multilateral organisations such as NATO have achieved that successfully. Attempts to create an EU foreign policy response through political integration, absorbing the views of individual members, produces policies that no one will follow, and which are easy prey to other states that are willing to play off one EU member against the other.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** As the hon. Gentleman well knows, I do not agree with the proposition that he has just described—but can he explain why that proposition is so unacceptable, given that it was signed up to by the Conservative Government whom he supported at the time of the Maastricht treaty?

**Mr. Spring:** Let me put the right hon. and learned Gentleman straight. We are totally in favour, and have always been in favour, of pan-European defence co-operation. The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that to be absolutely true, and it was agreed in the talks at Petersberg. What is being proposed today is entirely different; the right hon. and learned Gentleman, of all people, knows that.

We have seen the inertia that I have described again this year—the playing off of EU countries against each other. Britain again failed to register the deep concern that exists among many people in this country about human rights in China. That is not to say that either the EU—or, more broadly, the UN—does not have a significant role to play in establishing international co-operation leading to firm action, but it should do that by doing less, and doing it substantially better. The aim of those organisations should be to muster international consensus, but not at the expense of national democracies' ability to act independently. Both, however, need substantial reform if they are to achieve that.

Beyond the EU, the UN is and will remain the focal point of attempts to co-ordinate international action to deal with global issues—but the majority of today's disputes are internal. The UN has become more actively engaged in peacekeeping roles in the last decade than it was during the entire cold war.

We are clear that it is now more important than ever that the UN be realistic about what it can achieve. It needs to focus its efforts on fulfilling the responsibilities it already has, rather than constantly taking on new tasks. The UN Security Council will remain the central pillar for international co-operation to secure peace and security.

The composition of the Security Council is the source of some controversy today, but the criteria for membership remain clear. It should comprise those countries that are most willing and able to contribute to international security, and membership should not be seen as being related to the size of a country's economy, land mass or simple position on the earth's surface, in an age when distance matters less and less. We Conservatives believe that the UK and France, for example, should continue to be members in their own right. We, the next Conservative Government, will consider proposals for new members to join the Security Council, but we will not support the idea that the EU should have its own seat.

We will work to reform the UN. The aim will be to ensure that it has a clearly defined role that it is able to perform effectively, and that its work is co-ordinated with organisations in the regions concerned.

**Mr. Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire): I do not need to patronise the hon. Gentleman with a resumé of the history of the Baltic states, but not much in what he has said so far gives me much assurance that under his plan, were the Baltic states to be threatened by an aggressive Russia, they would be protected in the way that they believe they would be by a common European defence strategy. What assurance can he give to countries such as the Baltic states, which have a potential danger next door, that the Conservatives have a strategy anywhere near as effective as we believe the European defence strategy could be?

**Mr. Spring:** The Baltic states will of course be strengthened by their membership of the EU, and I hope that that will happen sooner rather than later. Their defence and security will be embraced by the European family of nations and, under the umbrella of NATO, everything is possible. Need I point out to the hon. Gentleman that if we disengage from NATO and possibly cause the Americans to withdraw substantially from Europe—which is the threat—the Baltic states' situation could be considerably worse?

I turn to the issue of human rights. Many areas of the world, such as China, Burma and Iraq, suffer oppression, and our position remains clear. James Mawdsley,

*[Mr. Spring]*

the courageous and defiant human rights activist imprisoned in Burma, recently joined the Conservative party because of the clarity of our stance on such issues. On Iraq, we have been clear about the damage that Saddam Hussein continues to do to his country's people by refusing to adhere to the UN resolutions. In the meantime, the Government have rowed back and forth from their initial promise of an ethical foreign policy.

Labour's ethics have been bizarre to witness—a mixture of inconsistency, leading to an aggressive approach to Sierra Leone but a shockingly inadequate response to Zimbabwe, and condemnation of Yugoslavia but barely a murmur about Russian atrocities in Chechnya. We read this morning that, with the election approaching, the Foreign Secretary has been spinning his intention to continue with his so-called ethical foreign policy. I remain unconvinced that he will be around to pursue it.

**Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): If the Government have got their ethical foreign policy so wrong, why did Lord Justice Scott, who did so much to unearth the scandal of arms to Iraq, recently say that he was "amazed" by the difference in the transparency of the position under this Government compared with the previous Government?

**Mr. Spring:** If the hon. Gentleman will bear with me, I will deal in a moment with some of the problems that the ethical foreign policy has caused.

Where are the ethics in the lack of firm action on Zimbabwe? I might add that I share the shock and horror at the Minister's announcement about what is happening in Harare this evening. It is truly tragic for that country.

Was not it the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), a former Minister of State at the Foreign Office, who described the phrase "ethical dimension" as

"a hook on which we found ourselves"?

It appears that the Government talk about ethics at election time and in practice try to distance themselves from the word the rest of the time.

The Government's behaviour contrasts markedly with the succession of Governments who did not posture about ethics but succeeded in helping to spread freedom, law and democracy across the globe, including twice in the previous century fighting for all of Europe against tyranny and, most recently, helping to liberate millions of our fellow Europeans from the iron hand of communism. It is a proud record.

As my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary has made clear, we believe that Britain can be at the centre of the new network world. We will use that position to serve British interests; we will do so honourably, and we will use Britain's strength in the world for peace and stability.

**Mr. Wilson:** I seem to detect some weasel words from the hon. Gentleman. Was he by any chance attributing victory in two world wars and the events at the end of the cold war on a party basis? He seemed to making a contrast in terms of party. Will he clarify that?

**Mr. Spring:** I should be happy to. I am sorry that the Minister is so sensitive, as I said nothing of the kind. I cannot understand why he should rise out of the waters like some sort of fish. I do not know his track record in the 1980s with regard to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament or anything else, but perhaps he is sensitive about that. My only point was that Britain played an enormously important role, of which every person in the country can be hugely proud. We helped to liberate Europe not only from Nazism, but from the subsequent horrors of communism. That is something of which we can be extremely proud.

Nowhere could the failure of the ethical dimension be clearer than in Zimbabwe. Months ago, the Prime Minister described the Government as being "insufficiently assertive" about what was happening there, but the dithering continued. Even Lord Goldsmith, the Prime Minister's special representative, has joined in the criticism of what is happening in Zimbabwe. I repeat that this evening's news makes the matter even worse.

Finally, it was agreed that the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group might send a group of observers to assess the scale of the problem in Zimbabwe, but what has happened to them? When will the group travel to Zimbabwe? The way in which Britain has allowed months of violence to escalate is shameful.

The Foreign Secretary has always reverted to a standard practice in the past: tackling Mugabe head on, he says, will only worsen the problem. When will the Government stop dithering about the dreadful disregard for human rights in Zimbabwe? The escalation in violence has had a destabilising effect on the whole of southern Africa. Zimbabwe is exactly the place where a multilateral policy that involves the Commonwealth—but especially Britain and South Africa—could work if there were a positive attempt to achieve that.

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): I have been reflecting on what the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Paddy Ashdown) said about Milosevic. He said that Serbians were more concerned about the Hague than about being shelled. Does the hon. Gentleman think that the time has arrived when Governments should start indicting Mugabe for some of the heinous crimes that he has committed? The Minister may have given the regrettable impression that the Government are more concerned about British nationals suffering damage in Zimbabwe, even though Zimbabwean citizens have been deprived of their civil rights and terrorised when they tried to carry on democratic politics. Is it not time for action to be taken?

**Mr. Spring:** I have great sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman has said. The situation in Zimbabwe is horrific. I genuinely believe that the Government, who have an important role to play in Zimbabwe, have conducted themselves in a pusillanimous manner that has merely aggravated the situation. I am absolutely clear about that.

As I have said before, there may well be advantage at times in co-operating comprehensively on foreign policy issues with our friends and allies. However, the hollowness of the common European Union foreign policy was recently made evident when two of our European partners received Mugabe—a huge personal boost to him. There was no justification for the French Government's action in that regard, and I remain appalled at the pusillanimous reaction of the Foreign Secretary to the way in which the red carpet was rolled out in Paris.

I have visited the middle east on a number of occasions in the past few months. Britain's absence from the task of moving forward the peace process was repeatedly commented on to me by people from all sides. Specific mention was made of the Prime Minister's special envoy. However well intentioned it was, and whatever initial benefits it may have brought, the special envoy's role has turned into an embarrassment for our superb representatives in the region and for our country's credibility.

**Mr. Wilson:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that he has made a pretty shabby attack on someone who is serving this country well? As a Minister who travels widely in that region, I have never heard those sentiments expressed by our representatives, who work closely with the Prime Minister's special envoy when he is in the region. If the hon. Gentleman can do no better than attack someone who is working at the invitation of the Prime Minister in a role that is vital to our diplomatic efforts, it is, again, a pretty poor show on the part of the Tory party.

**Mr. Spring:** The Minister is carving out for himself a character of defensiveness. Whatever the special envoy's personal characteristics—and I made no negative observations in that respect—he has no accountability and no role in the negotiating process. If he would care to spend a little time talking to our diplomats in the region and understanding more of what is going on, he should do so, and then he would understand the situation better. I had better not say any more.

We support greater multilateralism of the kind represented by the United Nations, NATO, the Commonwealth and the intergovernmental processes of the European Union. However, that is not the same as the loss of an independent voice in foreign affairs. We have much to give the world and we must not believe that somehow our influence will be enhanced if we lose that independent voice. That is defeatist, counter-productive and unworthy of a country which, through its unique historical ties and current reach in the modern world, has so much to offer.

8.31 pm

**Mr. Donald Anderson** (Swansea, East): It is a privilege to take part in this debate initiated by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Paddy Ashdown) who, in his valedictory dispatch, raised our sights in many key areas. I repeat my assertion that it is sad, given the respect throughout the House for the right hon. Gentleman, that Conservative Members have chosen not to attend this debate. If the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) does not believe me, I invite him to turn around and see the empty Benches behind him. That is an insult to the right hon. Gentleman and an insult to the House and our consensual traditions.

The right hon. Member for Yeovil made an excellent speech. I found nothing in it to criticise save, perhaps, that in his description of the trend in globalisation, he may have exaggerated the extent of that trend. Overall, I thought that it was a magnificent speech of which he and the House can be proud.

I was a little puzzled when the hon. Member for West Suffolk said that the United Kingdom's role was not to be a pale shadow of the United States. I contrasted that with the immediate response of the Leader of the Opposition when the United States talked of siting at Fylingdales the national missile defence station and the indication that whatever the Americans asked for, the Conservatives would give—a sort of blank cheque.

**Mr. Spring:** If the Americans ask for additional facilities at Fylingdales, would the right hon. Gentleman oppose them?

**Mr. Anderson:** I know that there is a debate in the United States about the nature of the missile system that they want. Some missile systems—a boost phase system, for example—would not need to rely on Fylingdales. It is absurd to give a response in advance of any defined request.

I found equally puzzling the hon. Gentleman's remarks that the United States wants greater burden sharing by its European allies. That is precisely the effect of the European security and defence policy, which has triggered greater defence expenditure by a number of our allies.

I shall briefly examine the Government's record from two angles: first, the burdensome question of how others see us; and secondly, my assessment of the Government's record—a stocktaking exercise after four years. How are we seen abroad? I have been fortunate enough to travel abroad both as Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and as leader of our delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. I have had many opportunities to discuss with colleagues in other Parliaments their perception of the British Government's record.

I can say, without hesitation, that, at present, the British Government are seen positively. There has been a sea change in our attitude to Europe, which has been warmly welcomed. It is seen that we now play a constructive role and that we are no longer at the margins of foreign policy.

Praise has come, too, from wider afield. For example, Mr. Dhanapala, the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs at the UN, commented on the UK Government's role in disarmament and non-proliferation:

"Britain's leadership . . . has been impressive indeed."

He commended the UK for leading by example.

Obviously, I do not have time to reel off all the comments that I have heard, but the Government's commitment to ensure that Britain is at the centre of international decision making and is a force for good in the world has certainly been noticed by friends and critics alike. We have used our many valuable assets constructively—especially our diplomatic service and our armed forces, which are both centres of excellence.

My general assessment is that Britain is now once again seen as a leading player on the international stage. We still maintain a strong relationship with the United States. The extent to which the US will move towards a more unilateralist policy remains to be seen—there was an interesting article in yesterday's *Financial Times* on that theme. However, the abrupt dismissal by the US of its commitments under the Kyoto protocol, its position on national missile defence and its actions in respect of Russia and Vietnam do not give cause for optimism.

The British Government have played a leading role in galvanising action in key areas such as Kosovo, Sierra Leone and East Timor.

**Paddy Ashdown:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his generous words earlier and apologise for interrupting

*[Paddy Ashdown]*

what must, inevitably, be a short speech. He touched on the United States and mentioned several points of concern. However, there are several encouraging things—the handling of the Israeli problem and of the banana issue, and, more recently, the delicate and subtle handling of the problems in China. We ought to cut the US Administration a little slack before deciding about them. Is it not always the case that American Presidents will often express isolationist rhetoric on the campaign trail, but not in practice when they come to government? I have a suspicion that the current US Administration are much more subtle in many of their international actions than we are sometimes encouraged to believe.

**Mr. Anderson:** Most of my examples were of events that occurred well after the end of the campaign trail; the decisions were made in government. However, I wholly concur with the right hon. Gentleman. We must see how things work out in practice. However, there are none the less some concerns.

Human rights were a large theme in the remarks of the hon. Member for West Suffolk. In 1997, the new Labour Government pledged to make human rights central to their foreign policy. That pledge has been much derided. The *Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph* are prone to printing easy headlines such as, "And they call it an ethical foreign policy!"

We may hear the phrase "an ethical dimension" rather less nowadays, but human rights are no less central. We continue to make concrete achievements. I can make only headline points, given the time constraints. Our influence was crucial in setting up the International Criminal Court, in developing the European Union code of conduct on arms sales and in making progress on debt relief for the world's poorest countries.

During the past four years, there has been much of which we can be proud. We launched the global programme to challenge torture. We led the international campaign against trade in conflict diamonds. Our support for the war crimes tribunal on former Yugoslavia is well known. UK forces have arrested more indicted Bosnian war criminals than those of any other country.

At home, there have clearly been changes, such as the substantially expanded human rights policy department, the newly created human rights project fund and the way in which non-governmental organisations have been brought in from the cold by public diplomacy and are now part of the discussions and debate in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and in posts abroad. We have ratified the protocol of the European Court of Human Rights, banning capital punishment in Britain, and we have lobbied foreign Governments on it.

The Opposition are pursuing a dangerous strategy, which puts Britain's interests at stake, by flirting with the idea of leaving the European Union and with the concept of joining the North American Free Trade Area. For example, by refusing to ratify the treaty of Nice, they would block EU enlargement, creating instability in eastern and central Europe and, indeed, making enemies for Britain in several countries in that region. It is sad that neither the Leader of the Opposition nor the shadow Ministers are able to say anything positive about the EU. Surely there must be something positive in our region and in the new organisation in which we play such a large part. If the hon. Member for West Suffolk can point to any positive statement, I shall sit down immediately.

**Mr. Spring:** I am very grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to intervene. I should be very happy to send him a great number of speeches on the subject by the shadow Foreign Secretary. I am disappointed that he thinks that we are somehow anti-European simply because we do not believe that the process of political integration with the EU is right ultimately for the continuation and success of the EU, which is the view of the majority of the British people. That could not be further from the truth.

**Mr. Anderson:** The hon. Gentleman makes my point for me; he can think of nothing, off hand, that his party has said that is positive about the EU. I shall sit down if he can do so.

**Mr. Spring:** I have repeatedly said that we welcome the advantages of the EU—such as those involving the single market, the environment and the intense co-operation on policing, drugs and other matters—as well as the role that the Community has undoubtedly played in preserving peace in Europe since the war. We have referred to those issues time and again, so I do not understand where the right hon. Gentleman is coming from.

**Mr. Anderson:** That is a minimalist agenda, beyond which we and our European partners went many decades ago. It is clear that the only way to have influence is to remain at the heart of discussions. Diplomats who served in the United Kingdom delegation to Brussels in the 1980s told me, rather graphically, how we were marginalised and had our interests adversely affected during that time.

Of course there have been some shortcomings in Government policy. Indeed, the Foreign Affairs Committee has been the source of several well-founded criticisms. We say things as we see them in respect of Gibraltar, Zimbabwe, the delay in tightening arms supply to Indonesia and a number of administrative failures involving Sierra Leone. Again, we acknowledge serious failings relating to arms exports and control, but the Quadripartite Committee has done a most valuable job. In its memorandum of December last year, Saferworld said:

> "The UK Government's annual report . . . currently stands as the most transparent report published by any European country, and offers a potential template for best practice throughout the EU".

We have also banned landmines.

On the basis of the Delphic saying, "Know thyself", my conclusion is that we should identify our strategic goals and the best instruments with which we seek to achieve them. This month, in its departmental report, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office clearly set out those strategic goals under the headings, "Security", "Prosperity", "Quality of life" and "Mutual respect". A collective approach is set out very clearly in the motion. Indeed, I could take exception to nothing in the motion.

Gone are the days when we could achieve such goals—or even some of them—on our own. Perhaps the Falklands conflict in the early 1980s and the transition in Hong Kong will be seen by historians as the last examples of the independent policy for which the hon. Member for West Suffolk has such romantic and obsolete hankerings.

Now our goals can be achieved only by making a difference within our alliances and by building coalitions, as we did so successfully at the Nice summit. History and geography have given us a unique global reach through a unique series of alliances—NATO, the European Union, the Security Council of the United Nations, G8 and the Commonwealth. In my judgment, the Government have fully recognised that there is no future in pretending to our electorate that nationalist unilateralist solutions are possible. Self-delusion is the worst delusion.

8.45 pm

**Mr. Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the opportunity to make a brief contribution and to speak in the same debate as my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Paddy Ashdown). I know that his speech will be studied in years to come because his predictions have the rather depressing habit of coming true.

I shall concentrate my remarks on the unilateral decision by the United States to reject the Kyoto protocol, and I shall explain why only a multilateral response to the threat of climate change will do. A multilateral response is clearly what the current US President's father wanted when he was in the Oval office. He might not have had in mind the world environment organisation at which my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil hinted, but, under George Bush senior, the United States signed the United Nations framework convention on climate change. It states that developed countries should take the lead in combating climate change. There is nothing in it about developing countries having to take the lead.

I hope that George Bush junior and his advisers are considering a multilateral approach. They have been granted an extra few months in which to define their position and I hope that they will adopt a multilateral approach before the COP 6—sixth conference of the parties—talks resume. If they are not considering such an approach, they had better invest in a better server in the White house, because the "flood Bush" e-mails will continue to arrive. I understand that the server has crashed five times already under the weight of those e-mails and it risks being down permanently if Bush persists with his recipe for American excess and global meltdown.

The United Kingdom's good faith and credibility in relation to climate change and the reduction of $CO_2$ emissions would be further enhanced were the Government to do what my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) suggested yesterday. They should allow the Climate Change Bill, which has been introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), to proceed. It would put on a statutory basis the Labour party's 1997 manifesto commitment of a 20 per cent. reduction in emissions. I cannot think of a better way of ensuring multilateral action than the UK taking unilateral action to reduce its $CO_2$ emissions by an even more significant amount than the legal commitments that have been made and by demonstrating that that is good for business as well as for the environment.

The Deputy Prime Minister's response to my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury was distinctly ungracious and I hope that we shall hear a more considered response from the Minister tonight. What emphatically will not assist in the process of securing multilateral action on climate change are ill-informed statements by Ministers. Other Members will have seen the comments by Peter Ewins, the chief executive of the Meteorological Office, who told *The Times* about a week ago that

"ministers' remarks about climate change were often so wrong that they made his scientists wince."

The report continued:

"He criticised in particular claims by Mr. Prescott . . . that last November's floods had been caused by global warming."

Mr. Ewins said that such statements were not supported by science and that it was impossible to say that such weather incidents were caused directly by climate change. I hope that Ministers will avoid making such statements because they can be used by the US to justify its lack of action on the important issue of climate change.

Few people can doubt that climate change is a major threat to mankind; fewer still can doubt that it will require a multilateral approach to tackle that menace. Unfortunately, one of those people is the President of the most powerful nation on earth. It is down to the United Kingdom and our European partners to ensure that he comes to his senses.

8.50 pm

**Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): It is pleasure to speak in the debate that was initiated by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Paddy Ashdown), who made an excellent speech. Despite the differences between our political parties—sometimes reinforced by the tactics of the Liberal Democrats—*[Interruption.]* I am going to be generous, so hon. Members should let me finish. Despite those differences, I was reminded of how much common ground there is between us. On the right hon. Gentleman's historical legacy as leader of the third political party, one of his major contributions has been to reposition the Liberal Democrats between the Labour party and the Conservative party. In the longer run, that can only be good for politics. It does not mean that we need pacts or have to merge, merely that where we have a common interest, we should say so.

I agreed with what the right hon. Gentleman said about globalisation needing global solutions. That does not mean rejecting the nation state, but we have to recognise its limitations. We must take account of the fact that a decision taken in a moment in Detroit or Tokyo can cost tens of thousands of jobs in this country. The idea that we can face up to that global challenge within the confines of the nation state is not a sustainable argument.

I also agreed with the right hon. Gentleman about national identity. We all have different identities, and as the regions and localities of the world develop, those identities change. On Europe, an opinion poll finding that often strikes me is that those people who believe that Britain was a once great nation now in decline, have a completely negative attitude towards Britain's position in the European Union; yet those who believe that Britain was a once great nation now on its way back, have a wholly positive attitude. We need to have confidence in our national identity. That is especially true of the English. I do not detect among the Scots, Welsh and the Irish the same uncertainty and reticence, and that affects their attitudes towards Europe. The right hon. Gentleman has made an extremely positive contribution.

*[Mr. Bill Rammell]*

I want to focus on the recent decision by the President of the United States to repudiate the Kyoto protocol, which is of enormous concern. I was struck by the comments of the UK's chief scientific adviser during the Kyoto talks, who said:

"Even if Co$_2$ emissions were cut by 60 per cent. over the next few years"—

and let us remember that the Kyoto protocol does not sign us up to anything like a 60 per cent. reduction—

"sea levels would continue to rise for centuries."

That is the challenge that we face and it explains why I am so worried about the decision taken by the US President and his Administration.

Members of all political parties can learn significant lessons from the events of the past few weeks. I fear that the first lesson is what those events tell us about the early stance of the new Bush Administration. Their actions during their first 14 weeks in office are cause for concern. Despite significant public opposition, especially within the United States, they are pushing ahead with the proposal to drill for oil in the Arctic national wildlife refuge. There is also a proposal to renege on the supposedly binding agreement that was signed at Kyoto. In addition, there are concerns about decisions beyond the environmental agenda. Given that that is the case after 14 weeks, one might ask whatever happened to "compassionate conservatism", which was the slogan used by the Republican candidate in the run-up to the presidential election. We in this country can learn from that. Many people in the United States are reflecting on what has happened and learning from the intervention of the fundamentalist Greens and Ralph Nader in the presidential election which led directly to the results that we have seen on Kyoto and much else.

There are those who argued that there was no difference between the candidates for the election in America, and in that respect the past 14 weeks have at least taught us an object lesson. The American people have made their choice and I do not criticise it, but there is a lesson for those in this country who claim that there is no difference between this Government and a Conservative Government. Whether those people are in the Socialist Alliance, fundamentalist Green campaigns or the Liberal Democrats, they should reflect on that.

It is enormously instructive to observe what the situation in the United States tells us about the modern-day Conservative party and its stance on national self-interest. Whenever we debate Europe and there is any suggestion of the pooling of sovereignty to achieve a greater end for the nation, the Conservative party accuses us of selling out our national interest. However, when the United States acts in a way that contradicts or attacks our national interest, the Conservatives are at best silent and on most occasions seem almost to acquiesce in the subjugation of our national interest to that of the United States. We hardly hear a squeak from them. We heard from the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), who said that he regretted the decision by the United States. He then launched into a ritualistic and wholly unjustified attack on the Deputy Prime Minister. If the Conservative party is serious about these issues, it needs to make a better response.

**Mr. Spring:** The hon. Gentleman made an assertion about the Conservative party's attitude to the United States, saying that we appear to be essentially hostile to anything to do with the European Union but that we offer no criticism of the United States. Can he give a recent example of that? I am sure that the whole House will be pleased to hear from him.

**Mr. Rammell:** The whole debate on national missile defence is an example. There is a series of unanswered questions about that proposal and there are genuine concerns that the initiative on its own could lead to an escalation of the arms race. The sensible response is the one that has been made by the Government, who have said that we should wait and see what proposals the United States Administration make and then make a judgment. That is not the response of the Leader of the Opposition or of the Conservative party, which has said that whatever the details are, we should sign up to the initiative. That does not serve the British national interest. The Conservative party's stance on the United States contrasts greatly with its attitude to Europe.

**Mr. Spring:** I must correct the hon. Gentleman on this point. National missile defence may or may not go ahead and be successful, but the Americans propose to proceed with it. All that we have said, quite responsibly, is that we want to participate in discussions during the evolution of the policy and that we should not be expected to pay for it. That is sensibly in the interests of the British people and indeed all of Europe.

**Mr. Rammell:** When the matter first became public debate I heard the Leader of the Opposition say that the Government should sign up now and support the proposal. That starkly underlines the way in which the Conservative party undermines the British national interest with its simplistic attitude to a matter that requires sensitive, detailed debate.

There is obvious disagreement about Kyoto and the stance adopted by the American Administration which is felt throughout the advanced world and certainly in Europe and on these Benches, but George Bush is the elected President of the United States, which will continue to be a good friend and ally of this country. We have many common interests and we need to work with the Americans to achieve change on these issues. There are positive grounds for optimism. Recent polling evidence in the United States after the Bush Administration's decision shows that 77 per cent. of people want stronger environmental action. Some centrist Republicans are even beginning to realise that the stance taken will not serve their interests as they approach the forthcoming congressional elections.

We must use our position in the special relationship to be a candid friend to the United States and the American President. We must convince the Administration that their stance on the issue is wrong; I believe that there are grounds for optimism. To echo the comments of the right hon. Member for Yeovil, I am convinced more than ever that, in tackling that kind of issue, the country's needs and interests are served by our being at the heart of the European Union, not apart from it, as the Conservative party wish.

The idea that the only remaining global superpower will respond to one national Government, whoever they are, simply does not bear scrutiny. There is a much better chance that it will be forced to respond to the combined

might and pressure of European Union Governments working together. That is the lesson to be learned; whether on this issue or on the World Trade Organisation talks, unless we are at the table with the Europeans, in the longer run we will not even be in the room for international debate and negotiation. We should draw that lesson from the debate.

I know that two other Members wish to take part in our debate, so I turn finally to the United Nations, which has been the major initiative of the past century to achieve multilateral and collectivist solutions. However, anyone who looks at the current structure of the UN knows that it is in significant need of reform. In many senses, it is the main forum for tackling human rights abuses throughout the world yet, too often, it does not fulfil that task.

The conflict in Kosovo taught us more clearly than anything that, when we are taking justifiable action in defence of human rights, the UN does not always provide the best help and support because of its decision-making structure and the right of veto held by permanent members of the Security Council. If we are to proceed with the work of the UN and if it is to provide solutions, it must be subject to fundamental reform and rationalisation and the right of veto held by permanent members of the Security Council should be curtailed; otherwise, the UN will simply be reduced to the lowest common denominator because necessary action in support of human rights will always offend one or other member of the Security Council.

This has been a positive and interesting debate, which underlines the extent to which we need both international and multilateral solutions.

9.3 pm

**Mr. Mark Oaten** (Winchester): I, too, think that the debate has been positive. Briefly, in my remarks, I want to look back and make an assessment of the Government's progress on their ethical foreign policy and on human rights issues.

From the start, may I say that Liberal Democrat Members welcomed strongly the statement of the Foreign Secretary in 1997 that there would be a change in foreign policy, with the ethical element at its heart. From our perspective that was welcome and a fine contrast to some activities in the 18 previous years. However, we believe strongly that those words are easy and need to be followed by fine actions. We recognise good action on Jubilee 2000 and the abolition of land mines, but a number of major holes remain in the Government's ethical foreign policy.

By far the biggest hole is the Government's failure to introduce legislation on arms exports. The right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) referred to that and cross-party Select Committees have criticised the Government. Five years after the Scott report, it is disgraceful that no such legislation has been introduced in any Queen's Speech in this Parliament, let alone passed. Of course, we welcome the fact that, in recent months, the Government have said they will introduce a draft export control Bill, and that, in the past two or three years, they have changed elements of legislation in relation to arms exports. It is good that the Government are producing an annual report on export licences, and we welcome that. However, on reading the detail, it is difficult to judge the use to which some arms are being put. There is little detail about end use. For example, the entry for the Channel Islands sets out the purchase of stun grenades, rifles and other firearms. Anyone would think that the Channel Islands are preparing to go to war, but the real detail is that these items were purchased for a museum. That illustrates the nonsense of not having more information in the annual report. Nevertheless, its publication is welcome.

I am pleased also that the Government have made it clear that they want to tackle the work of brokers. However, there are difficulties in determining how to deal with British brokers who are operating from foreign countries. We need to know more about how the Government propose to tackle that issue.

The greatest failure of the draft legislation that we have seen so far is not to put in place a system of pre-scrutiny of arms exports. If there is to be a genuine attempt to have an ethical foreign policy, that must start by allowing a cross-party group of Members to engage in pre-scrutiny to assess where arms are going.

I understand that there are some concerns about the delay that pre-scrutiny might cause within the system. There are business men in my constituency who share these concerns. When they have been trying to export goods, they have been frustrated at times by long delays. However, I do not think that pre-scrutiny would cause delay. The vast number of products and goods that are being exported would not be required to go through such a system. It may be that only about 10 or 12 would. The process, which is already very delayed, would not be held up much more by allowing a cross-party group of Members to engage in pre-scrutiny.

The second argument to be advanced is that pre-scrutiny would cause competition difficulties. It is said that if we were to open up the process, commercially sensitive contracts would be open for all to examine. It is suggested that other companies that perhaps were not aware that contracts were up for bidding would suddenly start to get in on the bidding process. Again, I think that that is a bogus argument against pre-scrutiny. It is not as if a Committee of Members will put up a big notice saying, "These contracts are out for bidding." If we trust Members, as we do now, to scrutinise MI5 and MI6—our intelligence services—surely we can trust them in the same way to examine arms exports.

If I were a Minister, I would want a "get out of jail card"—an insurance policy. What more effective insurance policy could one have as a Minister than knowing that a decision that might have to be taken in private had been endorsed by a cross-party group of Members in advance? That is one of the most compelling arguments. It would assure a Minister that his lonely decision has already been considered by a number of Members and approved. That system is good enough for the United States, which has overcome the possible difficulties. It is good enough also for Sweden.

Cross-party groups and the Quadripartite Committee and others all recommend the system as the way forward. I was pleased to hear that in a Select Committee this afternoon the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that he still has an open mind on the matter. I hope that the Minister will comment on that.

If we are to have proper practice in place, there must be proper end-use monitoring. There is a concern that if we are exporting arms, it is extremely difficult to track down where they end up. I accept that it will be a difficult

*[Mr. Mark Oaten]*

system to implement, given that monitoring will be difficult. However, having pre-scrutiny in place would surely allow pressure groups and others, via Members, to highlight some of the potential concerns about how end misuse could take place.

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): I am pleased with what my hon. Friend is saying about the need for pre-scrutiny of arms sales. Will he accept from me, as someone who served in the early days on the Quadripartite Committee, that that Committee has moved a long way from the point at which it started in agreeing the present position? If a disparate group of Members can do that, I am sure that the Government can make the same journey.

**Mr. Oaten:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. If four respected groups have come together in that way, there is still the opportunity for the Government to listen to the concerns that have been expressed. I hope that the Government will indicate that the issue is still open for discussion.

One reason why we need to have a system of pre-scrutiny in place is what has been taking place in Indonesia. For those of us who are interested in human rights issues it seems a fine example of why we need to have proper arms export controls in place. One of the most disappointing things that the Government did was to continue with the contracts to supply Hawk jets to Indonesia. There were ample opportunities to review those contracts, and it was disappointing that the Foreign Office allowed them to stand. It is difficult to prove that Hawk jets have been used in human rights violations; equally, it is hard to prove that they have not been so used. We know, for example, that water cannon have been used in Jakarta against students protesting there. A pre-scrutiny panel would not have allowed such arms sales to Indonesia to continue.

I shall touch briefly on a couple of other issues on which I would welcome the Minister's comments. This morning I met the Reverend Jackie Maraputi, who is a representative on human rights issues of the Protestant Church in the Moluccas. The Minister will know of the extremely difficult situation in that region over the past 12 months. The good news that Reverend Maraputi told me was that the Protestants and some of the Muslims are working closely together for reconciliation, and there is real hope that some of the difficulties in the region will be overcome as a result of that effort. Those difficulties have led to almost 8,000 deaths in the past two years.

The most encouraging thing that the reverend told me was that some of the more extreme Muslim militant leaders have decided to take part in that process. What support can the British Government or the British Council offer to help to fund that process? He made it clear that the problems can be solved without outside interference, but that funding and support from the British Council would be extremely helpful.

The bad news was that some of the human rights violations continue. The forced religious conversions are still taking place. There are appalling cases of the forced circumcision of children as young as six. People are forced to change their names and married couples are forced to undertake a different marriage service to change their religion. All that, I am told, sometimes takes place with the Indonesian army watching and, on occasion, handing out medicine to those who have undergone forced circumcision. It would be helpful if the Minister would indicate whether he is prepared to put pressure on the United Nations or the European Union for the independent monitoring of events on some of the Indonesian islands.

Finally, in relation to Indonesia, there is concern about the situation of those who are trying to avoid such atrocities. There are estimated to be about 2,000 refugees in the islands of Seram, Dura and North Molucca. They are hiding in the jungle, and they need aid and food. Will the Minister confirm that the best way of achieving that would be to put pressure on the Indonesian Government to get food and vital medicine into the jungle? Again, we need monitoring to establish the extent of the problem.

In conclusion, I do not suggest that the problems in Indonesia are a direct result of the arms that we are providing. However, we want the Government to be more active in the region. The example of Indonesia demonstrates the need for proper arms control to be in place. None of us can say that a jet, a cannon or other military equipment has not been used in the Indonesian region in a way that we would find repulsive. I hope that if the Government are given the chance to govern again, they will quickly introduce legislation on arms exports. That remains a serious hole in the ethical foreign policy which we on the Liberal Democrat Benches support.

9.13 pm

**Mr. Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): I want to thank the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Paddy Ashdown), before he leaves, for selecting the subject for debate tonight and particularly for his excellent rendition of Housman's poems. As I grew up in Shropshire, almost under the shroud of Housman, I fully appreciated their spirit. His prophetic utterances about the dangers of the first world war turned out to be entirely true. It is time that we heard more poetry in the House. A great deal can be learned from it, and it is better than the prose that we usually hear.

My next point is not intended as a criticism of the right hon. Gentleman, but the debate is in danger of becoming a self-satisfied discussion about what the rich northern world thinks about its place in the globe. In reality, we are one country in a world where, appallingly, a quarter of the population lives at starvation level and many have life expectancies that would mean that virtually every hon. Member present would be long dead. Life expectancy is constantly falling in many of the poorest countries. It is now down to less than 40 years in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa. We live in a world in which the basic human rights of many people in respect of the ordinary ability to live—never mind of political expression—are completely lacking. We must do an awful lot better in this century than we managed to do in previous ones.

I want to draw attention to three points. I do not want to speak at great length about the generality, but I think that the theme of our debate must be world peace, world social justice and environmental sustainability, and the need seriously to support international organisations that can achieve those aims. I refer especially to the possibility of ensuring that the UN's role in the world is much enhanced, rather than diminished. We should debate those

issues more often. Indeed, I think that our procedures would be improved if there were a more effective way of monitoring what we actually do at the United Nations. For example, we could establish a Select Committee on United Nations affairs or ensure that we receive a report back about what goes on at the UN. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights is just completing its work, but I do not suppose that we will hear one word about it in the Chamber, other than the few mentions that it will receive tonight. However, what is currently occurring in Geneva is crucial and it deserves much greater publicity than it has so far received.

As I said, I want to refer only to three issues, as I know that other hon. Members want to speak. The first directly concerns the United Nations and the Security Cou which is meeting tomorrow morning. At the meetin will receive a report from the Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, on the situation in the western Sahara. The western Sahara has been occupied by Morocco since 1974, but despite year after year of agreements, pledges and arguments about the voters' role, there has been no referendum, and the fundamental right of the people of the western Sahara to vote on their future in a free and fair referendum has not been recognised. I understand that the Secretary-General will not specify a date by which the referendum should occur in tomorrow's report, but will instead ask for an extension of the MINURSO—the UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara—mandate until the end of June, to enable him and other officials to continue progress on the possibilities of devolving power into the western Sahara from Morocco.

Over the years, I have initiated a number of debates on the western Sahara, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Ms Kingham), and I know that that is not what the people of the area have been campaigning for and demanding all these years. They want the right to vote on their self-determination. I am sorry to say that, if we merely keep imposing delays, hot war fighting will break out again, whatever the oratorical abilities of the leaders of Polisario or any other group. I do not want that and I do not advocate it. I want a peaceful solution, but I believe that the right to a referendum should be sacrosanct, and I hope that the British representative at tomorrow's Security Council meeting will make that point.

**Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the cause of the people of western Sahara and their right to a referendum have not been helped by the British Government's recent decision to allow the repair of gun parts and arms? I understand that the work was carried out against the will of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which was overruled by the Department of Trade and Industry. Does he agree that that was a very false move?

**Mr. Corbyn:** I am glad that the hon. Lady intervened; she made a point that I was going to make anyway. I agree that if we want to achieve a peaceful solution to what is, for want of a better term, a post-colonial conflict, it is not sensible for us to allow the refurbished arms to go to Morocco. We know that there is no external threat to Morocco from anybody and that the weapons can be used only in an internal conflict—it will be internal in terms of the current political arrangements—against the people of western Sahara.

I hope that the Minister will assure us that it remains the British Government's position to support a referendum in which the people of western Sahara can vote freely on whether to be part of Morocco or to follow their own independent path.

The people of East Timor had that right. As one who observed the referendum in East Timor, I know that when a referendum takes place, United Nations officials have to attend—they did wonderful work in East Timor—but some security system must be put in place immediately afterwards. The carnage in East Timor after the referendum was horrific to witness.

This afternoon, I attended a briefing for Members of Parliament by a lawyer who represented LAW, the Palestinian legal rights group. The picture that she painted of the conflict in the middle east, the attacks in the Palestinian territory and the heavy weaponry that Israel deploys was horrific. I hope that the British Government will renew their criticisms of Israel's actions in the occupied territories and help to bring about some serious developments that will lead to a long-term peace process. The more the helicopter gunships go in and the more bombardments, random arrests and killings that occur, the more the chances for long-term peace diminish. They are diminishing by the day. The rest of the world must engage in upholding the rights of people to a peaceful existence.

Many UN resolutions have been passed to support the right of the Palestinian people to have a safe, secure place in which to live. Israeli forces have breached them often. Despite the supposedly even-handed approach and way in which the media report the conflict, the victims of the current conflict in Israel and Palestine are predominantly the poor and Palestinian civilians.

The LAW briefing stated:

"Between 28 September 2000 and 17 April 2001 390 Palestinian civilians have been killed and over 12,000 injured by Israeli soldiers and settlers. 73 Jewish Israelis have been killed and about 400 injured. About 84 per cent. of those Palestinians killed and 99.5 per cent. of those injured have been civilians who are not members of the Palestinian National Security forces."

Any death is to be regretted and deplored, but the conflict is hardly even handed. Using helicopter gunships against a civilian population is an outrage anywhere in the world at any time. We should deplore that and try to encourage a peace process in the middle east.

My last point concerns the huge issue of national missile defence and the role of President Bush, who was not elected but somehow achieved office. We live in one world where 36,000 nuclear weapons are available. The Bush Administration are hellbent on developing a national missile defence system that was initially devised by Ronald Reagan and the defence companies. Defence contractors are doing well; they are making billions of pounds from Government contracts. The four main defence contractors in the United States receive a fast rate of return for the $34 million that they spend on lobbying on Capitol Hill and the $3.7 million that they contributed to Congress members' election campaigns last year.

The danger for the rest of the world is enormous. The incident involving the spy plane and the rising tension between China and the United States showed the dangers. We hear the rhetoric of right-wing think tanks in the USA that casts China as the enemy and claims that developing national missile defence will somehow protect the US for all time from any events elsewhere in the world. That is

*[Mr. Corbyn]*

crazy and extremely dangerous. Going ahead would require rewriting if not tearing up the anti-ballistic missile treaty. Countries worked hard for that treaty and it constituted an important step forward. It would also require tearing up the treaty that provides for space to be a weapon-free zone, and would at least undermine the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

While many European countries have said that they oppose national missile defence and would not be prepared to grant facilities for it, most other countries in the world are terrified at the very idea of national missile defence, the nuclearisation of space and all that goes with it. I would hope, therefore, that instead of waiting for the US to make an application to us, this country would join in and say that we, too, are not prepared to grant facilities for, or be supportive of, the national missile defence proposals put forward by the United States.

If we want to live in a world that tackles environmental destruction and pollution, poverty, human rights abuses and the small wars that are going on with terrible consequences all round the globe, how on earth does national missile defence fit into that, other than to stuff full of gold the companies that have already been manufacturing weapons of mass destruction for a long time and to encourage the redevelopment of a nuclear arms race between Russia, China and the United States that can only be dangerous and damaging to the rest of the world?

I would have hoped that in this century we would have learned some of the lessons of the wars of the previous century, so that we could say no to this system and encourage others to say no to it. We should put all the pressure that we can on the US Administration to abandon this mad system and instead use that skill and technology to do something good for this planet rather than something bad and dangerous.

9.26 pm

**Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): I know that time is pressing, so I shall be as brief as I possibly can.

First, I want to pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Paddy Ashdown) for his excellent introductory speech and particularly for his comments on the complexity of identity in the modern world. I found his somewhat apocalyptic vision of the years ahead disconcerting, although I share some aspects of it.

It was also encouraging, during the early part of the debate, to see the Liberal Democrat section of the Opposition Benches full while the Conservative part was virtually empty. For those of us who have, from time to time, anticipated the possibility of a realignment of British politics whereby the Liberal Democrats would become the official Opposition, those moments were encouraging.

I want to associate myself completely with all the comments made by my hon. Friends, and to pick up particularly on the remarks made by my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn). In the course of the debate, there have been several references to the American position on the Kyoto protocol and the American attitude towards national missile defence. I do not think that the link between those two United States policy positions has been noted. It is not arbitrary that the Americans have become so intransigent over Kyoto, or that they have become so obsessed by national missile defence.

A scenario is emerging wherein the United States has decided that it is prepared, as the 21st century moves on, to do everything possible to maintain its current position as the world's only superpower. It sees the main threat to that coming from economic development in China, and I feel that the justification given for the national missile defence system—that it is somehow a system to protect the United States against casual, irrational attacks by a small number of rogue states—is absolutely ludicrous.

If any of those alleged rogue states wished to attack the United States, they could easily do so with a nuclear bomb in a suitcase, or by the importation of the foot and mouth disease virus. That would be far more effective than trying to launch a full-scale nuclear attack. The national missile defence system seems, therefore, to be a pretext for the Americans' developing vision of the future, in which, some time in the second decade of this century, they will be prepared to fight—and intend to win—a nuclear war with China to maintain their economic supremacy.

The importance of President Bush's recently announced opposition to the Kyoto protocol is that the Americans are prepared to continue the exploitation of fossil fuels, and are determined to maintain their control over the majority of the world's oil reserves to fuel their economy to maintain their supremacy.

I want yet again to flag up—as have other Members—the crucial importance of exercising our Government's influence to persuade the United States to see sense and finally agree to an international system for a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions; of the need to develop renewable technologies; and that the continuing use of fossil fuels will not necessarily enable economic supremacy to be maintained. In fact, as the years go by, it is likely to be the countries with high-level skills and manufacturing capacity in renewable technologies that develop economic competence and supremacy.

I hope that our Government will do that, but I hope that at the same time they will use their influence, if not to oppose national missile defence directly, then to delay, prevaricate, cajole and even to try to persuade the United States to consider alternatives to the existing proposals.

I think that the general view in the House is that our Government should resist national missile defence and the Americans' position on the Kyoto protocol. However, we cannot adopt that stance alone. That returns me to the starting point and the main theme of the debate: in the modern world, multilateral action is the only basis for foreign policy.

9.31 pm

**Mr. Menzies Campbell** (North-East Fife): This has been an extremely thoughtful debate, featuring well-argued contributions from all quarters.

It would be wrong of me not to begin by thanking those on the Front Benches—the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), and the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring)—for the generous tributes that they paid to my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Mr. Ashdown). They paid tribute not just to my right hon. Friend's sparkling contribution this evening, but

to his contribution over a long period—but especially while he was leader of the Liberal Democrats—to a number of important foreign policy issues. I know that my right hon. Friend is very grateful for their generosity.

The Minister of State had to indulge in some pretty close textual analysis to find a justification for the Government's amendment, as opposed to the motion. As the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) pointed out, they are so close that, by kicking over the traces for once in his ministerial life—he did it often enough in his political life before becoming a Minister—the Minister might just be able to find himself in the same Lobby as us.

As I said, this has been a thoughtful occasion, and no one has been more thoughtful on these matters than my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil. This evening, we witnessed a remarkable demonstration of his insight and eloquence; but before moving on to some of the issues that were raised in the debate, let me remind the House that, in terms of foreign policy, my right hon. Friend has not only displayed insight and eloquence but, on occasion, shown rare courage.

That has not always been popular in the House. I remember, for instance, the time when my right hon. Friend rose to say that all Hong Kong residents should have passports that might entitle them to come and live in the United Kingdom. I can tell those who were not present that that was not exactly a popular thing to say. I also remember my right hon. Friend's insistence that our party should support Lady Thatcher—an increasingly unpopular Prime Minister in her own party and in the country—when it came to the issue of whether the Government should back the effort to expel Iraq from Kuwait.

I remember, too, my right hon. Friend's insistence—in the face of some pretty formidable arguments and quite a lot of heavy flak from the leader of the Labour party, the then right hon. and learned Member for Monklands, East—that our party should support a Government who were deeply embattled over the Maastricht treaty, at a time when the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) was confronted with extraordinary disloyalty from certain Back Benchers, some of whom appear to have experienced a renaissance on the Front Bench of today's Conservative party.

I remember, too, my right hon. Friend arguing knowledgeably and passionately—and not always achieving great popularity in the House—for early intervention in the Balkans. He also exposed the illusion of safe havens in an exchange of correspondence with the then Prime Minister that was best described as incendiary.

We Liberal Democrats will miss my right hon. Friend, but the House will also be the poorer. Those who have been the particular losers this evening are those Conservatives who have found themselves—no doubt under the heavy pressure of engagements and other responsibilities—compelled to stay away. It may be that they are out looking for other recruits, such as Mr. James Mawdsley, to bring them into the bosom of the Conservative party. When the hon. Member for West Suffolk described the recruitment of Mr. Mawdsley, I was reminded that in the 18th century the Duchess of Gordon used to encourage recruits into her husband's regiment by the presentation of a shilling and the offer of a kiss. I wonder whether the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) fulfils that function in today's Conservative party.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk mentioned Europe, but I remind him that the Maastricht treaty talked not of a common defence policy but of a common foreign and security policy. It also envisaged something called a "common defence", which would be a united defence. That treaty was driven through the House on a three-line Whip by the Government of whom the hon. Gentleman was, no doubt, a supporter.

The hon. Gentleman taxed us with a lack of confidence about Europe. As someone who has lived all his life in a country with a single currency but two separate legal systems, I have never had any discomfort in asserting my Scottishness. Nor would I have any anxiety about asserting my Britishness in a European Union with a single currency of which the UK was a member. It is hardly likely either that the German or French characters will be dissipated or irretrievably damaged so as to make them invisible through being members of the single European currency. If any party lacks confidence about Europe, it is today's Conservative party, which has travelled a long way since the right hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath), with great courage, insisted that the UK should join what was then the Common Market.

The Minister was kind enough to refer to the fact that, last year, before the millennium summit, the Foreign Secretary and I sought to produce a joint position on the United Nations. I am sure that in recent weeks other hon. Members have experienced newspapers ringing them up and asking them to summarise in 40 words the achievement of which they are most proud. That is a somewhat precious question, and I have consistently failed to return the newspapers' calls. However, if I was forced under the thumbscrew to reply, I would admit to being most proud of that joint document that the Foreign Secretary and I produced. As the Minister generously pointed out, it formed a substantial part of the British Government's submission at the millennium summit and, in my humble and perhaps overly self-congratulatory opinion, made a sensible and reasoned contribution to the debate about the future of the United Nations.

We must have a United Nations that has a collective capacity to prevent gross and persistent abuses of human rights. The UN is an imperfect institution of course, but it is the only truly global institution. It has universal membership, and that gives it a unique legitimacy. Of course, the imperfections must be remedied. The structure of the Security Council must be reformed, as must the nature of the funding. It simply is not right that the richest country on earth should be most in arrears with its contributions. The UN must also enjoy the support of those countries with real military capability. Part of the problem in Sierra Leone was not the number but the quality of the forces offered to the United Nations. That is why a stalemate continues in that country, with the British training of the Sierra Leone army and the UN insufficiently capable of performing its responsibility in the proposed long-term effort to return the whole country to democratic rule.

It is also right, as the Minister said, that the rules of engagement for the United Nations must be drawn in terms that are sufficiently robust to ensure that we do not have to stand by and watch the horror of Srebrenica

*[Mr. Menzies Campbell]*

unfold again. In my judgment, that name will reverberate down the years, marking a place where the United Nations, for all its idealism and the high-flown rhetoric attached to it, failed.

For the people who suffered most there, even the mention of Srebrenica and the recollection of what it involved induce a shudder. Apart from those whose husbands, sons and brothers were the victims, their numbers include the Dutch peacekeepers who were forced to stand by. Their calls for air strikes to try and prevent the massacre that took place went unanswered. That was a bad day for the United Nations, and we should do everything in our power to ensure that such a day never occurs again.

Human rights must lie at the heart of foreign policy. Human rights and personal freedom should not be the prerogative of the well-off, the well-governed or the well-connected. The motion recognises the universality of human rights. I venture to suggest that that must be the keystone of a foreign policy with an ethical dimension—indeed, the United Nations declaration of human rights is described as a declaration of universal rights.

However, it is not enough simply to acknowledge the existence of those rights. We have a duty to implement them as well. The hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) is not in his place at the moment, but he made a series of penetrating observations about the position of the Palestinians.

I yield to no one in my determination to ensure that the people of Israel have the right to live in peace in the country that they now occupy, but that right cannot be considered to be mutually inconsistent with the human rights of the Palestinian people. The House need only consider the weapons ranged on either side of the argument—Apache helicopter gunships and tanks on the one side, and Kalashnikovs and rockets on the other. There is no doubt where the balance of military advantage lies. If we are serious about human rights, we should be arguing the case for the right of the people of Israel to live where they do, and for the human right of the Palestinians not to be treated as they have been treated recently.

A number of hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake), spoke about the consequences of the unwillingness of the United States to accept the Kyoto protocol. The hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) put that unwillingness in the context of apparently unilateral action on the part of the United States.

I recognise that a number of the things that have been done in recent times by the United States have given more than an impression of a determination to press ahead unilaterally, but they do not all date from the installation of the new Bush Administration. The Clinton Administration declined to support the International Criminal Court until their very final days. That was only done to embarrass the incoming President, not for reasons of the proposal's substance or the particular merits that it might enjoy. It was the Clinton Administration who felt compelled to proceed with the tests for national missile defence, and who were part of the dispute about bananas and the access of British goods to United States markets that involved cashmere workers in the Scottish borders.

The feeling that the United States is acting unilaterally does not arise solely from the deeds of the new Bush Administration. I share some of the anxieties in that regard that have been expressed in the debate, but we must understand that a degree of rhetoric has been involved, in the presidential campaign and in the Administration's first 100 days. In the past week or so, there have been some signs that, with the increasing influence of Secretary of State Colin Powell, the United States' policy may be less unilateral than we feared. For example, its intervention with regard to the invasion of Israeli troops, described by Colin Powell as disproportionate, resulted in Mr. Sharon immediately giving the order that the tanks should be withdrawn.

With regard to China, some of the exhortations and advice offered from Capitol Hill were enough to turn one's hair white. Mr. Bush resisted some of the more extreme recommendations from the Republican party.

The dispute about bananas has rumbled on for three, four or five years. The Minister, who had a great deal to do with the issue in a previous existence, understands its complexity. Yet that dispute has been settled.

In Taiwan, there was every suggestion that, as a reaction to the seizure of the American spy plane, the Bush Administration might, on a tit-for-tat basis, offer the Taiwanese Government the Aegis-equipped destroyers. No such offer has been made. These may be straws in the wind but they cause us to approach the issue of unilateral action on the part of the United States with a little more caution.

On national missile defence, close observers say that there has been a change in temperature in recent weeks. I do not know how it will turn out; my party has made its position clear. However, I suggest that there is every prospect that the American Government might be able to strike a deal with that great deal-maker Mr. Putin. It is not difficult to envisage the basis of some agreement to allow the amendment to the anti-ballistic missile treaty—the provision of more money, as was given under the Nunn-Lugar scheme, for dealing with the detritus of nuclear weapons, a reduction in strategic nuclear warheads, a share in technology and, finally—something that may be more difficult for some to accept—an undertaking that the United States would not press for any further expansion of NATO up to the borders of Russia. It is not impossible to envisage a bargain along those lines. That may do with regard to Russia but it leaves out the attitudes of China, which are clearly of great significance in determining whether the perceived advantage of national missile defence is justified by what would undoubtedly be some disadvantages.

The Foreign Secretary, who very courteously advised me that he would be unable to be present because he was speaking at the Lord Mayor's banquet, may just be getting to his feet to talk about foreign policy. I earnestly hope that the words "ethical dimension" will pass his lips. When he made that declaration, approximately four years ago, it enjoyed the universal support and acclaim of my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself. Since then, it is fair to say, on an entirely objective basis, that there has been some rowing back. Words such as "constructive" or even "critical engagement" have been thrown about more often. It is not inconsistent to be constructively engaged with a country while ensuring that one's policies towards that country display an ethical dimension.

We have been most disappointed, as my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) said most eloquently a moment ago, in relation to arms exports. There is no doubt that there was considerable embarrassment in some parts of the Government that the first act of the incoming Labour Government four years ago was not to cancel arms sales to Indonesia, then under a rather different Government. Such a cancellation would have been entirely legitimate; it could not have resulted in any legal consequences. Arms exports are part of foreign policy, which is part of the Executive prerogative. In my judgment—a legal as much as a political judgment—a decision to discontinue arms exports for foreign policy reasons cannot be attacked. There was great disappointment that the Government did not do that. We hope that the Government will learn from the disappointments that they have caused and the embarrassments that have been suffered in some Departments.

Finally, let me turn to the principle of collective action which lies behind the motion. Foreign affairs are regulated, as we know, by treaties and by conventions. However, they are also regulated by our membership of the European Union, the United Nations, the Commonwealth, NATO and the G8—whether by treaty provision, by the terms of a convention or by the obligations, expressed or implied, imposed on us by membership of those organisations. Foreign policy is conducted in accordance with those obligations. It is, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil properly pointed out, an issue of pooled sovereignty. However, to achieve influence over the global economy, climate change and threats to peaceful co-existence, we need to enhance, improve and increase those partnerships.

I venture to suggest that we should no longer talk of great powers, but of great partnerships. If we do not take the collective approach that the motion and many speakers in the debate have urged, we risk the recreation of the competitive system of the 19th century, which spawned the disasters of the 20th. In the 21st century, we should surely learn the lessons of the past 100 years.

9.51 pm

**Mr. Wilson:** With the leave of the House, Mr. Speaker, I shall wind up the debate.

I agree with the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) that the debate has been good and thoughtful. It has proved one thing beyond doubt: a Tory boycott greatly enhances the quality of debate in the Chamber. I can say with absolute confidence that less nonsense has been spoken from the Tory Back Benches tonight than on any occasion since 1997—long may that continue.

On a much more serious note, I have been asked by several Members whether there is any further news from Zimbabwe this evening.[9] We contacted the high commission in Harare at 9.15 and there is nothing further to report. However, as I told the House earlier, we shall take stock in the morning and we shall of course keep hon. Members informed.

I shall try to cover some of the issues raised during the debate. Obviously, I shall write to hon. Members on other matters. We discussed Indonesia, the western Sahara and many other topics of real and detailed concern to hon. Members. I undertake to write to hon. Members on those subjects that I cannot cover.

I have some good news for my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), who referred to the importance of the meetings in Geneva this week of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. I fully agree with my hon. Friend's comments on the significance of those meetings. I am delighted to inform the House that earlier today, in Geneva, we and our EU partners secured the adoption by consensus of a draft resolution on torture. As a result the mandate of the UN special rapporteur on torture, Sir Nigel Rodley, has been renewed for a further three years. In achieving that, we had to fight off repeated attempts from some countries to weaken that mandate and, indeed, to criticise the UN special rapporteur for his work. The steps that are being taken are incremental, but I contend that they are taking us in the right direction, with Britain in the vanguard.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) and other hon. Members asked about our position on Kyoto. The UK's position on climate change is to be publicly committed to achieving our Kyoto targets. We do not think that there is a need for a specific climate change Bill, because the programme announced in November 2000 will reduce greenhouse emissions far beyond the Kyoto targets of 12.5 per cent. According to those criteria, they will be 23 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. We shall continue to hold a dialogue with the United States on its position, but there is no doubt about our position; it is support for achieving the Kyoto targets.

I shall use the few minutes left for my speech mainly to discuss ethical foreign policy—three words that should certainly cross the lips of anyone who speaks on behalf of the United Kingdom on foreign affairs. We should proceed with some humility; there are few absolutes in these matters and we should all recognise that, whatever we do, sometimes we make errors and misjudgments. However, the two criteria that matter are, first, motives and, secondly, the knowledge that progress is being made. On both those counts, I believe that the Government, especially the Foreign Secretary, have been true to the ethical objectives that we set ourselves in 1997. Frankly, I am not greatly interested in the views of the Tory party, in relation to which a decent period of silence on those matters should be measured in decades rather than mere years.

I welcome the judgment of Amnesty International, which said:

"The balance sheet"

—of the Labour Government in office—

"shows a record of real achievement."

It is a long time since Amnesty said that about a British Government. I value Lord Scott's view, as quoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), who made an observation about the remarkable change that he can see, compared with the grubby and reckless scandals on which he reported just a few years ago under another Administration.

The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) asked me to comment on the arms export Bill. The export control Bill will be a major measure. It is not as though nothing has happened in the past four years, but if we introduce something as major as an export control Bill, there must be consultation. If we aim to streamline existing procedures, some of which date back to the second world war and, in addition, introduce new provisions in complex matters, such as trafficking and

*[Mr. Wilson]*

brokering, it is important to allow adequate time for consultation. It is equally important that the past four years should not have been a hiatus during which nothing happened.

From my own relatively recent experience in dealing with such applications, I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the House about the thoroughness, care and depth with which each application in researched and about the way in which we who ultimately have to make the decisions treat them and try to get the balance right in each case. The Government remain committed to introducing such a Bill as soon as possible.

On the specific point about prior scrutiny by the Committee, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that it remains under consideration, subject to those complex issues, including those that he mentioned, such as commercial confidentiality and the timely processing of export licence applications. The motive comes from the two criteria that I mentioned earlier. First, the motivation must be right. Secondly, progress is being made in that direction. Again, to compare the position now with that four years ago is to compare day with night. Perhaps that is the reason why the Conservative Back Benches are silent and empty. People's memories go back more than four years.

On the ethical foreign policy, we have a good story to tell, and across the world since 1997, the United Kingdom has set the agenda as a force for good. If we consider issues that were stale and hopeless and about which people despaired of progress being made, such as the Lockerbie trial, the Salman Rushdie fatwa, the Balkans and the role of Milosevic, East Timor, Sierra Leone and so on, the United Kingdom has been in the vanguard of ethical policies. Perhaps things are imperfect. We make no claims of perfection, but the policy is certainly ethical and progressive. We have taken a stand in defence of the United Nations Security Council resolutions on Iraq and on conflict diamonds.

**Mr. Spring:** What about Zimbabwe?

**Mr. Wilson:** The hon. Gentleman shouts that from a sedentary position, but he has nothing much to say about anything. What about the Tory party's record in southern Africa over a very long time? Again, the Conservative party's record calls for a long silence.

Our efforts to establish the International Criminal Court and our anti-torture campaign; our leadership against the death penalty, which I referred to earlier; our action against landmines; and the different regime on arms sales and the consultation on the Bill that I have mentioned should all be considered. Not everything has been done, but there have been debt initiatives and changes have taken place in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, where there are more women and more people from ethnic minorities and more exchanges with non-governmental organisations and businesses. All that is covered by the term "ethical foreign policy". When we eventually ask the country to give us a mandate, it will be on the basis that we have demonstrated that this Government have acted honourably and ethically.

*Question put,* That the original words stand part of the Question:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 40, Noes 291.

**Division No. 196]** **[10 pm**

**AYES**

Allan, Richard
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Baker, Norman
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Fearn, Ronnie
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kirkwood, Archy
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Opik, Lembit
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wallace, Rt Hon James
Webb, Steve
Willis, Phil

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Andrew Stunell and Sir Robert Smith.**

**NOES**

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul

Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCrea, Dr William
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Ian Pearson and**
**Mr. Graham Allen.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

*Question,* That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House believes that the United Kingdom's national interests are best served by addressing the challenges of the modern world in constructive partnership with other countries and international organisations; further believes that human rights and protection of the environment are important global issues which are central to Her Majesty's Government's foreign policy; and welcomes the Government's full support for the work of the United Nations and initiatives to improve UN peacekeeping and the effectiveness of the Security Council.

## Nortel Networks, Paignton

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Mike Hall.]*

10.11 pm

**Mr. Adrian Sanders** (Torbay): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to raise an important issue for my constituents and people in neighbouring constituencies.

I shall begin by plotting some of the history of my constituency, which like all seaside resorts in this country, and certainly the big important ones, developed during the Victorian era, very much as a result of the railways. Much of the infrastructure in such communities has not been renewed, although it has been repaired, and perhaps, in some cases, updated. Tourism has had to cope with a number of competitive changes. The most significant was the development of the jet engine, which brought the package holiday in the Mediterranean and other parts of the world much closer for the domestic tourist. Other changes include the growth of farm and inner-city tourism, often through nationally funded developments of museums, galleries and other attractions. There has been little investment in tourism over the past 50 years, and each seaside resort, my own in particular, has sought to diversify its economy.

One of the main motives for diversification is the fact that many seaside resorts have become unemployment black spots, with rates above the national average. Torbay has been lucky, in that in the 1960s Standard Telephones and Cables built a plant that was taken over, in the 1980s by ITT, and in the 1990s by Nortel, which later changed its name to Nortel Networks. Up to 5,000 people have been employed on that site, engaged in what was the very basics of the electronics industry, and has now become the modern-day fibre-optic industry. It became the largest private sector employer in the area covered by the Government office of the south-west. Last year, for the first time, manufacturing overtook tourism in its contribution to our local economy.

When I say that 75 per cent. of all internet traffic in north America is carried on equipment made by people in my constituency, and that firms such as Sifam, better known today as JDS Uniphase, are located there, the House will realise that the area has become the centre for the fibre-optic industry in Europe.

Last Christmas, we were in the unprecedented position of having job vacancies in hotels and catering over the Christmas break. Then, in February, came the bombshell that 700 short-term contract employees would no longer be required; in March, we learned that a further 700 redundancies were required on site. Today, the news is that JDS Uniphase, formerly Sifam, is going to lay off people in the fibre-optic industry in Torquay and Plymouth. Those devastating bombshells, together with foot and mouth, have highlighted the underlying fragility of the economy in south Devon. For years our dependence on one industry, tourism, was effectively shifting to dependence on one employer.

However, I must tell the Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce, the House and people outside that it is not all doom and gloom. Torbay is in a magnificent, attractive environment and we have good schools and a skilled labour force. We even have a climate that is kinder than that in the rest of the country because we are on the gulf stream and surrounded by hills. In fact, we have all the factors necessary for those wishing to relocate or start a modern business; everything is there for inward investors.

However two major factors are missing, which go back more than 100 years. Our strength was founded on tourism because of transport links using trains, and the investment in infrastructure. If I tell the Minister that no new hotels have been built in my constituency for more than 50 years, and contrast that with Mediterranean resorts, she will see the difference between the two areas. Most of our parks were constructed by the Victorians, as were our gardens and beach facilities. We have tried to develop a business park but, unfortunately and ironically, that was turned down because of poor transport links.

The previous Government de-trunked the A380, so responsibility for it now rests with the local authorities. Yet a bypass on that road has been talked about since 1957. One can travel from the north of Scotland all the way down to Newton Abbot on either a three-lane motorway or a two-lane dual carriageway, but then one has to crawl in and out of the Torbay conurbation, which is the second largest conurbation in Devon and Cornwall and the fourth largest conurbation in the south-west region, south of Bristol

Our rail links are vulnerable to coastal erosion at the seaside and flooding at the junction at Exeter. We have precious few through-train services from Torbay to other parts of the country. Fifty years ago, there were several trains an hour to different locations around the country, which carried holiday visitors during the summer months, but today their journey has to be planned with almost military precision to meet connections from one end of the country to the other.

We also suffer from poor air links. There is no link between the south-west and Heathrow. The other week, I met a pharmaceutical company which is looking to site its European headquarters somewhere in the United Kingdom. It wants that site to be within an hour and a half of Heathrow because an executive flying long-haul from Japan does not want to travel far when he arrives. A Nortel Networks executive flying in from Canada wishing to fly to the south-west arrives at Heathrow, transfers to Gatwick, then has to get down to the south-west. The last part of the journey is often along the A380 crawler single-lane road.

May I thank the Minister, who has met me and given me some extremely helpful ideas? Indeed, she followed that up with a letter. However, we need to look at five factors. In an economy in a small constituency like Torbay, which is based on a small labour market, the effect of 1,400 redundancies is severe. We have a declining tourism industry, and also the worries caused by foot and mouth. That has a big impact on the amount of money that is circulating in the economy. We are, unfortunately, on the periphery of the United Kingdom, and that tends not to be recognised by government.

First, we need emergency assistance for all the businesses that are affected by foot and mouth. There is a fear that businesses that are deemed not to be rural might not qualify, but whatever is available to rural areas should be available to seaside resorts, given the way in which their businesses are being affected too.

Secondly, we need to consider council funding, which seems to lag behind that in other areas. There have been overspends on personal social services year after year, which is common among seaside resorts. They are magnets, and people move into them. Perhaps the census will catch up, but it is the local authority's estimate that there are several thousand people resident within the council area who are not accounted for in terms of government grants. I emphasise the need for a revision of the standard spending assessment. If it were possible, I should also like a revision of our qualification for any form of assistance from government to ensure that we are not missing out on anything to which we may be entitled.

Thirdly, I would like a commitment to improve our transport links, and a recognition that we cannot do that ourselves. We are already suffering because insufficient money is made available to our local authority and other Government agencies. That limits our ability to do the big things that need to be done to improve transport links.

Fourthly, I would like to see the area become a priority for inward investment within the Government office of the south-west. The Minister helpfully suggested that she would pass on our plight to Invest.UK, and I hope that that has taken place. That should be backed up by our becoming a priority area within the Government office of the south-west for inward investment and regional development agency support.

Finally, I would like a sympathetic response from government agencies, and especially from the planning arm of the Government office of the south-west, when any proposals come from my area seeking to diversify our economy. A proposed business park was turned down three years ago by the planning office in Bristol because it said that we did not have the necessary transport links. If the project had gone ahead, it could have taken up some of the slack caused by the redundancies that have recently been announced. I know that the council is working on a revised and perhaps smaller business park, and there needs to be as much assistance as possible with that.

I am aware that Government cannot wave a magic wand in a global economy. I am well aware that decisions taken in other parts of the world can have an impact on our constituencies. However, we can surely have an expectation that when we have a problem, it will be recognised by Government, and that they will do all in their power to assist the area to get itself out of the problems in which it may find itself.

Even if the Government cannot wave a magic wand and say, "Yes, you can have a road here tomorrow," they could give a green light and say, for example, "We shall consider re-trunking the A380." It would help us to attract the inward investment that we desperately need if the inward investor knew that the infrastructure would be improved in future.

I look forward to the Minister's reply.

10.24 pm

**The Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce (Ms Patricia Hewitt):** I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Torbay (Mr. Sanders) on his tenacity in securing the debate, on the vivid picture that he has painted of his constituency, and on the way in which it has moved from dependence on tourism to becoming one of the world's centres for high technology in manufacturing. The hon. Gentleman has set out the difficulties that he and his constituents are now facing, given the global downturn, including the temporary but painful downturn in telecommunications and other parts of high-technology sectors. As the hon. Gentleman mentioned, he and I have met and discussed and also corresponded on the situation caused by the job losses at Nortel and, as we learned today, at JDS Uniphase as well. As I told him previously, we are already in touch with Nortel and we will continue to do everything that we can to assist his constituents and the wider community who are affected by the closures.

As a member of the rural taskforce, I heard again at our meeting this morning of the impact of foot and mouth disease on a wide range of businesses right across Devon and Cornwall. The hon. Gentleman's comments about the impact, particularly on tourism businesses, confirms what we heard from the regional development agency and other colleagues at the rural taskforce meeting this morning.

Like all my colleagues, I very much regret the job losses that are taking place in Torbay and other parts of the country in the telecommunications sector in the UK. The problem is not unique to Nortel, nor is it unique to the United Kingdom. Almost every major company in the telecommunications sector is experiencing substantial restructuring and job losses. That has been a marked feature of the past couple of months and is a direct result of the sharp downturn in the global telecommunications market, which is particularly pronounced in the United States, with the fall in stock market valuations.

Today, as the hon. Gentleman said, there was a further announcement of site closures and job losses by JDS Uniphase in the UK, including the job losses at the company's Sifam operation in Torquay and the additional job losses at the two plants in Plymouth. Already, the Employment Service has been in touch with that company to offer advice and assistance, and the company is consulting with the work force on how the cuts will be achieved.

We have been closely in touch with Nortel Networks and the hon. Gentleman has met some of the company's representatives. They are clear that the job losses being suffered in Torbay and south Devon are due to the downturn in the American economy. However, even with those job losses, painful though they have been, Nortel remains a very important and successful employer in the wider Torbay area. Even after the earlier round of job losses, employment in the company as a whole stands at more than 4,000—twice the level in 1998. The reflects the strong growth that the company enjoyed in the intervening period.

I can confirm to the hon. Gentleman that all the local agencies—the Employment Service, the Benefits Agency, the RDA and the Government office of the south west—have been working closely with Nortel and the local authority to establish exactly what help is needed and to ensure that it is delivered. On 1 February we granted major redundancy status, which means that the employees affected by redundancy have immediate access to Government job search and training programmes. We have extended that help and that status to cover all subsequent redundancies at Nortel in Paignton.

Devon Training for Skills bid on behalf of local partners for rapid response funding, and that funding of almost £200,000 was approved by the Department for Education and Employment on 3 April. Former

*[Ms Patricia Hewitt]*

employees of Nortel are already benefiting. They are getting help in various forms, including further IT training to help them move into other parts of the labour market. That help will continue to be available to people for up to 12 months after they have been made redundant.

It is important to stress that the skills of the hon. Gentleman's constituents will be in high demand by other local employers. I understand that Nortel held a jobs fair on 5 March at which local employers, the Employment Service and the Benefits Agency offered help back into work, and that more such events will be held if there is demand for them.

When we met last month, the hon. Gentleman suggested that the skills of those employees, which is such a precious competitive asset, could provide an opportunity for potential inward investment into the UK. I assure him that the regional development agency has already been working closely with Nortel as part of what could be called its after-care programme for inward investors. Invest.UK is always in touch with inward investors wherever it can market existing facilities and skills within the United Kingdom. I have also specifically asked Invest.UK and the communication and information industries directorate within my Department to meet him to discuss Nortel and the wider aspects of marketing the attractions of Torbay, including both the climate to which he referred and the skills of the work force. I understand that a date is being fixed with some urgency for that meeting.

It is difficult at this stage to assess with any certainty the effect that the job losses will have on the wider economy in either the short or longer term. I understand that the Employment Service has received locally a total of 285 new claims for jobseeker's allowance from ex-Nortel employees, which compares with the loss of about 1,400 jobs. That may indicate that many other people have already found alternative employment locally or elsewhere.

**Mr. Sanders:** I think that the Minister will find that the reason for that figure is that a number of employees are now working shorter hours, so they are not going to the jobcentre to sign on. Although such people have not lost a whole job, the change means that less money is circulating in the local economy. If employees do not work full time, there is a longer-term impact, even if the number of employees remains fairly high on site.

**Ms Hewitt:** The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. I understand from the company that although it offered short-time working as a way of managing the reduction in head count that it needed without losing valued expertise completely, a number of staff opted for the voluntary severance package rather than for such work. I am not sure about the extent to which shorter-time working affected the total number of people who would be seeking other work.

I understand that employment at Nortel grew rapidly after 1998—I have referred to the figures—and that that accounted in part for strains in other sectors of the local labour market. The hon. Gentleman referred to unfilled vacancies in the tourism sector last Christmas, so it may be that people who have taken redundancy or who find themselves with no alternative but to do so will be fairly rapidly absorbed into high-tech manufacturing with other employers or into other sectors in the region.

Let me make a slightly more general point. The Torbay area has access to a range of programmes to help the local economy and, in particular, to improve skills and employability. They include the new European objective 2 programme in the south-west, which is worth some £108 million in European grant money over seven years. They also include objective 3, the new deal and our new DTI enterprise grant for businesses. As the hon. Gentleman will know, Torbay is one of the South West regional development agency's five priority areas for regeneration. The agency has already agreed to invest more than £500,000 towards the development by Midas Construction of more than 6,000 sq m of factory units at Long road, Paignton. It is also working with Torbay council on regeneration proposals for Torbay's waterfront.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned at the end of his speech a number of specific factors that needed attention as part of the wider regeneration of the local economy. In particular, he mentioned transport. In relation to the A380, my understanding is that a bypass was not proposed in Devon county council's local transport plan, so it was not possible to consider funding for the project, of which I know that he is long-standing supporter. I believe that the joint study that was commissioned by Devon county council and Torbay council concluded that a bypass could be delivered only in the medium term bf 2006 onwards. However, I believe that the hon. Gentleman has arranged to meet my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport. I am sure that he will find him helpful in considering the way in which an effective transport structure strategy can be established with the help of the county council and, I hope, the regional development agency.

The first of the hon. Gentleman's five points dealt with support for businesses affected by foot and mouth disease. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, who chairs the rural taskforce, has already announced a substantial package of Government support for a range of businesses in different sectors that have been affected by foot and mouth disease The majority are not agricultural.

We have significantly extended the small firms loan guarantee scheme. Although it is too early to predict its impact, inquiries about it are running at six times the normal rate. It will not help every business, but I hope that it will be useful to some that have been disastrously hit by the disease.

We have introduced a package of more generous rate relief for rateable values of up to £12,000. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury told me this morning that the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise have already deferred £28 million of due payments on income tax and VAT. That proves that the Treasury agencies are fulfilling my right hon. Friend's pledge that businesses that genuinely struggle with cash flow because of the disease will receive sympathetic support from Customs and Excise and the Inland Revenue.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether the current population of the area was genuinely reflected in the calculation for standard spending assessment. That is a matter for my right hon. and hon. Friends at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and I am sure that he will take it up directly with them.

I have dealt with inward investment, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. He also referred to the business park. That is exactly the sort of investment that the regional development agency, the county council and other local partners can make. He rightly stressed that it needs the benefit not only of potential skilled workers—the area has them—but good transport links.

I reassure the hon. Gentleman that we greatly value Nortel as a major inward investor in the United Kingdom. I have no doubt that it will remain committed to the area for many years and that its current activities do not reflect a weakened commitment to the United Kingdom or Paignton. They are simply the inevitable but painful result of a global downturn in the sector.

I also assure the hon. Gentleman that we will continue to do all that we can with the local agencies to ensure that the individuals who are affected by redundancy receive all possible help to get new jobs quickly. We shall continue to support the area to carry on creating the conditions for sustained economic and social success.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Before I adjourn the House, it may be helpful if I tell the hon. Gentleman that I have enjoyed many holidays in Torbay, which is a very friendly place.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes to Eleven o'clock.*

## Deferred Division

ROAD TRAFFIC (S.I., 2001, No. 561)

That the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 561), dated 26th February 2001, a copy of which was laid before the House on 28th February, be revoked.

*The House divided:* Ayes 176, Noes 282.

**Division No. 194]**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McCrea, Dr William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David

Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, Rt Hon David
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**NOES**

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chaytor, David
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian

Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

*Question accordingly negatived.*

# House of Commons

*Thursday 26 April 2001*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL (*BY ORDER*)

*Order for further consideration, as amended, read.*

*To be further considered on Wednesday 2 May.*

# Oral Answers to Questions

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### Playgroups (South Swindon)

1. **Ms Julia Drown** (South Swindon): What Government financial support was given to playgroups in South Swindon in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 2001–02. [157907]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Margaret Hodge):** This year, generous financial support is being given to playgroups in Swindon, including £770,000 for direct grant for three-year-olds, funding for four-year-olds through the standard spending assessment, £415,000 in child care grant, £1.5 million over three years for the neighbourhood nursery initiatives and moneys from the new opportunities fund. Swindon playgroups can also access specific national funds for capital investment and sustainability to expand services to provide full day care and to support pre-schools in difficulties.

In 1996-97, Swindon pre-schools got nothing for free nursery places and a minute share of the miserable £9.6 million available nationally for out-of-school clubs. Unlike the Tories, we are putting our money where our mouth is, investing in the early years and supporting pre-schools.

**Ms Drown:** There is no doubt that under this Government there has been tremendous extra support for nursery education and child care, including playgroups, which is in stark contrast to the virtual abandonment of the sector by the Conservative Government. Will my hon. Friend assure us of her support for playgroups? What are the Government doing to improve the status of playgroup workers, who provide valuable support to our communities but are often poorly paid and lack recognition for their worthwhile work in playgroup sessions, in preparing for those sessions and in evaluating the work that is done?

**Ms Hodge:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on her long-standing commitment to the work that she has carried out to ensure that there is a choice of high-quality child care and education places for people in South Swindon. Of course we value playgroups and we wish to raise the status of those who work in them. It is an interesting fact that child care and early years education is now the second fastest growing sector in the labour market. With our investment in that sector, the establishment of a qualifications framework and the introduction of the child care tax credit and the working families tax credit, we are enabling playgroup workers to be properly rewarded for their work.

**Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): When the Education and Employment Committee looked at early years provision in towns such as Swindon, we heard that a problem for playgroups is the pressure placed by schools on parents to bring their children into school well before they are ready. What are the Government going to do about that?

**Ms Hodge:** As the hon. Gentleman knows, the pressure on playgroups came from the previous Government's ill-advised and ill-conceived nursery voucher scheme, which led in one year to the closure of 1,100 playgroups. This Government have invested to ensure that playgroups have access to the nursery education grant for three and four-year-olds. That means that we have turned a corner, and last year there were 6,000 new places in playgroups in England.

### Truancy

2. **Mr. David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): What plans he has to support schools in using information technology to tackle truancy. [157908]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Michael Wills):** Last month, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), announced that £11 million will be available to introduce electronic registration systems into more than 500 secondary schools.

**Mr. Taylor:** Information technology may well cut 10 per cent. of truancy over the next two years, but our pledge at the 1997 general election was to cut it by a third by 2002. Are we on track for that? Is not parentally condoned truancy the real problem? Should we not invest in more low-tech attendance officers to try to combat that problem? Is there not potential in this place to combat Tory truancy from Question Time? The presence of only seven Tory Back Benchers at education and employment questions is dreadful.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. That is not the way to proceed with questions on education and employment. I certainly hope that the Minister will not respond in kind.

**Mr. Wills:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend is right that parentally condoned truancy is a major problem. I have some figures that we have just received from 112 local education authorities that responded with information on the effectiveness of truancy sweeps. Half said that most children stopped during sweeps were accompanied by parents or carers. In some areas, that was the case with up

to 97 per cent. of truants, so it is obviously a big problem and we must address it. That is why we introduced truancy sweeps, which we announced last year.

We are making considerable progress on our manifesto pledge to cut exclusions and are well on track. We have cut 20 per cent. from the highest figure, and we are now introducing measures that will make a significant impact on truancy. The best way to reduce the rate of truancy is to prevent it from happening in the first place, and that is why many of the local projects that we support through our social inclusion pupil support grant target measures to do that. We also know that the use of electronic registration can cut truancy by up to 10 per cent. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members might be more interested in this if they took more interest in education policy. We know that electronic registration must be an important part of our strategy to reduce truancy.

**Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Every week I see groups of young people of secondary school age in my constituency and I try to discover whether they are at school or not. Every week, I find that many of them are not, and sometimes they have not been there for the whole period during which they should have been attending school.

Will Ministers consider seriously not just the option of daytime school-hours truancy sweeps, but of ensuring that we have enough people, such as detached youth workers, to engage with young people out of school hours at weekends and evenings? They could discover what motivates the kids and get them into some structure, whether through sport, an apprenticeship or work-related project, so that they can get back into the system. Could we not concentrate on such personal mentoring rather than trying to bribe young people into activity with CDs and other things?

**Mr. Wills:** The hon. Gentleman is right about the importance of having a rounded strategy with a number of different instruments to tackle the problem of truancy. His constituency, I believe, is benefiting from the excellence in cities initiative and he will know, precisely for the reasons that he outlined, that personal mentors are an important part of that initiative, performing the kind of function that he described. The Connexions service will also provide personal mentors for older pupils to make sure that they get the kind of support that they need to overcome the barriers that divide them from school and education and that cause many of them to truant in the first place.

**Mr. Andrew Reed** (Loughborough): Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a wide range of difficulties and reasons why an individual may truant? Does he agree that the role of local education authorities is crucial for children with emotional and psychological problems, who are not truanting through choice, but have problems that need to be addressed? Will he ensure that local education authorities have sufficient resources to give back-up to schools, rather than taking cash away from local education authorities and putting pressure on schools, as large secondary schools with those problems cannot cope with the vast amount of work?

**Mr. Wills:** My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the importance of investment in those resources. It is all very well having the ideas, but unless there is money to back them up, they are meaningless, which is why we are now investing £174 million in measures to tackle exclusion and truancy. By way of contrast, that is 10 times the amount spent in the Opposition's last year in government.

### Schools Expenditure (Worcestershire)

3. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): If he will make a statement on expenditure on schools in Worcestershire. [157909]

**The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris):** In 2001-02, Worcestershire's education standard spending assessment increased by almost £9 million. In addition, its share of the £52 million education budget support grant will be £1.35 million. Following the recent Budget announcement, Worcestershire schools will receive almost £7.8 million as their share of the school standards grant, more than double their allocation in the previous year.

**Mr. Luff:** I think that the Minister, who is an honest woman, would admit that, under this Government, Worcestershire's share of national education expenditure has fallen very sharply indeed. Is she aware that the pressures that that is creating in Worcestershire schools like Droitwich Spa high school is leading to a crisis in retention and recruitment? I therefore ask her a simple question: will she commit her party to a clear and unambiguous timetable to end that unfairness?

**Ms Morris:** Where the hon. Gentleman is right is in saying that the formula that we use to distribute money from central to local government needs to be reformed. We are doing that; his Government did not. Quite honestly, had the formula been in a better state when we came to office, we would not be in difficulty now. It is interesting that the debate is now about what share of an increased budget Worcestershire schools get. Under the previous Government, the debate was about how those schools coped with their share of budget cuts.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned a school which, presumably, is in his constituency. I should like to quote the head of an infants school in Worcester, who recently wrote to her MP and said:

"I cannot believe how much money we have! Speaking to other Primary Headteachers, I know they feel the same . . . We all know it will not happen overnight, however, I feel that at least we are on the road to recovery."

That recovery is taking place after 18 years of underfunding. I am happy that the debate is now about how we split up the extra money going into Worcestershire schools. Our record is one of £1 million extra for his local authority to cut class sizes and a real-terms increase of 16 per cent. for every child in Worcestershire's schools. The position is not yet perfect but, as that infant school head said, schools are well on the way to recovery.

**Mrs. Theresa May** (Maidenhead): What Worcestershire schools need is not yet more ministerial delay and dither, but a Conservative Government committed to a national funding formula. However, I expect that Worcestershire schools were pleased to hear the Prime Minister's pledge that he would raise the level of spending in state schools to

that in independent schools. Was that spending level the same as in the public schools that the Prime Minister attended, or as in the so-called pretty standard grammar school attended by the Leader of the House of Lords?

**Ms Morris:** It is excellent news that now, for the very first time, we have a Prime Minister with such aspirations for standards for our children. The hon. Lady, and schools in Worcestershire and elsewhere, should look at what the Prime Minister has delivered in the past four years: three times as much capital spending, an increase in revenue spending of £540 per pupil, and a commitment to make sure that the share of the national wealth spent on education continues to grow in the next Parliament as it has in the present Parliament. We have a record of which we can be proud. Now people know that we have kept our word—education is the Government's top priority. As schools in Worcestershire know, we will continue to deliver, as we have delivered for the past four years.

**Mrs. May:** Parents and teachers in Worcestershire will be disappointed by the Minister's replies, which show how little she and the Government understand what is happening in schools in Worcestershire. On Sunday, when she was asked what the timetable was for the Prime Minister's pledge, her response was, "Well, you have to ask the Prime Minister." Is it possible that education Ministers were not aware of the pledge that he intended to give, or was it yet more prime ministerial hot air?

The right hon. Lady spoke of the Government keeping their word. Far from it; the Prime Minister committed the Government to spending a higher proportion of national income on education than the previous Conservative Government, but they are spending less. He gave a commitment that class sizes would be smaller—tell that to the parents of the class of 94 in Norfolk. He committed himself to the most fundamental reform of the teaching profession since state education began, which has led to teachers leaving the profession in droves. Is not the reality, as schools in Worcestershire know, that on funding, secondary class sizes and teacher numbers, the Labour Government are all spin and no delivery?

**Ms Morris:** That shows just how out of touch the Conservatives are with what is going on in the real world. Anyone who went round infant classes four years ago would have seen that three in 10 of those children were in classes not of 31 or 35, but often of 45. This September, whichever school one visits, whether in town or country, one will not find one five, six or seven-year-old child who is in a class of more than 30. We have delivered on class sizes. If one goes round schools, one will find 17,000 that have been invested in and improved. Schools that have needed to be rebuilt for generations have been rebuilt under this Government. On teacher numbers, there are 12,000 more teachers in post than in 1997.

I do not believe what the hon. Lady says about the views of Worcestershire teachers when I read the comments of the infant school teacher whom I quoted earlier. She continues:

"After years of trying to make savings each year and having to cut back on non-teaching staff, we can afford a full complement of classroom assistants at the start of the academic year."

Forget the figures—one does not have to believe them. After four years of Labour government, the result is that we have more 11-year-olds who can read and write than ever before in the history of the nation, and we have fewer children leaving school with no qualifications. We have made a difference. That is what parents wanted, and that is what we have delivered.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Before we proceed, I should point out that the Minister's reply was far too long. I say to the Opposition Front Bench that the question was also too long.

### School Achievement Awards

4. **Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): What advice he is taking following his Department's errors over this year's school achievement awards and the Minister of State's letter to schools of 29 March. [157911]

**The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris):** We have fully investigated the reasons for the error, which should not have happened. As soon as I was aware that there was a problem, I acted quickly to put things right. That included informing schools, individual hon. Members and the House.

**Mr. Hawkins:** This appalling error was set out in a written answer delivered this week to my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin). Page after page of schools throughout the country were misinformed that they had won school achievement awards or told that they should have received them when they had not done so, as a result of the complete incompetence of the Minister's Department. After her recent answers to my hon. Friend, in which she preened herself about her Government's supposed triumphs, will she now accept that she should be taking advice from the chairman of governors and the head teacher of Blackdown school in my constituency? They say that their staff are demotivated and describe her letter about this appalling mistake as insulting and incompetent. Will she apologise to the 293 schools throughout the country that were misinformed, stop wasting taxpayers' money on advertising and start doing her job?

**Ms Morris:** Yes, I apologise to the 300 schools that received inaccurate information. I apologised to them in my letter and to hon. Members in a parliamentary answer. The hon. Gentleman could have spoken for longer, and turned over the pages listing the 7,000 schools that received awards that were a true recognition of their great achievements. It is a tragedy that he uses his time in the House to name publicly the school that was wrongly given the award—something that I have not done in the Chamber. It is a shame that he did not take the chance to list all the schools in his constituency and local education authority area that won awards and deserve to be recognised.

I apologise to the 300 schools, but for the very first time, this Government have spent £60 million on giving a cash bonus to teams of teachers and classroom assistants, and to all those who work in schools, to celebrate their success. I have received a great number of letters from special, nursery, infant and secondary schools, which tell me that this is the first time that they have ever been recognised and rewarded in such a

manner. I share in their celebration; it is a shame that the hon. Gentleman did not gracefully choose to do so for a little bit of his time today.

**Mr. Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield): My right hon. Friend will know that this was not a major tragedy, but an unfortunate glitch. I hope that she will continue with the school achievement awards and all the other innovative programmes and policies that are, within the comprehensive ideal, bringing together the ambition to achieve diversity and choice. Will she remember that such diversity and choice need not only a lot of good ideas, but the continuing resources that the Government have pledged to provide? As we approach a general election, will she pledge to the House that we will continue with that commitment of resources?

**Ms Morris:** My hon. Friend is right: those ideas need to be well resourced, and they will continue to be so. The school achievement award scheme was part of our strategy for reforming teachers' pay. I assure him that, just as we are the first Government to put in place a system that rewards good teachers for teaching well, we will continue to reward teams of teachers, as we have done through the school achievement award.

## New Deal for Schools

5. **Mr. Jonathan Shaw** (Chatham and Aylesford): How much has been allocated to schools in the Chatham and Aylesford constituency from the new deal for schools programme. [157912]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Jacqui Smith):** The funding allocated between 1997–98 and 2000–01 to schools in the Chatham and Aylesford constituency from the new deal for schools programme was £10.6 million. That included allocations made to Kent and Medway local education authorities for total packages that include schools in the constituency. For the next three years, Kent has so far been allocated £56.6 million and Medway £10.6 million under the new deal for schools programme.

**Mr. Shaw:** If my hon. Friend believes that that reply warrants gratitude and thanks from me, she is right. However, that is not the complete picture. The capital grant to which she referred is £1.5 million for St. Mark's school in Eccles, which has waited years for a new school. The money came from the new deal; the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrat party voted against it. On Monday, I attended a ground-breaking ceremony for Chatham South school, which has waited 20 years for a new school hall. However, it will get not only a new school hall, but six classrooms, a studio and—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman should try for an Adjournment debate on the subject.

**Jacqui Smith:** I do not ask for gratitude, but for the money to continue to contribute to raising school standards. Departmental research clearly shows that the money that we are putting in to schools has an impact not only through repairing roofs, building new schools and replacing temporary classrooms but through giving teachers and children the environment that they need in which to learn and to continue to raise standards.

## Performance-related Pay

6. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): If he will make a statement on performance-related pay for teachers. [157913]

**The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett):** The new arrangements for performance-related pay for teachers are now in place. More than 80 per cent. of the assessments have been undertaken and we envisage that more than 70 per cent. of those eligible for the award will receive it. Those who receive it, together with the pay increase from 1 April, will gain an increase of £3,000 and access to a new pay scale of £4,000, which will take teachers in London who do not accept management and administrative responsibility to a salary of £31,000 or £34,000 a year.

**Mr. Cunningham:** I am grateful for that reply. How many teachers in Coventry have qualified for performance-related pay? What is my right hon. Friend doing to lift morale and to reduce the amount of paperwork that teachers have to endure?

**Mr. Blunkett:** I have always accepted that pay on its own is insufficient. Working conditions and investment in the staff room as well as the classroom are crucial. Just under 1,600 teachers have currently applied for performance-related pay in Coventry. I do not have the final figure for the number who have qualified, but I hope that it is equivalent to the national figure that I gave.

In the past two terms, we have halved the amount of paperwork and Government missives. We are putting in place a £35 million electronic data collection and collation scheme, which will avoid the duplication of data and the necessity for a variety of agencies to request the same information. With the massive investment in each pupil and in buildings and technology, we are not only raising morale but, by doing so, ensuring that we raise standards for every child in every school in the country.

**Mr. Phil Willis** (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Liberal Democrats welcome any extra money that goes into teachers' pay packets, but how does the Secretary of State explain the £35 million that was spent on consultancy to introduce the scheme? How can he excuse the days of wasted time spent by teachers and head teachers in filling in a bureaucratic nightmare? Is not it high time to abandon performance-related pay, and look to Scotland, where the Liberal Democrats have brokered a deal for teachers that values them through the hours that they work and their conditions of service? That is what matters to teachers, not the bureaucracy that the Government have heaped upon them day after day.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): How can you fill in a bureaucratic nightmare? That's bad grammar.

**Mr. Blunkett:** My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) points out the impossibility of filling in a nightmare. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) had a similar nightmare

to me and the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) when he attended the National Union of Teachers conference. I presume that he lost his voice there.

The hon. Gentleman delivered an interesting tirade. Starters in England receive higher pay than in Scotland. That position will continue in August when the increase in Scotland takes effect. Teachers in Scotland may or may not have a 35-hour week by 2006. Any party that advocates a 35-hour week in a 39-week year needs to be able to tell the electorate what resources are being diverted to pay for that policy.

**Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): My right hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards said a few moments ago that the school achievement award scheme was part of performance-related pay for teachers. Will the Secretary of State consider revising the school achievement award scheme, basing it perhaps on Ofsted reports, to create a less crude measure than using only test results? Will he consider at least taking Ofsted reports into account? Now that our friend Mr. Woodhead has gone, schools might be able to take a more positive approach to Ofsted. I can say, as someone who has experienced an Ofsted report, that when one has got through it, one certainly feels in need of a reward.

**Mr. Blunkett:** That is precisely why performance-related pay is rewarding good teachers well for doing precisely that in the classroom, rather than having to rely on management or administrative promotion. Yes, the achievement awards are about progress, in terms of assessed improvement against benchmark three-year programmes, and about excellence. We are very open to refining and improving any reward system, so long as it is based on improved standards.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): This is an important question; I say that to the Secretary of State sincerely. The future of the Ryles Park high school in my constituency is in some doubt, primarily because it is the only secondary school in Macclesfield that provides for those with learning difficulties, and that has an inevitable impact on the league tables. Does he accept that, while performance-related pay is important, responsibility is also important, and that the skills that teachers need to deal with those with learning difficulties are critical to the success of education? Will he recognise the role of those teachers, which could lead to improvements in the number of those attending that school and remove the doubt that hangs over its future?

**Mr. Blunkett:** I confirm that I agree that those working with, supporting and encouraging the progress of those with learning difficulties should be rewarded, which is why the performance-related promotion is about rewarding and recognising those who take children from whatever their starting point to a point of improvement. In other words, it is as applicable to teachers working with special needs children—not only in integrated special needs but in special needs schools—and receiving the performance-related uplift, as well as those who have received the achievement and performance bonus, as to teachers elsewhere, and I commend those special needs teachers.

**Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): Does the Secretary of State recall that the criticism of the scheme from the Liberal Democrats and others when it was launched was that only a minority of teachers would benefit? Do not the figures that he outlined demonstrate that a clear majority of teachers can benefit, now and in future? Does not that fact show that the vast majority of teachers are good teachers, and that the Government value them?

**Mr. Blunkett:** Yes, I can confirm that. Although my hon. Friend was being heckled by the Liberal Democrat spokesman during that question, I must point out to the House that performance-related pay applies also at senior management team, deputy and head levels. More than 60 per cent. of head teachers and more than 50 per cent. of deputy heads have benefited from it. Putting in place the performance-related promotion for those not on administration and management grades is another leg in that process. So, yes, all teachers have the opportunity to benefit from this programme, which is why 200,000 of them applied.

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Given that the performance-related pay scheme is divisive, how does it assist in recruitment or in increasing morale in the teaching profession? Is it not a gimmick, and a pointless one at that?

**Mr. Blunkett:** Of course, recruitment has gone up, as illustrated in the independent statistics, by more than 12,000 since January 1998, and there are 2,400 extra supply teachers, all of whom are available in the classroom. However, I cannot see for a moment how the scheme can any longer be described as divisive. People have their normal pay increase, and the entitlement to go up the normal incremental scale. They now also have the entitlement to seek promotion on to the new scales that I described earlier, and they get the £2,000 uplift to boot, simply for being a good teacher in the classroom.

The fact that 200,000 teachers have applied illustrates that, far from this being something for a minority, it is for the majority of teachers who, I repeat—despite the president of the National Union of Teachers telling me off for saying so—are good teachers. We value them for being good teachers and we thank them for it.

## Sure Start (Romsey)

7. **Sandra Gidley** (Romsey): If he will make a statement on sure start provision in the Romsey constituency. [157914]

**The Minister for Public Health (Yvette Cooper):** Currently there are no sure start programmes in the Romsey constituency, but 260 have been announced. Districts are chosen on the basis of levels of deprivation. The district of Southampton has two sure start programmes, although the catchment areas for both programmes are outside the Romsey constituency.

**Sandra Gidley:** It is true that Southampton was encouraged to make an application for sure start. The city council wanted to include the Flower estate, which is part of Bassett ward in my constituency, but unfortunately the estate forms only a third of a very large ward which is otherwise regarded as affluent. Will the Minister

undertake to ensure that isolated pockets of deprivation, which all agencies agree need help, will be able to receive money in future, and that we do not rely solely on arbitrary ward boundaries?

**Yvette Cooper:** The hon. Lady has raised an important issue about how best to target small areas of deprivation. So far 260 sure start programmes have been targeted in that way, but we are committed to introducing 500 by 2004. Many other areas will have programmes over the next few years.

We have made clear our intention to look at different models when we are developing the new programmes, and to focus on smaller pockets of deprivation that the current targeting method might not pick up. Every child living in poverty deserves the best possible start in life, wherever he or she lives.

### New Deal for Young People

8. **Mr. Nigel Beard** (Bexleyheath and Crayford): What assessment he has made of the involvement of different sectors of the economy in the new deal for young people. [157915]

**The Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities (Ms Tessa Jowell):** The new deal has helped to cut long-term unemployment among young people by nearly 80 per cent. over the past four years. It is now the lowest for a generation, and a strong and stable economy has enabled businesses to create well over 1 million new jobs

The intensified training provided by the new deal is designed according to the demands of employers. New dealers will increasingly move into sectors where skill shortages have been a problem for businesses seeking to grow. For example, we are working with leading information technology companies through Ambition IT, which will enable 5,000 more unemployed people to train as computer technicians. Ambition Retail, a consortium of major high street shops, allows the possibility of 50,000 more jobs, and further jobs to come. Transco is recruiting at least 15,000 new dealers to train as gas fitters over the next few years.

The new deal is providing solutions for industry and jobs with prospects for unemployed people.

**Mr. Beard:** I have seen an excellent example of the way in which the new deal is working for both 16 to 25-year-olds and those over 25 in Bexleyheath and Crayford, and I know of the number and variety of doors that have been opened. Thameside, in the London borough of Bexley, has some of the greatest potential for business development in London, and the Thames gateway partnership is aimed at attracting new employers to the area. Will the new national network of training organisations be able to provide for the skills that employers may require, so that local people may retrain and benefit from the new opportunities that will arise?

**Ms Jowell:** That is precisely the intention of the combined efforts of national training organisations, learning and skills councils and the new deal. I hope very much that those opportunities will be extended to my hon. Friend's constituents and to the employers whom he mentions, but they should be under no illusion: were the Tories to be elected, the new deal would be scrapped.

**Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Minister could more accurately say that the new deal would be improved under the next Conservative Government. She knows that about a third of young people leaving the new deal go into jobs, and that half of them have lost those jobs within nine months. The record of the Wildcat Corporation in New York is 86 per cent. going into jobs, 94 per cent. of whom are still in them after 12 months. Now that the new deal taskforce has spent £175,000 taking advice from Wildcat, what has she learned about the reasons for the new deal failing to achieve the results that are achieved by Wildcat and that will be achieved by "Britain works" under the next Conservative Government?

**Ms Jowell:** The hon. Gentleman is wrong. We hear more invented figures with the purpose of discrediting the new deal, a programme that has halved long-term unemployment among young people and which the Conservatives are pledged to scrap. We are taking lessons from Wildcat because that is important in trying to develop more help for the most disadvantaged young people, especially the ambitious, sectorally focused, high skill programmes that I have already identified.

### School Language Colleges

9. **Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): If he will make a statement on schools with attached specialist language colleges. [157916]

**The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett):** In May 1997, there were 181 specialist schools and there are now 536, with an ambition to make that 650 by this September. Some 99 are language colleges.

**Dr. Iddon:** Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Little Lever school in my constituency, which achieved language college status and is already teaching five languages? The Japanese Government have funded a full-time teacher of Japanese and 15 Japanese women visited the school recently, dressed in national costume, and talked about their culture to the whole school. The teaching of Russian in the school has also prompted the art department to exchange its art work with a school in Russia. An international dimension has been spread across the whole curriculum of the school and out into the wider community.

**Mr. Blunkett:** I very much wish to congratulate the school. I have a list of the languages taught—French, German, Spanish, Urdu, Japanese, Russian, Italian and Cantonese, as well as starter courses in other languages. I only wish that I had been at the school when the Japanese visitors came, so that I could have enjoyed their costume and dancing. I congratulate the Japanese Government on their excellent initiative in funding the first year of the post and I hope that we can develop that with other embassies and countries.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What consideration has the Secretary of State given to making German rather than French the main foreign language taught in schools? One can spend four years at school learning French but find it very difficult to achieve an authentic accent, whereas after just 18 months of learning German even Germans can think one is a German, which is very satisfying. Teaching German also provides grammar, which has not been taught properly in schools since we stopped teaching Latin. Does he agree that die Zukunft ist Deutsch und nicht Französisch—the future is German, not French?

**Mr. Blunkett:** No, I do not.

**Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): I enjoyed that exchange and the Secretary of State will know that I, too, take an interest in specialist and language colleges. Given that the criteria for specialist schools are now so broad that it is in practice possible to be a selective school in virtually anything except one or two important academic subjects, and given that the Prime Minister was reported to have told the Association of Teachers and Lecturers recently that—in contrast to the Secretary of State's Green Paper—there seemed to be no remaining limits on the number of specialist schools, I invite him to give an indication of the longest timetable for implementation of the specialist schools programme. Can he tell the House whether any comprehensive schools will be left as what the Prime Minister's spokesperson so characteristically, inelegantly and grossly unfairly described as bog standard?

**Mr. Blunkett:** I have comprehensively dealt with the last point on more than one occasion. The hon. Gentleman made a Freudian slip—I think that the record will show that he used the word "selective" when he meant "specialism". There is no limit on the number of specialisms or the number of specialist schools. They are comprehensive. Only 5 per cent. of specialist schools operating in 2000 retained some historic element of selection. Of the rest, less than 7 per cent. admitted children on the basis of aptitude.

Specialist schools are non-selective comprehensive schools. Professor Jesson's research showed that 53 per cent. of pupils in those comprehensive specialist schools obtained five or more A to C grades compared with 43 per cent. of pupils in similar intake comprehensive schools. That shows that the specialist school programme works in the interests of raising standards as well as outreach to the wider community.

**Mr. Richard Allan** (Sheffield, Hallam): Does the Secretary of State agree that language learning should not be seen simply as a utilitarian exercise for those wishing to communicate with non-English speakers, but as something that can enrich a person's entire educational and cultural experience? In that context, does he support schemes such as Sheffield's multilingual city initiative, which seeks to spread language learning throughout the community? Sheffield nursery schools have very high rates of language learning which children then take with them throughout their lives.

**Mr. Blunkett:** The earlier a child can engage with other languages, the more successful that will be. I commend that and many other schemes that have developed, not only language tasters for nursery schools but those providing links with other parts of the world using information technology, including the multilingual programme that I have commended in the city of Sheffield. My only regret is that I learned a language called Esperanto at school. It was a very good idea at the time, but it got me into certain difficulties at the age of 16 when I used it in Paris.

**Charlotte Atkins** (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Is it not the case that specialist schools under this Government are very different from those under the previous Government, in that they must ensure that a third of their budget is shared with the local community? In addition, the Government are promoting joint bids, so that two high schools can bid jointly for specialist status. Specialist schools are encouraged to share their resources with the community with after-school clubs and so on, so that instead of the winner-takes-all approach of the previous Government, our specialist vision is about sharing resources and improving diversity throughout our communities.

**Mr. Blunkett:** A number of joint bids have already been approved. I want to see many more, particularly in areas such as my hon. Friend's constituency, where there are two schools within one small community. I want the collaborative approach to the bidding process to be extended so that schools talk with other schools and the education authority about which would be most appropriate for a particular specialism, and they work it through with their primary school feeders and the other secondary schools in the area. I want to ensure that they then reach out to the community so that the specialism is available to all, including adult learners.

## Exclusions

10. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): What recent representations he has received on the Government's policy on the exclusion of pupils from schools. [157917]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Jacqui Smith):** We have received a number of representations from hon. Members, the head teacher associations, local education authorities, schools and parents, many of whom welcome the extra investment that the Government are making in educating excluded pupils and providing in-school units for disruptive pupils.

**Mr. Amess:** Will the Government please reconsider their ridiculous policy of setting targets for the number of children excluded from schools? In particular, will the Minister reflect on the damaging effects of circular 10/99, which has meant that in my constituency when a child was caught bringing drugs into school and the parents appealed, the child was reinstated on the basis of being found with drugs but not caught selling them? Does she appreciate how damaging that is to the morale of teachers and, in particular, the effect that it has had on the headmaster?

**Jacqui Smith:** I have corresponded with the hon. Gentleman about that matter. We have listened to head teacher associations and strengthened our guidance to exclusion appeals panels. My right hon. Friend the

Secretary of State has made it clear that we do not expect head teachers to keep disruptive children in schools, and that we do not expect appeals panels to reinstate children excluded for selling drugs.

**Mr. Tony McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is right for the Government to give schools that have a disproportionate number of children with very challenging behaviour every support, and that targets for exclusions should not be set where the local circumstances make it clear that they are unrealistic?

**Jacqui Smith:** My hon. Friend is right. We need to provide support for schools, which is why schools have welcomed the resources that we are making available for these purposes. This Government are making available 10 times the amount of money made available by the previous Government. As a result, there are 1,000 learning support units in our schools providing the support that disruptive pupils need. The removal of those pupils from the classroom enables children to learn and teachers to teach. Such initiatives, and the money to back them up, were noticeably lacking under the previous Government.

**Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): Is the Minister concerned about children who have had to be excluded from school because they have contracted tuberculosis? What talks is she having with her colleagues in the Department of Health about reinstating the screening and vaccination programme that the Government dropped several years ago?

**Jacqui Smith:** I have had discussions with my colleagues in the Department of Health, and the vaccination programme is being reinstated. However, the head teacher and the health authorities involved in the recent case in Leicestershire have made it clear that the children attending the school received screening where it was necessary, and that they were easily treated. Action in that regard is being taken by my Department and the Department of Health, and by local health and education authorities.

**Mr. John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings): How does the Minister reconcile her answer on exclusions with the maintenance and imposition of arbitrary exclusion targets? Those targets force schools to put up with disruptive and often violent pupils, who damage the opportunities of other children and undermine the morale of teachers already doing a very tough job. In addition, the targets call into question the judgment of governors, who make every effort to put first the interests of the whole school. Will the Minister take this opportunity to abandon those arbitrary targets and to put her trust in the professional judgment of heads and teachers? In that way she will back up our schools, governors, parents and pupils.

**Jacqui Smith:** We do trust the professional judgment of our head teachers. We also accept what they have made clear to us—that they need the resources to support them in dealing with disruptive pupils before they get as far as exclusion, and in making sure that excluded pupils also receive the sort of education that they need outside schools. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) recently admitted that when exclusion levels trebled under the previous Government, excluded pupils received as little as two to three hours' education a week.

I recall from my time as a teacher that, under the previous Government, the lack of resources and the fact that there were no learning support units in place meant that there was no choice other than to exclude a child or do nothing. This Government have provided 10 times more resources for schools and local education authorities than did the previous Government. We trust the professionalism of head teachers, and we have made available to schools and local education authorities the resources that they need to deal with disruptive pupils.

## Schools (Ilford, South)

11. **Mr. Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): If he will make a statement on direct support given by his Department to schools in Ilford, South since May 1997. [157918]

**The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris):** Schools in Ilford, South received over £0.5 million through the school standards grant in 2000–01, and will receive more than £1.1 million in this financial year. Since 1997, they have also been allocated over £3 million through the new deal for schools. All schools in Redbridge have benefited from increases of £33.3 million in the education standard spending assessment.

**Mr. Gapes:** I am grateful for that reply. When I visited one of the high schools in my constituency which has technology college status, the head teacher told me that she had never had so much money. The school serves the most deprived part of my constituency. People from all over the world live there, and the parents of the children at the school speak probably as many as 100 different languages. Is it not a good sign that the Government are providing resources for those priorities? Can my right hon. Friend please ensure that the programmes that are already in place and the sure start programme, which is also benefiting my constituency, will continue for the next five years?

**Ms Morris:** I am pleased to hear of the success of the schools in my hon. Friend's constituency. I record my thanks to the teachers in those schools. The improvements in results at all age groups have been faster than the national average and that is down to the hard work of teachers and support assistants. I pay tribute to them. It is interesting that the message that we have had from the head teacher in my hon. Friend's constituency is exactly the same as that from the infants school in Worcestershire. There is more money, they have never had so much money and they welcome it. As the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) said, we trust the professional judgment of teachers, and that is their message. I am delighted to reiterate that the increase in funding for education over the past four years will continue in the next Parliament.

## Sixth Forms (Lancashire)

12. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): If he will make a statement on the impact of his future funding proposals for sixth forms in schools in Lancashire. [157919]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. Malcolm Wicks):** Schools can only gain from our proposals because their funding levels are protected by our real-terms guarantee: that their funding will be maintained at the 2000-01 level plus an annual uprating, provided that their numbers do not fall. This is an unprecedented guarantee. Schools have never before had a commitment to guarantee their real-terms funding in this way.

**Mr. Jack:** I do not think that the head of the Lytham St. Anne's high technology college in my constituency would have understood much of the Minister's answer. The words from the Dispatch Box would give him little comfort about the fact that he is still struggling to deliver the new A-level curriculum. In addition, there is growing suspicion, now that the learning and skills councils are responsible for funding sixth-form education, about whether there will be discrimination against schools with a traditional sixth form. Can the Minister make an unequivocal statement today that the learning and skills councils will not discriminate against schools with traditional sixth forms and that such schools will be properly funded in future?

**Mr. Wicks:** We have provided extra resources for curriculum 2000 for the new AS-level regime. Today I have given an unprecedented real-terms guarantee about the funding of those schools. I am sure that that will be good news for the head teacher, pupils and parents of that school. With the new learning and skills councils, which take over funding from April 2002, there will be a new regime. We are consulting and listening hard. It is important for each and every school with a sixth form that the funding is maintained. The role of schools with sixth forms is paramount in our education policy.

**Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): Is it not a fact that the sixth forms at schools such as Haberghan and St. Theodore's in Burnley, like those in the rest of Lancashire, will be able to go forward and build on their success of the past four years and that they have nothing to worry about? Nobody should be putting scare stories around about what the Government are doing.

**Mr. Wicks:** I congratulate those schools on their work. With curriculum 2000 our young people at 16 can now study four or five subjects rather than be narrowed down to two or three. I hope that no political party will try to dig out from the skip of scaremongering stories to the effect that we are against school sixth forms. We are not. Our guarantee ensures that their funding is safe with the Labour Government.

**Teacher Recruitment (North-East Lincolnshire)**

13. **Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): What proposals he has for improving teacher recruitment in North-East Lincolnshire. [157920]

**The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris):** Schools in north-east Lincolnshire are already benefiting from the fact that there are more teachers in post in England than at any time since 1984. They come on top of an expansion of the graduate teacher programme to 2,250 places in England in a full year, the introduction nationally of new courses for those returning to teaching and further improvements to teachers' pay, including a 6 per cent. rise for newly qualified teachers.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Like everyone else, I am delighted at the Government's efforts to improve teacher recruitment. That is only right and proper. However, we have a particular problem in north-east Lincolnshire in that more than 12 schools now have 49 vacancies: seven in technology, seven in English and seven in mathematics. It is important that kids from Grimsby should not be disadvantaged by any prolongation of this crisis. Will the Government consider special incentives for the recruitment of teachers to areas of particular difficulty and, within that, special incentives for recruitment to schools in disadvantaged areas?

**Ms Morris:** My hon. Friend is right. There is a series of measures—apart from the general ones that I mentioned in my answer—aimed at shortage subjects and at those areas of the country that have particular difficulty in recruiting. This is the time of the year when vacancies occur, because it is the point at which teachers move from one school to another—clearly, every school in every local authority will be advertising. I know that my hon. Friend will be reassured that in each of the areas that he mentioned there have been large increases in applicants to start teacher training this year. I know that they will take a year to come through, whereas, of course, this September, the extra students—more than 2,400—who started training last year will have completed their training and will be joining schools. I very much hope that schools in his constituency will be able to recruit from them as well as from the record number of people who are leaving teacher training.

## Business of the House

12.30 pm

**Mrs. Angela Browning** (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the Leader of the House please give the business for the coming week?

**The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett):** MONDAY 30 APRIL—Second Reading of the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill.

TUESDAY 1 MAY—Remaining stages of the Social Security Fraud Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 2 MAY—Motion to approve standing orders relating to the Regulatory Reform Act 2001.

The Chairman of Ways and Means has named opposed private business for consideration at Seven o'clock.

Motion relating to the establishment of a working group on provision for former Members.

THURSDAY 3 MAY—Debate on the International Development White Paper—"Making Globalisation Work for the Poor" on a Motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 4 MAY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will include:

MONDAY 7 MAY—The House will not be sitting.

TUESDAY 8 MAY—Remaining stages of the Private Security Industry Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 9 MAY—Remaining stages of the International Criminal Court Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 10 MAY—Opposition Day [9th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

FRIDAY 11 MAY—Private Member's Bills.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for the first two weeks after the May day bank holiday will be as follows:

THURSDAY 10 MAY—Debate on "Creative Industries".

THURSDAY 17 MAY—Debate on employment zones.

The House will wish to know that on Wednesday 2 May, there will be a debate relating to a common asylum procedure and uniform status for persons granted asylum, in European Standing Committee B.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

*[Wednesday 2 May 2001: European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union document: 13119/00, Towards a common asylum procedure and a uniform status for persons granted asylum. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee report: HC 28-viii (2000-01).]*

**Mrs. Browning:** I am grateful to the Leader of the House. Will she give the House some indication as to when we might expect the dates for the Whit recess to be announced? I am sure that Members on both sides will be interested in receiving those.

Will the Leader of the House confirm that the next Treasury questions, scheduled for Thursday 10 May, will actually take place? The reason I ask is that if there is any question that that session will not take place on 10 May, the House will be looking for an opportunity next week for the Chancellor to come here to share with us the concerns that he shared with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. In his speech to that bank, he clearly expressed anxiety about the way in which the British economy might be affected by the fall-out from the American downturn. That is of particular interest to the House, because during the past four years we understood that the Chancellor had abolished the economic cycle. However, clearly, the economic cycle is back and the Dispatch Box would be the appropriate place for the Chancellor to explain why, having abolished it, it is back.

We also note that next week, on 1 May, the House will consider the remaining stages of the Social Security Fraud Bill. Will the Leader of the House identify whether there will be time for the House to look at another matter regarding social security? I realise the constraints and the narrowness of the debate on remaining stages, but as the appropriate Ministers will be on the Treasury Bench that day, I am sure that the House would like the opportunity to question them about the £3.5 million the Government have spent on advertising benefit fraud, especially when it turns out that the advertising merely resulted in a distance learning package for those who want to learn how to do it.

Finally, we note today, from our monitors, that the announcement has been made of the 15 so-called people's peers. The right hon. Lady is deeply involved in this procedure and will be aware that when the Government axed the hereditary peers, they promised that, during this Parliament, they would set up a cross-party Committee of both Houses to address future reforms of another place. Despite our pressing them to do so, and our willingness to serve on it, they have not done so, but have announced the people's peers. Surprisingly, we note that the 15, chosen from 3,000 applicants, include three professors and seven knights—people who I am sure will make a valuable contribution, but who would otherwise have been obvious candidates under the normal procedures. I wonder whether the right hon. Lady could tell us what exactly the Government's definition of the people is these days.

**Mrs. Beckett:** The hon. Lady asked me for an indication of the dates of the Whitsun recess, which slightly surprises me as I have observed during the time that I have been in this post that every time that we announce the dates of a recess, someone on the Conservative Benches complains that we have only just come back from one. As we have only just come back from the Easter recess, I will bear the hon. Lady's observations in mind, but I am not in a position to give her the dates today.

The hon. Lady asked me about the Chancellor finding an opportunity to come to the House. I was really quite surprised by her remarks because my right hon. Friend has never ever suggested that the Government had abolished the business cycle. Indeed, it is precisely because we know that the business cycle continues to exist, and will always continue to exist, that he has placed such emphasis on so managing the economy that we can have economic stability and stable economic policy, even as the business cycle proceeds. So, far from ever having suggested that there was no such thing as the economic or business cycle, my right hon. Friend has clearly always understood the opposite, but understood also that it is the

duty of Government to try to mitigate the ups and downs of the business cycle. The Conservative party signally failed to do that in all the years in which it was in power.

The hon. Lady asked me about the new list of peers—of course those appointments were made by the Appointments Commission—and she appeared to suggest that in some way the current procedures are defective. I have not had much time to scrutinise the list, but I understand that significantly more women and more people from the ethnic minorities have been appointed than was the case under the previous system. That seems to me to be evidence of good judgment on the commission's part. However, the principal difference is that this procedure is open and transparent, and that it is not a matter of peers being appointed simply on the decision and the judgment of the Prime Minister, which had always been the case under previous Prime Ministers. It is time that the Conservative party gave my right hon. Friend credit for being the first Prime Minister ever to give away patronage.

The hon. Lady then asked me about the issue of social security advertising—

**Mrs. Browning:** What about the joint Committee?

**Mrs. Beckett:** I beg her pardon; I must have lost that question in my notes. Yes, the Government intend to pursue joint discussions about how we handle the future development of the upper House. I recognise, and am pleased that the hon. Lady has placed it on the record, that the Conservative party is not unwilling to take part in such discussions. We shall certainly bear that in mind and we hope that we shall be able, over time, to get some agreement on how the further reform of the upper House should work.

The final issue that the hon. Lady raised with me was that of Government advertising, and she suggested in particular that Ministers from the Department of Social Security should be discussing the issue of DSS advertising. I thought that she gave the impression that she believed that this was misplaced spending on the Government's part. It may be slightly unfortunate for the hon. Lady that it is the case, as I am sure that she must now be aware, that, in real terms, the expenditure on Government advertising in this year is very close to the expenditure undertaken by the Government of her party in 1987. Of course, what is particularly unfortunate is that the hon. Lady chose the example of social security, because if the previous Conservative Government had been prepared to spend a little more on advertising the consequences of their policies in 1987, perhaps many people would have understood that they were taking away their rights to widows' pensions.

**Mr. Joe Ashton** (Bassetlaw): May I thank my right hon. Friend and you, too, Mr. Speaker, for the motion which is on the Order Paper for next Wednesday to set up a working group on the problems of ex-MPs—a proposal that is long overdue? It is not intended to provide any financial assistance and it will not cost the taxpayer any money.

In the past, no inquiry has been held into what happens when MPs lose their seats or when they retire.

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): Declare your interest.

**Mr. Ashton:** The right hon. Gentleman can jeer as much as he likes, but this is a serious business. More than 600 MPs have left the House—half of them have retired—since about 1987. No one knows what has happened to them, about their jobs or their problems, or about what advice they might need.

**Mr. Tony Banks** (West Ham): We all know where Jonathan Aitken has been.

**Mr. Ashton:** Well, we expect silly jokes from people who have a good job, and who will have a good job after the election, but the fact is that after the previous election many people lost their jobs, including friends of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth).

The Data Protection Act 1998 has made it virtually impossible to find out such information on a voluntary basis because it is not possible to gain the relevant names and addresses. Those are the things that we should debate seriously next Wednesday.

I am sure that the motion has the support of the Chief Whips of every party. You have done a great deal of work on the issue, Mr. Speaker, so has the Leader of the House, and I should like to thank you both for that.

**Mrs. Beckett:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. He makes a very important point: there is cross-party support for a discussion to find out whether a voluntary organisation could be set up. He also makes the important point, which I certainly had not properly taken on board in the past and which may not be familiar to all Members, that partly because of the Data Protection Act 1998, there is no record of what has happened to former MPs or, indeed, to their spouses, or widows or widowers. It is extremely difficult for people to make contact.

Of course people are occasionally in touch with the welfare organisations, but there are many more with whom no one is in touch, some of whom are in considerable difficulties. My hon. Friend and others—literally, on all sides of the House—are interested in finding out whether it is possible to form some sort of voluntary organisation of former Members, which can keep in touch so that people can gain advice and support from others in similar circumstances.

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): Presumably, Phoenix the calf cannot now qualify to be a people's peer, but will the Leader of the House assure us that that great national asset can be used in future Government advertising? Clearly, that would be a great deal more effective than some recent Government advertising.

May we have a statement on the role of the Electoral Commission? Clearly, the commission has a very important responsibility, and perhaps it should be involved in assessing the role of Government advertising in the 12 months before a general election. That is but one of the many questions now being asked about the forthcoming election. Many other important issues do not seem to have been properly tackled by the commission.

*[Mr. Paul Tyler]*

Before any possible date for Dissolution, can we have a report on the commission's role in adjudicating on such matters? Obviously, some regulation is required if only because the taxpayer is getting very bad value for money in relation to Government advertising.

The right hon. Lady has referred to the 1987 advertising expenditure of more than £104 million by the then Thatcher Government, most of which was spent on selling privatisation. The public are concerned not just in case there is an attempt to skew the electoral process, but because such advertising represents very bad value for money. May I also draw her attention to the obvious necessity to review the fact that we should have fixed-term Parliaments? Several of her colleagues believe that greater attention should be given to that proposal. Fixed terms would enable the Electoral Commission to adjudicate more effectively on such matters as advertising.

**Mrs. Beckett:** To answer the hon. Gentleman's main point about Government advertising, I point out that it is not a matter for the Electoral Commission. However, the issue is already under scrutiny by the National Audit Office, which always monitors the effectiveness and value of any Central Office of Information advertising campaign.

As for the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that, in some way, the advertising is unsuitable, unnecessary and totally ineffective, I point out that much of the advertising has been on police recruitment, and he may have noticed that there has been a substantial increase in recruits. Advertising has also led to an increase in teacher recruitment, and it has also encouraged people to join or to return to the health service, and there has been a huge take-up on that.

There has been advertising on issues—such as the working families tax credit, the national minimum wage, the children's tax credit and the minimum income guarantee—in which we think it is important for people to claim their entitlements. Sadly—to some extent, I suppose it is inevitable—if we wait for the news media to communicate to people that there is a new entitlement to, say, the children's tax credit that will start at the beginning of April, we would have to wait a very long time. The only way to ensure that people are aware of their entitlements is through Government advertising.

As for the hon. Gentleman's remarks about Phoenix the calf, at least the one thing that we can be fairly confident about is that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister will not be photographed sitting in a field cuddling it.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): I wonder whether my right hon. Friend shared my misfortune last week. Although I know that she was in this country, I was in Turkey where I turned on the television and watched CNN. I had the misfortune of viewing the shadow Secretary of State for Defence talking about foot and mouth in the United Kingdom. Members on both sides are rightly concerned about its impact on the tourism industry, but they would have heard him saying that foot and mouth was out of control. He referred to funeral pyres and to all the matters that have turned tourists off coming to this country. Will my right hon. Friend advise the House as to what we should do with the Tories who continually talk Britain down?

**Mrs. Beckett:** My hon. Friend makes a very powerful point. I was not able to watch CNN, so I did not see the interview to which she refers. Given that I understand that we are all anxious about the impact on tourism and the economy generally of the knock-on effects of the crisis, it is most unfortunate if any hon. Member, in whatever position or circumstance, acts in a way that causes greater alarm and despondency to be spread in what is an important market. I wish that I could say that it was uncharacteristic behaviour on the part of the hon. Gentleman to whom my hon. Friend referred, but I fear that I cannot.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney** (North-West Cambridgeshire): Does the Leader of the House recall that at the last business questions she said, following my encouragement, that she would consider scheduling a debate on the decisions concerning parliamentary pay and other associated matters? She has not done so, but I would be grateful if she would explain why. Does she not recall that, in the final weeks of the previous Parliament, she and her colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench were extremely keen that the then Government should table such matters for decision on the basis that existing Members would be better able to judge needs and that those who were leaving the House—either voluntarily or involuntarily—would receive pension help as a consequence? In the light of that and her own past behaviour, will she reflect further and schedule such a debate for next week?

**Mrs. Beckett:** As the right hon. Gentleman said, I heard the point that he made and I have given the matter consideration. He attends business questions, so he will be aware of the enormous pressure and the requests for many issues to be debated. It has not been possible to find time for this issue to be aired at this time.

**Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the preparations in South Africa for the Rio plus 10 conference in September next year to mark the 10th anniversary of the 1992 Earth summit, set up to establish greater international co-operation on environmental policy? In view of the crisis in international environmental policy caused by the decision of the United States Government to oppose the Kyoto protocol, will she find time in the near future for a debate so that we can consider the response of all relevant Departments to that conference?

**Mrs. Beckett:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. He takes a keen interest in the issue, which he assiduously pursues. However, I cannot find time to have such a debate on the Floor of the House in the near future, although he might consider the opportunities offered by Westminster Hall. It strikes me that although the debate on the international development White Paper will focus on globalisation and its impact on the poor, other aspects of world development also impinge on the poor, and the environment is one of them. Far be it from me to impinge on the prerogatives of the Chair, but my hon. Friend might try to fit the matter into the context of that debate.

**Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): The whole House will have been disappointed with the right hon. Lady's

response to my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir B. Mawhinney) about the Senior Salaries Review Board report, especially as it relates to information technology. She has announced a debate on former Members, but seems to have ignored the SSRB's recommendation that future Members need the relevant decision to be made before the general election. Most decisions on information technology in this place occur without a debate on the Floor of the House, but will she at least table a motion—perhaps also for debate on Wednesday—to set up a group to ensure that all Members of Parliament are entitled to a supplied computer when they arrive? They would receive such equipment in any other job. That would save hundreds of thousands of pounds that will be wasted if the decision to supply that equipment is not taken before the election.

**Mrs. Beckett:** I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I am aware that he has a keen interest in such issues and is a campaigning member of the Information Committee. However, I must explain two things. First, it is clear from the SSRB report and many other discussions that a considerable amount of work and planning needs to be done before the new systems are fully operational. I understand his anxiety about newly elected Members and about making decisions in a changing context. However, I am not clear that hon. Members will be satisfied with the service available to them if the kit from central supply is provided in the immediate aftermath of the election, as he suggests. The SSRB report makes it clear that a substantial transitional period is needed.

Secondly, next week, the Modernisation Committee is taking evidence from hon. Friends who have been involved in such matters. That is, in part, because of concern expressed about the adequacy of IT support and how it will need to be developed substantially to implement the SSRB report recommendations.

**Ms Debra Shipley** (Stourbridge): Will my right hon. Friend reaffirm the Government's commitment to allow MPs a free vote on hunting and that that will be held in Government time?

**Mrs. Beckett:** As my hon. Friend knows, the Hunting Bill is in the upper House. The Government's approach has always been to allow a free vote on it. I have no reason to suppose that that stance is likely to change.

**Mr. Peter Brooke** (Cities of London and Westminster): Will the Leader of the House comment on the state of the approach roads to the Palace of Westminster on Tuesday, especially as those people who intend to protest in my constituency on that day have not sought the approval of the Metropolitan police for that line of route?

**Mrs. Beckett:** I take the right hon. Gentleman's point, although I am not sure that the protesters have a line of route. He will appreciate that it is not wholly a matter for me. However, I am aware that the House authorities have been in discussion with the Metropolitan police who are mindful of their responsibilities to the citizens of London and the House.

**Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): The Government have made many good efforts to help tourism over the past few weeks, and my right hon. Friend will be aware that Calderdale has a thriving tourism industry. However, is she aware that Tory-controlled Calderdale council, in a cost-cutting exercise, has closed almost all the public toilets in Calderdale, thus sending a message that if people come to Halifax and the Calder valley, they cannot spend a penny? Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the effects that that is having on tourism and, obviously, on public hygiene?

**Mrs. Beckett:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. I was not aware of the serious impact of that decision, and I can perfectly understand her concern on behalf of her constituents, let alone potential visitors to her constituency. I fear that I cannot undertake to find time for a debate on the Floor of the House, but it sounds to me like a classic for Westminster Hall.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): It is disappointing that even in what appear to be the dying days of this Parliament the Government have not introduced a debate in their time on the national drugs strategy. Will the Leader of the House bear in mind the impact and seriousness of the problem facing the country, the effect on crime figures and on expense on education, health and social services, and the fact that in the past four years there has been only one debate on the subject in Government time, and introduce a debate as soon as she can?

**Mrs. Beckett:** Of course I take the hon. Lady's point that those are important issues, but as she, too, regularly attends business questions she will be aware that it is only one of many subjects of substance which the House likes to debate from time to time, and it is not always easy to find time for debates on the Floor. However, I recommend to her, as I have done to others, the attractions of the extra debating time available in Westminster Hall.

**Mr. Gerry Steinberg** (City of Durham): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the problem of term-time workers? Thousands of workers, mainly women, in educational establishments throughout the country, particularly universities, are laid off during the holidays. They receive no pay and are denied benefits during that time, so for about 20 weeks of the year they have absolutely nothing to live on. Many women took the job on the basis that they were told by the Benefits Agency that they would qualify for benefits, and those benefits have now been stopped. During the time that they are off work, they receive no national insurance contributions, which will obviously have a detrimental effect on their pensions.

The problem has gone on for nearly five years and is being considered by the Law Lords in the other place. Will my right hon. Friend provide for a statement to be made to the House on how long it will take for a judgment to be made, bearing it in mind that many of these women basically have nothing to live on?

**Mrs. Beckett:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. As far as I can recall, this is a problem of considerable standing. I seem to remember it being raised some 15 or more years ago. He is right to express concern about the possibility that people have been given advice that has turned out not to be accurate. I fear that I cannot assure him that there will be a statement on the matter because the court case will continue in the near future,

*[Mrs. Beckett]*

but I can certainly draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in case there is any information that he can give him.

**Sir George Young** (North-West Hampshire): The Leader of the House has not announced time in the next two weeks for consideration of Commons amendments to the Health and Social Care Bill, leaving it inevitably vulnerable to an early Dissolution of the House. She will know that the Bill contains a measure that has all-party support, namely the introduction of free nursing care in nursing homes. She will also have heard the Prime Minister yesterday commit the Government to overturning a decision on the future of community health councils. Are the Government seriously considering holding up a measure that is popular so that they can proceed with a measure that is unpopular?

**Mrs. Beckett:** With respect, there is no question of the Government holding that up. The right hon. Gentleman will find that the Bill is still in the House of Lords and, indeed, that the Lords have not yet finished their consideration. He makes an important point about the further consideration needed in this House at some stage, but it is not usual to schedule that before the Bill has finished its proceedings in another place, as he will appreciate.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): Further to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), is my right hon. Friend aware that I have been in correspondence with the trustees of the pension fund on several occasions regarding the need to deal with the financial position of Members of or near retirement age who retired mainly in 1987 and before? Because of their salary at the time they almost certainly receive a pittance of a pension. As there is a substantial surplus in the pension fund, would it not be right for us to look carefully at what can be done to assist Members who, through no fault of their own, retired on such a small pension?

**Mrs. Beckett:** I understand the point made by my hon. Friend. Indeed, when I recently made inquiries, I was astonished to discover that only 8 per cent. of retired Members who now draw pensions from the parliamentary pension fund are entitled to the full retirement pension, whatever its level. However, I fear that my hon. Friend is wrong to believe that there is a surplus in the pension fund; there was a fairly substantial surplus but decisions taken by the Opposition when in government resulted in that surplus disappearing. Indeed, according to the Government Actuary, there is a potential for the fund to go into deficit.

I therefore fear that I cannot undertake to do as my hon. Friend suggests, but I acknowledge the point that he made. This is a matter for the House and if it decides to set up a voluntary organisation for Members who have retired from the House, voluntarily or otherwise, I hope that it will be handled more expeditiously in future.

**Mr. Roy Beggs** (East Antrim): Has the Leader of the House had an opportunity to examine documents from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that were released on 19 April under the 30-year rule? In one of those documents, the British ambassador to Ireland, Mr. John Peck, wrote to the then Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home on 16 December and commented on the aftermath of the 1970 arms trial in the Republic. He said:

"whatever the verdict, if Mr. Haughey was not part of a conspiracy, he was at any rate up to the neck in a scheme to import arms illegally."

Today's edition of the *Irish Independent* reports:

"Senior Garda officers reported on a meeting between Charles Haughey and a senior IRA man months before the arms crisis rocked the Government, according to documents held in the Dail."

Will the Leader of the House agree to provide time for a debate on the content of those FCO documents and any additional information that is made available by the Irish Republic, bearing in mind the strong suspicion in Northern Ireland that some Ministers in the Irish Government at that time played a big part in assisting in the creation of the Provisional IRA, which then gave us 30 years of murder and terror in Northern Ireland?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I think that the Leader of the House will be able to reply.

**Mrs. Beckett:** I was not aware of the issue in the 30-year-old documents to which the hon. Gentleman referred, but I have no doubt that those documents will be the subject of much analysis and discussion. Although he raised substantial and weighty issues, I fear that I cannot undertake to find time for a debate in the near future. I believe that Northern Ireland questions will be held the week after next, and he may find an opportunity to raise the matter then. I suspect, however, that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland will decline to take responsibility for something that happened 30 years ago.

**Ms Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North): I know that my right hon. Friend is aware that people suffering from multiple sclerosis are concerned about the non-availability of the drug beta interferon for certain forms of the illness. I have a number of constituents who are anxiously awaiting the decision of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. Can my right hon. Friend suggest anything that would cause NICE to make an early decision, as my constituents and many other MS sufferers and their families are awaiting that decision with anxiety and are currently in limbo?

**Mrs. Beckett:** I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes. I, too, have constituents who are concerned about the matter, as I expect most hon. Members do. I shall certainly draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health. We all understand the anxiety of those who hope and believe that they might benefit from the availability of such treatment. One of the reasons that it is being considered by NICE is that not everyone does benefit, although obviously people hope that they will benefit. Everyone wants the consideration by NICE to be thorough and scientifically sound.

**Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): As the right hon. Lady knows, Sunday 29 April is census day. Will she join me in thanking the teams of volunteers who have been

delivering forms throughout the country? Can she assure the House that every precaution has been taken in the delivery and collection of forms to ensure that there will be no threat of the spread of foot and mouth disease? Can she also give me an assurance that every property that is occupied has been registered on the electoral roll for census purposes and will receive a form, so that we can have a full census of rural as well as urban areas?

**Mrs. Beckett:** As far as I am aware, it is believed that every property has been included, but I shall draw the hon. Lady's remarks to the attention of my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury. A great deal of thought and discussion has gone into the handling of the census, in order to make sure that nothing is done that might exacerbate matters related to foot and mouth disease. The hon. Lady may recall that some time ago, the person who is the overall head of the census operation made it plain that careful thought had been given to that, and that every effort would be made to ensure that there were no problems.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that while it has been a pretty good day for Lady Quango and the other 14 people's peers, it has also been a relatively good day for 1,500 women canteen workers who have been battling for 18 years to get equal pay? Will there be a statement about the fact that now, a meeting with some unreconstructed socialists like myself, my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) and other members of the miners group has finally resulted in a meeting with the brand-new Minister for Energy? The issue has been resolved and the canteen women will get an average of £10,000 apiece. Some of them will receive up to £40,000. They have struggled for 18 years, and have been bailed out by a combination of Labour Members and a Minister in the new Labour team.

**Mrs. Beckett:** My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to a very welcome decision. I congratulate both of my hon. Friends, who have campaigned over a long period and assisted in putting the case, and my hon. Friend the Minister, who made the relevant decision.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): I endorse entirely the comments of the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton), and I am delighted that the debate is taking place.

My question relates indirectly to foot and mouth disease and the measures introduced by the Government to give business rate relief to certain rural areas affected by the outbreak. I have had some support and I have had the ear of the Minister for the Environment, who heads the rural taskforce. It is extraordinary that Macclesfield, which has a huge, sparsely populated rural area in which livestock is the major agricultural occupation, is not eligible for assistance under the scheme. My constituency is not the only area affected. Will the right hon. Lady arrange for the Minister to make a statement on the issue, so that he can explain what action he is taking to include within the scheme Macclesfield and other areas that are currently omitted?

**Mrs. Beckett:** I fear that I cannot undertake to ask my right hon. Friend to come to the House again in the very near future, but I can certainly draw to his attention the hon. Gentleman's perfectly proper concerns. I am confident that he will want to inform the hon. Gentleman about the discussions that have been taking place on the issue that he raises.

**Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Now that British Steel has admitted that it lied to the work force of H. H. Robertson for business reasons, I have written to all of the 28 other hon. Members whose constituents are affected by the closure. In view of the very important issue that the decision raises and the fact that it could bring into disrepute the actions of many honourable company directors throughout the country, will my right hon. Friend find time for an early debate on the subject, so that the same outrage cannot happen again?

**Mrs. Beckett:** I know that my hon. Friend's concern will be shared by the other hon. Members whose constituents are affected, although I fear that I cannot undertake to find time for a debate or statement on the matter in the near future. I remind him of next week's DTI questions, as he might find an opportunity to raise the matter then.

**Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): The Leader of the House should be aware that we are now halfway through the Committee stage of the International Criminal Court Bill, which she has listed for completion on 9 May. The Committee is considering an 80-something clause Bill, but we are now debating clause 2 stand part. Before she says that our progress is the result of an Opposition filibuster, I point out that we are discussing immensely important matters. I made a speech during which 41 interventions were made, mostly by Labour Members. We were discussing the operation of the statute of Rome and its important consequences. We must have further debates about universal jurisdiction and diplomatic immunity, and provide an opportunity for the Government to explain to Amnesty International and others why there is no such provision. It is immensely important that the crucial issues that are involved continue to be fully and properly debated. Will she reconsider the timetabling of the final stages of the Bill for 9 May, so that we can extend the Committee stage and have a proper debate on them? That may also create an opportunity to discuss the office costs allowance and other matters.

**Mrs. Beckett:** I have not been following closely the progress of the Bill in Committee, but I shall make some inquiries about the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises. Sadly, there is often difference of opinion among hon. Members about the time that is required to consider different aspects of proposed legislation, and I cannot undertake to take the decision that he suggests. Indeed, the House is bound by the programme motion that it carried. I shall, however, draw his remarks to the attention of the Minister who is in charge of the Bill.

**Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): My right hon. Friend will be aware that Saturday 28 April is workers' memorial day, which draws attention to the fact that 335,000 workers worldwide lose their lives each year as a result of their work. Will she give some thought to the possibility of erecting a plaque to commemorate the

*[Mr. Michael Clapham]*

workers in British industry who have lost their lives? I think that that would focus wonderfully the attention of this place on the need for appropriate health and safety legislation.

**Mrs. Beckett:** My hon. Friend makes an important point about the lives that are lost every year as a result of accidents and errors in the workplace. It is not for me to decide whether the House considers erecting a plaque, but he is right to draw our attention to the extent to which the issue should be of concern to hon. Members from all parties, as I am sure that it is.

**Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): Will the right hon. Lady consider with her ministerial colleagues the problem of unannounced visits by Ministers to other hon. Members' constituencies, which I fear might be a growing practice? She will remember our correspondence on the fact that she found herself at the canal museum in my constituency just before Easter without having let me know of her visit. I am sure that she inadvertently failed to do so, and when I remonstrated with her about the visit, I received a full and sufficient apology. Of course, I am not trying to pursue that. However, the incident gave rise to concern because the press and local councillors knew of the visit, but the Member of Parliament did not. My secretary tells me that it is possible for hon. Members to find out the postcode of any place on the parliamentary database in seconds or minutes. It is essential that Ministers take the point seriously.

**Mrs. Beckett:** The hon. Gentleman is right, and Ministers take the point seriously. He said that he was sure that I visited his constituency without notifying him inadvertently. He knows that that is the case because that formed part of the explanation that I sent him. Unfortunately, my office, which is most assiduous and conscientious about such matters, was misinformed.

However, I fear that the hon. Gentleman's secretary is not wholly correct. I know from experience—not of the visit that we are considering—correspondence and advice given to constituents by advice bureaux that the postcode is not always an adequate identifier of constituencies. All Ministers' private offices always take steps to ensure that local Members of Parliament are notified of visits. I hope that the offices of Opposition Front-Bench Members take the same steps; I am not sure whether that is always the case. We shall continue to pursue the policy.

**Mr. Ivan Henderson** (Harwich): I ask my right hon. Friend to seek assurances from Opposition Members about holding sensible debate on asylum issues, including during a pending general election campaign. In a council by-election that took place in my constituency last week, we retained a seat on a 4 per cent. swing to us. The Conservative candidate, whose name is Richard, but he likes to be called Dick, put out literature, which states:

"Elderly people are blocking vital beds in our hospitals because of the closure of local homes for them to be transferred to. Yet people who come to this country and have paid nothing get put up at the best hotels for free".

Can we have an assurance from Opposition Members that they will not use gutter politics when debating such a sensitive issue?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. That is not a matter for the Leader of the House.

## Foot and Mouth

1.17 pm

**The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown):** With permission, I would like to make a statement on the foot and mouth outbreak.

As I did on eight occasions before the Easter break, and have done once already this week in a session with the Select Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I wish to update the House on the latest position on the disease, set out the measures that the Government are taking and give hon. Members the opportunity to raise points with me. I also wish to inform the House about the outcome of the Agriculture Council in Luxembourg this week and of my bilateral discussions there with the Dutch Agriculture Minister.

As of 11 am today, there had been 1,481 confirmed cases of foot and mouth disease. For ease of reference, the House will wish to know that I am putting details of the number of cases in each constituency in the Library today. They will be updated daily. I am also making available to individual Members full details of the cases in their own constituencies, to supplement the early warning system that has been in place for some weeks.

More than 2 million animals have now been slaughtered for disease control purposes. Around three quarters are sheep, 20 per cent. are cattle and 5 per cent. are pigs. A further 475,000 animals have been slaughtered under the welfare slaughter scheme.

The latest figures show that 152,000 animals await slaughter and 218,000 carcases await disposal in Great Britain. The backlog of data not entered on the database that holds those figures has been greatly reduced. None the less, the figures still tend to overstate the position. There is a disposal backlog in Devon of around 85,000 animals and we are addressing that as a top priority. There are no significant disposal backlogs in other areas of the country.

We continue to work closely with the Department of Health on the public health issues surrounding the various disposal routes. There are no completely risk-free options. Updated and consolidated guidelines were published on Tuesday. The method of disposal in each case is the safest and most effective in the circumstances. The House will be aware that the numbers of confirmed cases continue to fall, week on week. From the highest point of 43 cases a day, on average, in the week ending 1 April, the average number of cases has fallen to 16 in the week to 22 April.

We have been able to lift restrictions in nine different areas where there have been no new cases for 30 days and thorough veterinary and serological testing has taken place. As a result, the tighter movement restrictions associated with infected areas have been lifted from some 5,000 sq km—1.25 million acres—of the country, affecting about 12,500 farms.

These figures show that we are continuing to bear down on the outbreak. We can be cautiously optimistic about the future course of the epidemic. The scientific advice was that the single most important action we should take against the spread of the disease was to reduce the time between report and slaughter to 24 hours. That has been our policy and it has been shown to be the right one.

The Government's policies for slaughter on infected premises within 24 hours, and on contiguous premises within 48 hours, have been crucial to the control of

the epidemic. Following formal advice from the chief scientific adviser and the chief veterinary officer, I can today announce for England a broadening of the existing areas of discretion for local veterinary judgment in the light of the developing disease situation. The devolved Administrations will be making their own statements.

The joint advice from the chief scientist and the chief vet follows detailed consultation with the veterinary profession and with the expert scientific group advising the Government on the course of the disease. This development is not, as some have reported, a relaxation; its purpose is to improve the achievement of the policy by refining the instructions given to staff in the field.

The key points are as follows: we will continue to kill all animals that are dangerous contacts, which will include animals on a significant number of neighbouring farms and beyond; on other contiguous premises, susceptible animals will be killed. Cattle may, however, be spared if there is adequate biosecurity. This will be a matter for local veterinary judgment, taking account of all the circumstances. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has already published guidance—agreed with the veterinary profession—on the biosecurity measures that farmers can take to help protect their animals from infection. When cattle are not culled, they will be subject to regular veterinary patrols.

These refinements can be expected to provide some relief from automatic slaughter of cattle. They will not lead to a change in the policy of culling of pigs and sheep on contiguous premises. Pigs pose a high disease risk and can spread the virus. Sheep can carry the disease without showing symptoms, thereby causing further undetected spread.

Following consultation with interested parties, we shall be providing for the special circumstances of rare breeds of sheep, and of moorland and hefted flocks, based on tight biosecurity coupled with serological testing. Guidance on this will be issued to staff on the ground very shortly. These are complex matters of scientific and veterinary judgment. The new arrangements have to be right, to ensure that they meet real needs and contribute to, rather than hinder, disease control.

I would also like to update the House on the position regarding vaccination. The Government have given serious consideration to a cattle vaccination strategy in north Cumbria and possibly Devon, given the particular issues in those regions and, especially, the intensity of infection in certain areas and the forthcoming turnout of cattle from indoor housing to outdoor grazing. The Government accept the case for vaccinating cattle in those areas, but only if the vaccination programme is supported by a substantial majority of the farming community, by veterinarians, by the wider food industry and—I believe this to be crucial—by consumers.

As I told the Agriculture Committee on Monday, that level of support is simply not there, and the signs are that it will not now be achieved. Without that support, a vaccination programme would be very difficult to implement on the ground. We continue our discussions with all those who would be affected, but the case for a vaccination programme becomes less compelling as the number of daily confirmed cases and the weight of infection in the hotspot areas continues to fall.

I turn now to the livestock welfare disposal scheme. In the first week of April, 53,000 animals were slaughtered under the scheme, rising to 143,000 in the second week of April and more than 150,000 last week. Opening the scheme generated a great many applications, at one stage apparently totalling close to 2 million animals. All applications have now been checked. This process has removed many of the duplicated applications—one particular producer put in 14 separate applications for the same animals. There are now applications covering some 1.3 million animals. Well over half a million of those animals have now been dealt with—either slaughtered and disposed of or withdrawn voluntarily, or because there was no welfare case to answer. By the end of today the backlog in Great Britain will stand at less than three quarters of a million animals, and we are on course to have completely removed the backlog by mid-May.

The welfare disposal scheme has been established to deal with severe welfare problems arising from the FMD movement restrictions that cannot be dealt with by other means. I am glad that we have been able to extend progressively the options available to farmers to deal with welfare issues, and to re-establish routes for their perfectly healthy livestock to be sold into the food chain.

As of Monday of this week farmers within infected areas, but outside the 3 km protection zones surrounding infected premises, have been able to enter healthy livestock into the food chain. As a result of those changes, the vast majority of farmers have practicable alternatives to the welfare disposal scheme. I am confident that the rate of withdrawals from the welfare scheme backlog will accelerate as a result.

In the re-establishment of routes into the food chain across Great Britain as whole, it is imperative for the payment rates for the livestock welfare disposal scheme not to act as a disincentive to farmers by providing more attractive financial options than the market itself. In order to ensure that, I am announcing today that payment rates for categories of livestock normally slaughtered for meat or meat products have been revised. All animals collected for slaughter or slaughtered on-farm from Monday 30 April will receive the new payment rates.

The rates for cull and draft ewes, new season lamb, clean cattle, and pigs are being revised to a level that represents about 70 per cent. of current market prices. For hoggets and cull sows, a higher rate of 80 per cent. is being established. Arrangements have been put in hand to ensure that all who have animals killed under the scheme are aware of the financial returns they will receive before they formally hand over their animals. I still intend the scheme to be reviewed on 22 May; meanwhile, I shall discuss with the industry the separate market-related issues in respect of light lambs and cull sows that would normally have gone for export. It would be misleading to expect an early resumption of export markets, but taxpayers cannot be expected to buy out the problem.

In my statement on 27 March, I outlined a number of actions flowing from our initial assessment of the origins and spread of the disease. The consultation on the proposed ban on pigswill closed on 10 April. We received about 150 responses, nearly all of which favoured a ban. A number of detailed issues were raised; we are considering them as a matter of urgency, and I expect to make an announcement next week. We have also received a good many comments on our proposed 20-day standstill period, after movements on farms, for sheep, goats and cattle. Again, most representations are in favour, but a number of highly technical issues have emerged.

*[Mr. Nick Brown]*

Because of the considerable interest that has been expressed, I have decided—in response to an explicit request from the National Farmers Union—to extend the consultation period for a further month from the initial deadline of 11 May. Cross-departmental examination of the controls on commercial and personal imports of meat and meat products is well under way, and I shall have more to say about the matter in the near future.

At this week's meeting of the Agriculture Council, I reported in full to EU colleagues the progress that we have made to combat FMD, and acknowledged the help given us by the Commission and other member states. As before, there was strong support for our efforts and those of my Dutch colleague, and for our determination to eradicate FMD. At my instigation and that of Laurens Brinkhorst, the EU will convene a conference later in the year to examine all aspects of our experience of this disease—in particular, that of the UK and the Netherlands—to help shape policy for the future, including vaccination policy.

Combating foot and mouth disease remains the Government's top priority, but as the disease is brought under control questions arise from farmers and others in the rural economy about options for the future. We therefore intend to work in partnership with farmers and others to identify ways of assisting the recovery of the farming sector. We shall focus in particular on farmers directly affected by FMD who face choices about their futures, and on the regions of the United Kingdom that have been hit hardest by FMD—especially, of course, Cumbria and Devon. As a first stage, the Government will concentrate on the need to provide high-quality, targeted business and agronomic advice to individual farmers, and will explore ways of improving marketing in the livestock sector, to the benefit of the whole food chain. The Government also intend to help livestock farmers to decide the optimum basis on which restocking should take place, taking into account the desirability of rebuilding flocks and herds that are high quality, disease-free, extensively reared and farmed in environmentally sustainable ways. As a further component of our recovery strategy, we shall work with the industry to develop insurance options against both animal disease and the economic consequences that disease brings, and we will share our thinking on that with our partners in the European Union.

Work to help farmers emerge from the crisis has begun, and will form part of the Government's long-term strategy for helping UK farming to restructure in sustainable, market-orientated and environmentally responsible ways; at the same time, it will take forward our policy for bringing about common agricultural policy reform.

**Mr. Tim Yeo** (South Suffolk): I am grateful to the Minister for making his lengthy statement available to me a little while before he made it in the House. I warmly welcome the improving picture that he has been able to paint of the state of the crisis and the spread of foot and mouth disease. I would like to take this opportunity to express again our warm appreciation of the work of all those service personnel, vets and others whose efforts on the ground, in the front line of tackling the crisis, have helped to reduce the spread of foot and mouth disease.

I shall start with the improvement in the figures, because that is crucial in assessing the progress that has been made and also, perhaps, in judging the merits of the other policy changes that the Minister has announced. The Minister will recall that before the Easter recess I asked twice for his assurance that daily figures for slaughter and disposal would continue to be published throughout the recess. In fact, the daily publication of the figures ceased and was resumed only after a substantial public outcry.

It is important now to know whether the basis on which the daily figures for slaughter and disposal are calculated has been changed. For example, let us consider the problem of carcase disposal in Devon. The NFU advised on Tuesday that the sudden fall in the number of carcases awaiting disposal in Devon was not because more carcases had actually been disposed of but because the Ministry changed the definition of disposal. Now, apparently, the Minister counts a carcase as disposed of once it has been moved to a disposal site. Few people who live or work within the sight or smell of such disposal sites would agree with that definition.

If the improvement that the Minister claims is partly achieved by redefining disposal, it casts doubt on some of his other claims too. If one set of figures is manipulated, are others any more trustworthy? The fact that the Minister prevented me from talking to vets in the Ministry's regional office in Exeter last week does not inspire confidence that the Government are being entirely open. Will the Minister therefore tell the House exactly what changes have been made to the way in which those figures are calculated? Since his Ministry now—rightly—makes use of independent epidemiologists, will he allow an independent statistician to audit the figures that have been published since the outbreak started?

The Minister announced a change of policy today and he will understand that many people, including farmers, will be surprised by the suddenness of a change, which, despite his description of it, most people will see as a relaxation. A few days ago, the Government wanted to start vaccinating, which suggests that they believed that existing policies to control foot and mouth disease were inadequate. Now the Minister proposes to relax those same policies. When was the new formal advice from the chief scientist and the chief veterinary officer, to which the Minister referred, given to him? Will the Minister publish that advice today? Since this change of policy was announced by No. 10 Downing street just in time for the 10 o'clock news last night, can the Minister tell us when the decision was actually made?

No one wants a single healthy animal to be killed if that animal can be saved, but the surest way to minimise the incidence of animals being slaughtered is to stop the spread of foot and mouth disease. It is important that no risks should be run; policy must not be relaxed until it is safe to do so. Ending slaughter on contiguous farms now raises the question of why that policy has been maintained for so long. Have thousands of healthy animals been sacrificed in vain? We support any steps that save healthy animals from slaughter, provided those steps do not risk the further spread of the disease.

As culling on contiguous farms will apparently continue for sheep and pigs, can the Minister say whether the legal basis of such culls is clear? Will he confirm that his Ministry withdrew a court application to cull uninfected animals on contiguous farms in Anglesey recently? If cattle are not to be automatically culled on

contiguous farms, will tests be carried out promptly and regularly on those cattle instead? If such tests are not carried out on farms adjacent to infected premises, is there not a risk that foot and mouth disease could start to spread?

Have the Government ruled out the use of vaccination entirely? Does the Minister accept that the three tests that I have repeatedly set out, including yesterday in the House, are the right ones to assess whether vaccination should be used?

On the welfare disposal scheme, how long are farmers having to wait while their animals suffer before slaughter under this scheme occurs? The Minister will be aware of the public concern about the distress that some animals experience. If the backlog under the scheme is not cleared until the middle of May, is it true that some animals may by then have been waiting for six weeks?

As this crisis starts to pass its peak, does the Minister agree that attention must be paid to the origin of the outbreak? Is he aware that 15 parliamentary questions that I asked about this in March remain unanswered four weeks later? Will he undertake to answer all parliamentary questions that have been tabled by right hon. and hon. Members before any Dissolution of Parliament? Will he also assure us that, in the event of a Dissolution, the information that he promised today about the constituency spread of new cases will continue to be available to parliamentary candidates on a constituency basis throughout an election campaign?

Is the Minister aware that the Government's handling of foot and mouth disease is giving rise to more and more concern? Stories of muddle, delay and incompetence are still commonplace—telephones are not answered, faxes are ignored and contradictory advice and instructions are given. In many places, there is still a sense that no one is in charge. For example, can the Minister tell us who is in charge in Devon this morning?

The same muddle exists at a national level. Who is making the policy now—the Minister, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Defence? Last week, the chief scientist said that vaccination should be introduced to support the slaughter policy. The Minister agreed but the president of the National Farmers Union said no, so the policy was dropped. This week, the Minister and his advisers said that the cull of animals on contiguous farms was necessary to curb the spread of the disease. Then No. 10 spin doctors saw newspaper pictures of Phoenix, and the policy was changed.

When this crisis is finally resolved—and I repeated yesterday the four criteria by which that should be judged—there will have to be a full inquiry. Does the Minister agree that one key aspect of that inquiry will be to establish whether the spread of foot and mouth disease would have been very much less if the Government had learned the lessons of the 1967 outbreak and if they had acted on the timely advice that I and other Conservative Members have offered, on the record, at every stage during the past nine weeks?

This crisis has crippled our livestock industry, disfigured our environment and wrecked our tourist trade. It is costing families, businesses and taxpayers billions of pounds. It is a crisis that need not and should not have reached its present level. It is the Government's incompetence that allowed it to do so.

**Mr. Brown:** As ever, I am grateful to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) for his help and support. His statement about the public officials dealing with the disease outbreak is genuinely welcome. He is right to thank officials working in a civilian capacity for different Government Departments, and the service personnel and the professional veterinary personnel in the private and public sectors who are helping to bear down on the disease. The whole House should thank those hard-working public servants who are all working for the common purpose of bringing this terrible outbreak of disease to an end, and to help the country get beyond it. I am therefore grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks in that regard.

I am less grateful for what the hon. Gentleman had to say about muddle and delay, and for his stories about telephones not being answered, and so on. In my experience, one only hears part of the story when such reports are put into the public domain. I do not think it sensible for anyone holding a responsible position in public life to go around attacking those who are trying to bring to an end this outbreak of disease as quickly as possible. Hard-working public servants are entitled to our support, not our condemnation. I am willing to meet individual Members of Parliament who want to raise particular issues with me. I have done my best to do so, as have other Ministers in the Department.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the figures for slaughterings and disposals. It is true that those figures were removed from the Department's website for a few days, but that was to ensure that they were accurate and consistent. The full set of figures was returned to the website on Good Friday, and the figures have continued to be updated ever since. We did not respond to pressure from anyone in that regard: our aim was simply to make sure that the information being provided was accurate.

I freely say to the hon. Gentleman that he is right to identify a problem in Devon. In my statement, I told the House that there is a difficulty with the backlog of carcase disposal in that county, but I strongly dispute that we are trying to deal with it by putting into the public domain figures that are not correct. We are trying to deal with the problem by clearing the backlog.

The hon. Gentleman alleges that I have prevented him from talking to vets. I do not know how I could do that. I can stop him going into Government buildings around the country to talk to civil servants who are trying to control the disease for the benefit of the country—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) must calm down.

**Mr. Brown:** I will not encourage publicity stunts—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I instructed the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton to calm down. She must calm herself.

**Mr. Brown:** The rules have not been made especially for the hon. Member for South Suffolk. I am taking the same line with all hon. Members. Of course I will agree to requests by hon. Members with regard to visits to Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food premises for purposes that relate to their constituencies. It is right to

*[Mr. Brown]*

continue with that policy, but I am not going to facilitate wholesale visits to Ministry premises all around the country in the middle of a disease outbreak.

I turn now to vaccination. The crucial issue in determining vaccination policy is consumer acceptance of such a policy. It is the consideration of consumer acceptance that drives the views of retailers, processors and farmers. I welcome the fact that other Ministers in the European Union have taken a similar view. The question of vaccination needs to be discussed in a rational and scientifically based manner once the outbreak has been brought to a conclusion.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk asked how we are prioritising our work under the welfare scheme, and talked about the backlog. We have asked the RSPCA to help us prioritise cases so that we get to the most needy ones first. The hon. Gentleman asked about scientific advice to me. It is based on the advice of the chief scientist and chief vet. The change in emphasis on the contiguous cull results from a conference that the chief vet held last Friday, where he consulted private sector and public sector veterinarians across the regions and in particular from affected regions. It is not surprising that a disease outbreak that has moved rapidly should require rapid responses in policy to deal with it. This is the response that, after consideration, the chief vet and chief scientist are recommending to me. I am more than willing to put their formal advice and the guidance given to veterinarians locally in the public domain.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether I would continue to update the information on constituency cases. Yes, I will place it on an updated basis in the House of Commons Library and will endeavour to place it elsewhere, so that all those with an interest can have continuing access to it, whether or not Parliament is sitting.

This is a serious disease outbreak. It is now moving towards its conclusion, but we will have to respond to further incidents. There will be outbreaks. It is not possible to say where they will occur or how many there will be, but advice to me is that there will be further outbreaks. We have to be ready to stamp on them where they occur and cull them out quickly. We will be able to achieve that far more easily if we have public backing for our policies, in particular the backing of the livestock industry, farmers and the broader rural community. Frankly, if the House can show some unity of purpose, it will reflect better on all of us in the days to come.

**Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours** (Workington): My right hon. Friend has said that the vaccination of cattle is not feasible in present conditions. What about the vaccination of Herdwick sheep and other special sheep breeds as an addition or alternative to his policy of tight biosecurity and serum testing? Could we not have both policies introduced?

**Mr. Brown:** This is an important issue and we have given it substantial consideration and examination. The professional advice to me from the chief vet and others who advise him is that vaccinating sheep is not an option. The advice from John Thorley is that the National Sheep Association is opposed to vaccination, and there is a range of reasons for that. Even for rare sheep breeds and special sheep breeds it would not be right to try to cull out the disease in hefted sheep as an automatic response. For that reason the proposal that I have explained to the House today is to manage them where they are and to test them in the autumn when they are brought down from the areas where they are extensively farmed.

**Mr. Colin Breed** (South-East Cornwall): I thank the Minister for his statement and his usual courtesy in providing an early copy. This is welcome news and, indeed, a common-sense approach to the situation. I should like to raise a number of points.

It is still disappointing that there is no news whatever about compensation for the over-30-months scheme. That has become quite an issue. Do I take it that the Government are not intending to give compensation for that particular problem? Surely it must be one of the easiest schemes to implement.

Will the Minister look at the situation concerning pedigree animals, particularly in respect of welfare disposal? Clearly, pedigree animals are not valued highly enough if entered into the welfare disposal scheme, although they suffer the same welfare problems as other animals, their value notwithstanding.

What assessment has the Minister made in respect of the percentage of infected animals that have been part of the contiguous cull? Bearing in mind the substantial number of animals that have been killed, it would be useful to know what he believes the actual number of infected animals to have been.

Will the Minister confirm that, today, there are still some new cases that are not in the existing infected zones—in areas that are somewhat remote from them? That is, of course, worrying.

Finally, on the pigswill consultations, I am sure that the Minister has received representations from those who will be substantially affected as regards whey feeding. There will be a major effect on cheese making—an important industry in many parts of the affected rural areas.

**Mr. Brown:** The hon. Gentleman is right; I have received representations about whey feeding and the proposed pigswill ban. I am looking closely at that and other issues related to the brewing industry, as part of a broader consideration—although, clearly, it is a discrete issue.

On new cases, I have already referred to the fact that we could expect sporadic outbreaks in different parts of the country. I understand that they occur for three main reasons: the movement of vehicles; the movement of people; and the movement of animals. I have placed advertisements in the farming press about biosecurity. In all my meetings with farmers, I emphasise the importance of biosecurity, farm by farm. The hon. Gentleman is right: if we are to defeat the disease, we must all work together and focus on the measures that are necessary—farm by farm—to prevent the disease from getting on to a farm and spreading from it.

The hon. Gentleman asks about the percentage of infected animals in the contiguous cull policy. The purpose of the policy is to get to the animals as quickly as possible so that the number of infected animals is relatively low. We know that if we do not get there quickly, the number of animals infected will rise

remorselessly and will then spread the disease. I know that it is hard, because individual farmers—although they understand the general reason for the policy—always argue that their particular animals, especially the high-value animals, should be given a chance. That is a perfectly understandable and human response. However, it is my painful duty to have to assert the broader public interest; it is in the interest of the rural community, the livestock industry and individual farmers that we cull the disease out and return to normality as quickly as we possibly can.

I note the point that the hon. Gentleman makes about pedigree animals. However, I have to beware of creating an alternative market for livestock through the welfare schemes. I will consider his representations—they are fair. As I said in my statement, I want to look at the other two sectors—lightweight sheep and sows—where the market is compromised, at least in part, by the export ban. The circumstances are specific and I want to discuss them further with the leadership of the farmers' unions and others with a particular interest. However, there is no easy solution. The worst thing I could do, through trying to be helpful, would be to create a false market that would, in turn, merely suck in imports and, frankly, do medium and long-term damage to the livestock industry.

I acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman has been a doughty campaigner on behalf of people with over-30-months animals. I am keeping the issue under review. It is not fair to say that a conclusion has been reached, but I know that he understands the difficulties as well as the obvious merits of the case that he presents.

**Mr. Paul Marsden** (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. I thank him for his tireless hard work during the past few weeks. Does he agree that there is a need for better contingency planning and for an increase in contingency funding for his Department? Specifically, will the independent review, which is referred to on page 25 of the MAFF departmental plan, where there is an overview of the business planning process, incorporate the lessons that should be learned from the foot and mouth outbreak? The question is not if, but when, we shall be faced with a third outbreak, but of a different disease—whether it be BSE, foot and mouth or swine fever.

**Mr. Brown:** My hon. Friend is right. The Department will need to reflect on its contingency planning arrangements, not just within the Department but across Government, in the light of this unusual, indeed unique, disease outbreak—at least the pattern that it has taken is unique. There are other things that Government can do to prevent such an occurrence happening again, and I have discussed them in my statement: the re-examination of our rules on personal food imports, on commercial food imports, on pigswill, and on the issue of the standover of animals that have been moved for commercial purposes. All this is being looked at very hard at the moment, and I hope to have something to say to the House on some of it shortly.

**Sir David Madel** (South-West Bedfordshire): The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that I asked him, in a written question on 9 April, whether he would release vaccine to zoos that may need it to vaccinate endangered species that are susceptible to foot and mouth disease. He also knows that Whipsnade zoo is in my constituency. Apart from the welfare of the animals there, it is an extremely important part of the local economy. Can the right hon. Gentleman now say whether vaccine can be released to Whipsnade zoo, so that it may have the option to vaccinate if it considers it necessary?

**Mr. Brown:** There is a vaccine strategy for zoos; I am sorry if I have not let the hon. Gentleman have a copy of it. I will ensure that he has a copy; in fact, I will send him two, so that he can give one to his zoo. The circumstances in which vaccination of animals could be permitted by Government are clearly set out, and there has been discussion with organisations representing those who operate zoological premises.

**Mr. Doug Henderson** (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): One thing that has characterised the last two or three months has been the movement in scientific opinion, which has confused many of my constituents and, I believe, other people in the country. Members in the House and in the country recognise, against the background of that moving scientific opinion, the determined and measured way in which these issues have been addressed by my right hon. Friend, but may I raise with him the issue of information to Members of Parliament?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is crucial that decisions taken be communicated accurately? Does he have a fast-track system for dealing with questions? Most of the questions that Members are currently asking are real questions, which have been raised by constituents who have real problems, and we need real answers. Does my right hon. Friend have a fast-track system for dealing with those; if he does, could he have a faster-track system for dealing with them?

**Mr. Brown:** There is a fast-track system for Members of Parliament; there is an established helpline for Members of Parliament. My hon. Friend asks whether we could have an even faster track, presumably for Members for Newcastle, and of course I am very sympathetic to that—so if he has a word with me afterwards, I will sort out his problem, whatever it is.

**Mr. Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar): Will the Minister clarify the advice given as to the effects of pyres on grazing land? As he is aware, this week restrictions were lifted from my constituency; but farmers are concerned about the advice which, as far as we understand it, sought to minimise the risks. There was a suggestion that any particulates and other noxious substances would quickly dissipate in a matter of months, but stock is now being moved in my constituency and farmers really want to know whether they should be putting their stock out to grass. What advice will be available, given that one of the first pyres was lit in my constituency at a time when there was quite a lot of wind and the smoke spread throughout my constituency and changed direction? What advice will be given to those on farms close to the pyre and close to the fallout of the pyre? Should stock be put out to graze, and if so, when?

**Mr. Brown:** The prospect of the foot and mouth disease virus being spread by the fires is very remote indeed, but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that there

*[Mr. Brown]*

is a need for human health advice. The chief medical officer has just revised and updated his advice, and that is in the public domain. There is a need for advice from the Environment Agency, dealing with any environmental contamination, and above all there is a need for advice to farmers on restocking protocols. If the hon. Gentleman cares to contact my office after this exchange, I will ensure that he is given clear-cut advice to pass on to his constituents.

**Mr. Lindsay Hoyle** (Chorley): In a similar vein, I should like to ask what environmental study of the pyres and landfill sites will take place to ensure that the people who live in the surrounding areas feel safe. The long-term monitoring of landfill sites, as well as pyre sites, is very important. I am sure that my right hon. Friend will take on board the importance of the Intervention Board and the fact that the farming community still has difficulties—everything seems to be going ahead, but when it comes to the final signature on the letter, things do not happen as speedily as the farmers expect. What encouragement, help and assistance can be given to the Intervention Board to ease the pain that farmers are suffering at the moment?

Finally, I believe that the Chamber was at its best when both sides worked together to try to eradicate the diseases, instead of which we are degenerating into scoring cheap political points, which does no parliamentarian any good whatever. I hope that the true credit will go to those involved in fighting the disease—those in MAFF and the armed forces, and obviously those working for the NFU who are not getting the thanks that they deserve.

**Mr. Brown:** The public service has received help and support from NFU officials, who have worked alongside those at our regional centres, liaising with the farming community and performing an invaluable role in this difficult situation. The Intervention Board has been given extra resources to deal with the schemes that it is administering on the Government's behalf throughout Great Britain, but the right way to deal with the animals constrained by the movement restrictions is to bear down on the disease and to find a market-oriented approach, rather than looking to emergency state schemes. Environmental monitoring will continue, and we shall bear in mind the long-term effects of the disposal routes, not just the short-term ones.

**Mr. John Burnett** (Torridge and West Devon): The Minister has said that the backlog in Devon is now 85,000 animals—a considerable reduction and a considerable improvement. Today, and every day, many thousands of carcases are being moved to rendering plants and, probably, to landfill sites. Fortunately, there has been a significant diminution in Devon of confirmed cases in the past week. The Minister has announced a change in the contiguous cull policy. Taking all those factors together, will there be an end to the pyres and to the necessity for the huge burial grounds?

**Mr. Brown:** I know that it is painful, but the policy of culling out the disease must continue until we have removed the disease. There is no medicine that I can give to the animals, nor other intervention that I can take, that will get rid of the disease. Unless we stop the disease, it will spread remorselessly, so we cannot relax our guard. As I said in my opening statement, I acknowledge that we have had a problem with disposal routes in Devon.

As the hon. Gentleman knows—he has raised the issue with me—there is no universally accepted disposal route. I understand what he says about the resistance to the pyres. They disfigure the landscape and people worry about the consequences, so I assure him that we will try to find disposal routes that are acceptable to local people, but I cannot confidently say that I am certain that we will be able to do so in all circumstances, because arguments can be made against, as well as for, each disposal route. I am afraid that that is the best I can do for the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on being the calm, rational centre of the storm that has been swirling around him—unlike the cynical opportunism that we have seen from the Tory party?

Has my right hon. Friend made an assessment of the excessive movements of cattle, which he has mentioned? The House has been told of a farmer who was shocked to discover that a flock of sheep that he had bought had been on 11 different holdings in the past two months. In some parts of the country, it is claimed that 10 per cent. of sheep disappear. Some of them die, but we believe that some are counted several times to increase subsidies.

Can we ensure that we identify the reason for the spread of the disease, which has been far greater than in the past in this or any other country? The main reason has been the illegal movements of sheep and other animals around the country to increase subsidies.

**Mr. Brown:** My hon. Friend is right to this extent: we have all been surprised at the number of sheep movements that result from the patterns of trade. There is a range of reasons for that, but they have implications for disease control. That is why I am consulting about a standstill period before sheep that have been traded can be moved again.

The implications for the current support regimes of the European Union—particularly the headage-based ones—have not been lost on anyone. I am clear in my own mind that, in future, we shall move away from headage-based schemes—for hill farmers specifically and, more generally, under the sheep premium regime—when the Commission puts its reform proposals forward. We shall move much more closely towards schemes that support farmers' incomes through a series of agreed criteria and away from supporting just the volume of livestock. That is the future of public support for the industry, and the Government need to discuss it carefully with those interested in the industry.

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): Does the Minister accept that he would better create unity in the House and confidence in his policies if he allowed my hon. Friend the shadow Minister access, on behalf of the Conservative party, to vets, officials and others? The Minister's attitude on that has frankly been reprehensible.

Does the Minister also accept that the policy that he has presented is hardly a joined-up one? The changes that he has announced today, the vacillation on vaccination

and the Phoenix factor suggest that we have had the needless slaughter of many animals over the past six weeks.

**Mr. Brown:** I am sorry to disagree with the hon. Gentleman on both points. I cannot deny the Opposition spokesman access to vets and I am not seeking to do so. My responsibility is for the work of the Ministry and of public officials. I want them to focus their full-time attention on eradicating the disease. As I have said very carefully, a special rule has not been devised for the Opposition spokesman; we are applying it equally and consistently to Members on both sides of the House.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, the pattern of the disease has changed as it has spread, as we have borne down on it and as the number of cases has declined. Throughout, I have followed the scientific and veterinary advice available to Government and—to be candid about it—I have done more than that. I have put the advice into the public domain and, more than that, I have done what in my understanding no other Minister has done before. I have arranged presentations for hon. Members—I understand that the hon. Gentleman attended one of them—to explain the epidemiology and to explain the case for vaccination. We have allowed the issues to be set out, so that we all could consider them. As I have said on a number of occasions—I repeat it now—whenever I make a decision based on scientific advice, I am willing to share that advice and to explain very carefully why I have arrived at the decision that I have. That is precisely what I have done today.

**Mr. Tom Levitt** (High Peak): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement, not least because it will take the pressure off the livestock disposal welfare scheme.

However, I wish to raise a livestock welfare issue of which my right hon. Friend's officials are aware. It does not seem able to be solved. My constituent, Mr. James Rotherham, runs a trout farm and, because anglers cannot get to the riverside, there is no demand for his trout to be put into rivers and lakes. Even if there were such demand, he would not be able to reach the rivers and lakes because of the travel restrictions. That means that thousands of trout on his farm are getting bigger and bigger in a very confined space. They are not suitable for selling to the retail trade and the fact that he cannot get rid of them means that a welfare issue has arisen because of the travel restrictions on the land around the area where he stocks the fish. Will my right hon. Friend consider this issue as a matter of urgency because the problem is getting desperate?

**Mr. Brown:** My hon. Friend is right to explain the dangers of creating a false market. Although I shall give detailed consideration to the special circumstances that he sets out to see what can be done, I cannot promise to resolve them.

**Mr. David Curry** (Skipton and Ripon): The changes in the welfare scheme are sensible, but they leave farmers with cattle that have gone beyond the 30 months seriously adrift. The Minister must urgently address that problem. Is he aware that when the Government's chief scientific adviser met the Select Committee on Agriculture yesterday, he made no reference to a possible change of policy on contiguous culling? Indeed, he emphasised that the risk of infection from a farm with foot and mouth disease to a surrounding farm was 17 per cent. Can the right hon. Gentleman give an absolute assurance that the change in policy follows science not sentiment, and that pictures in the newspapers of cuddly animals—however heart-rending—have not influenced that decision?

**Mr. Brown:** I can give the right hon. Gentleman that assurance. Veterinary consideration of how to handle the difficult issue of cattle in the contiguous cull was considered by the chief vet at his conference last Friday. He has received many representations specifically on that topic from the vets who have to do the difficult and distressing job of carrying out the policy in the regions. I know that the right hon. Gentleman understands that, in addition to policy issues, there is a range of practical difficulties to consider. However, the policy was under review well before any individual incident was reported in the papers. We would be wrong as policy makers to extrapolate public policy from individual cases that always involve very young animals such as Lucky the lamb and Phoenix the calf. I understand that they may serve as symbols, but there are special circumstances in both cases.

On the right hon. Gentleman's other concern, I understand that to be the case. However, we must not relax the policy because that will allow the disease to spread remorselessly. I take comfort from the fact that we are getting to it quickly enough for the number of animals that are showing signs of the disease to be relatively small. The crucial consideration is that things will not stay that way if we do not act firmly now.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): This is a welcome statement in difficult circumstances. In Chinese mythology, Phoenix ushers in a new age, and these provisions might at least mean that we are at a new stage. How will the change in policy affect the number of slaughtered animals that are being put into landfill sites? As livestock is now going into the food chain, will we be able to lessen the amount of carcases that go into landfill sites and therefore reduce the 111 sites that are in England at the moment?

**Mr. Brown:** As the number of infected premises steadily declines, the number of dangerous contacts and contiguous culls are also remorselessly declining, which means that fewer animals will have to be disposed of by the differing routes. We are considering the most appropriate route for each set of circumstances, but we are going to have to use them all for the foreseeable future. There is no perfect solution. Arguments can be made against each route, but there are even more powerful arguments against doing nothing.

**Mr. Roger Gale** (North Thanet): I stand to be corrected, but my understanding is that when a veterinary surgeon discovers symptoms that he or she believes to be indicative of foot and mouth disease, the procedure is that the Ministry is notified and the case is either confirmed or, on the basis of the evidence, which may be insufficient, rejected. If it is rejected, I understand that the Ministry might, quite properly, authorise a precautionary cull. If that takes place, is it correct that a post-mortem examination and blood tests are carried out in every case

*[Mr. Roger Gale]*

and that where foot and mouth is subsequently confirmed, those cases are added into the outbreak figures? If that is so, at what stage are they included?

**Mr. Brown:** I promise to let the hon. Gentleman have a detailed written answer to that because I want to be certain that my response is correct. The principle that he enunciates is right. Veterinarians are allowed to exercise clinical judgment on the site and do not have to check in with the veterinary headquarters in Page street if the situation is clear. However, it is right to remind the House that for every three cases that are reported to us as suspected foot and mouth, two turn out to be false alarms.

**Charlotte Atkins** (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I very much welcome the decision to allow farmers outside the 3 km protection zone to get their animals into the food chain. That will certainly help many of my farmers and butchers that source locally. Given the fact that the impact of foot and mouth goes far wider than the farming and agricultural communities, why is the compensation that is being allocated through Advantage West Midlands based on the percentage of the population involved in agriculture? That excludes Staffordshire, which is one of the worst affected areas outside the main hot spots.

**Mr. Brown:** I will have to ask my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment to respond to my hon. Friend's second concern. The formula is a matter for him. We decided to use regional development agencies as deliverers of support because of the idea that local people would best know local circumstances and be able to respond more easily to local demands. I welcome what my hon. Friend says about getting the supply chain moving. That is crucial for the medium and long-term future of the British livestock industry.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): Is the Minister aware that tests on David and Caroline Gilder's animals at Bozard farm, Woolstone, near Tewkesbury, have proved negative and hundreds of animals have been unnecessarily slaughtered? Hundreds more on surrounding farms have also been unnecessarily slaughtered, and I shall table written questions on a similar situation on a farm near Whitby in Yorkshire. In cases of genuine misdiagnosis, it is reasonable that the Government pay compensation not only for the animals slaughtered, but for all consequential losses. Will he seriously consider that?

**Mr. Brown:** I cannot announce an alteration to the compensation arrangements. However, I will consider the individual case of the hon. Gentleman's constituents if he refers it to me. I am not certain of all the circumstances involved and it would be unwise to go further, other than to make the general point that it is incredibly hard for the farming community—in particular, individual farmers—to have their animals taken, especially under the contiguous cull policy. Of the animals that seem healthy, some might be healthy, some might be incubating the disease and many will almost certainly be dangerous contacts. The policy is for the general good, but the individual farmer always hopes that it will not be applied to him and wants us to wait and see. The hard truth is that we cannot wait and see. We must act for the general good, not for the specific good. The animals might not have the disease, but if we do nothing they will get it.

**Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and inform him, with some relief, that we have not had an additional outbreak in Monmouthshire for more than two weeks. However, the 17 cases in my constituency have had a devastating effect. Does he agree that among the lessons to be learned are those relating to the long-term transportation of livestock, the practices of some livestock dealers and the need for sub-regional abattoirs? When he meets his colleagues in the European Council, will he assure them that some farmers will not want to get back into farming? They need an early retirement package and progress must be made on that.

**Mr. Brown:** I agree with much of what my hon. Friend says. On the unresolved issues—in particular, whether more can be done to help those who have decided to retire from the industry—I am giving further thought to what can be done in these special circumstances.

**Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): The Minister will be aware that although we have not had an outbreak in my constituency, we have been badly affected by the restrictions on animal movements. He announced that from Monday 23 April, some restricted livestock has been allowed to enter the food chain. Is he aware that as of Thursday last week, no information had been provided to trading standards, so no movements can be made? Can he assure that House that that hurdle has been passed and the system is working smoothly?

The Minister also announced changes to the welfare disposal system. Is he aware of the severe consternation that the system is causing to pig producers in the Vale of York, especially since he gave a commitment that the original payments would run for eight weeks from 23 March? The cut in payments to £37, or probably less, for clean animals will cause grief to those producers.

**Mr. Brown:** I understand the second point that the hon. Lady makes, which is of course fair. However, I have to weigh up the danger of continuing with rates that I am advised risk creating an artificial market that is more attractive than the actual operation of the supply chain. If we did that, we would remorselessly suck imports into the food chain and perhaps permanently displace British products, which would not be in the interests of the livestock industry. In addition, the state, rather than the consumer, would be the purchaser of a great deal of livestock—much more livestock than we should purchase. That was a hard decision, but I believe it to be right. I gave an assurance that the scheme would continue to run; I gave no assurance about adjustments of the rates. Although the situation is tough, we would do far more harm than good by trying to keep the rates artificially high.

I understand the other point that the hon. Lady made, and perhaps she will allow me to write to her about it.

**Mr. Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that contrary to what the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) keeps saying, if the current downward trend continues, this outbreak will have been

contained far more successfully than that of 1967, which is remarkable given the present outbreak's much wider geographical spread?

How much truth is there in the reports that my local rendering plant in Exeter has been working at only 60 per cent. of capacity? Given the terrible problems that we have had with carcase disposal, surely that is totally unacceptable.

**Mr. Brown:** I do not think that the situation is exactly as my hon. Friend describes it, although I am aware of the reports. I have asked that the situation be examined, and if the plant is able to handle more work, which of course we have, we will send it to them. I welcome what my hon. Friend said about the comparison of the current outbreak with that of 1967.

There will be a time to reflect when we have exterminated foot and mouth disease in this country. People will want to consider the way in which the two outbreaks were handled, but the 1967 outbreak had many different features and there was a point at which there were 90 new infected premises a day. We have not even got beyond half that rate.

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Minister may know that half of my constituency was declared an infected area because there was a suspected case over the border in Powys. That was six weeks ago. The case proved to be negative, but the infected area status still applies to half of my constituency. I understand that there will be movement on that within 24 hours. Will the Minister assure me that there will be better liaison between his officials and those of the devolved Administration in Cardiff? Will he assure me also that Intervention Board officials will have a better working relationship with officials of the devolved Administration, because these matters are very important?

**Mr. Brown:** The Intervention Board is of course shared between myself, acting as the Minister for England rather more than for the UK, and the Ministers in Wales and in Scotland, so it serves Wales just as it serves England and Scotland. The working relationships at ministerial and official levels between my Department and the devolved authorities have been very good, or at least that is my perception. If the hon. Gentleman would like me to consider a specific issue of communication or another matter, I will willingly do so, but I have to say that the implementation of the policy is wholly devolved and is a matter for my colleague the Secretary for Rural Affairs in the Welsh Assembly, not for me.

## Points of Order

2.24 pm

**Mrs. Angela Browning** (Tiverton and Honiton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that at business questions before the Easter recess, I drew to the attention of the House the fact that Members were using written questions to seek information about other Members' constituencies when one could not clearly identify a reason for the question to be asked. I named the hon. Member for Clwyd, South (Mr. Jones), who had engaged in that practice. Since then, it has been drawn to my attention that the hon. Gentleman—I gave him notice that I intended to name him—has tabled no fewer than nine questions to nine Departments about my constituency. So probing and wide-reaching are those questions that one Department has had to draw up an answer of four pages.

The cost to the public of answering such questions is enormous. Surely they are an abuse of parliamentary privilege by Members. As there is an election coming and these questions are clearly asked purely for party political purposes and the production of election literature, I wonder whether this is a matter in which you could intervene, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** I have some sympathy with the hon. Lady's concerns. There is nothing in the rules of the House to prevent Members submitting questions that relate to another Member's constituency. However, if Members choose to ask such questions, I expect them as a matter of courtesy to give notice in advance to the colleague whose constituency is the subject of the question. If a question of that nature has been submitted without notification, I deprecate that. More generally, I hope that Members who are contemplating such action will consider carefully whether it sits well with the purpose and spirit of parliamentary questions and answers.

**Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I crave your indulgence briefly to make two separate points of order. The first is simply a matter of the record. Today, in relation to oral Question 9 to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, which was about specialist schools, I, in a perhaps somewhat feline fashion, inserted the phrase "selective schools". The Secretary of State chose to suggest to the House that it was a Freudian slip. I gather that he now accepts that I meant what I said.

The second point of order is much more serious because it involves people's livelihoods. I draw the attention of the House to the fact that this morning there was news of approximately 1,000 redundancies at the British works of Timken, manufacturers of bearings and related products, in Northampton. That will have a considerable effect because almost all those jobs will be lost by people in the constituencies of the hon. Members for Northampton, North (Ms Keeble) and for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) and in my constituency, where there is also a small Timken facility. That is a major blow to the economy of our area and severs a long-standing relationship with a well-respected United States-sourced firm. Have you, Mr. Speaker, received any representations from Ministers to make a statement on the

*[Mr. Tim Boswell]*

matter? If not, will those who are now on the Treasury Bench take note of what has been said and communicate it to their colleagues, because the matter is of concern in our area?

**Mr. Speaker:** I am sorry to hear of men and women losing their jobs, but it is not a matter for the Chair, as the hon. Gentleman knows.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I would like to pay tribute, through you, to the parliamentary clerk in the Ministry of Agriculture, who has assisted Ministers in producing, throughout a very busy time, many outstanding answers to written questions that I have tabled. However, a number remain unanswered, and I would like to reinforce, through you, the request made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) for an opportunity for all questions to be answered in advance of any Dissolution or recess.

**Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am glad that the Minister of Agriculture is still in his place. My experience is exactly the same: I had many priority written questions on matters of great importance to my constituents, relating to foot and mouth disease, down for answer before the recess. A week after the recess, I have still received only holding answers to all those questions. Is there anything that I can do to encourage the Ministry to give my constituents the information that they so desperately need?

**Mr. Speaker:** I hope that the Minister has taken note of the concerns of both hon. Gentlemen.

**Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Throughout the entire crisis we have not had a full day's debate in Government time on foot and mouth. We have had several statements but, Mr. Speaker, you will have noticed that today a considerable number of Conservative Members wished to ask a question when the statement came to an end. May I ask you to use your usual understanding so that, should we have another statement from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, you will give preference to those unable to ask a question today?

**Mr. Speaker:** I heard some mutterings and it is understandable that those who were not called are disappointed. However, on several occasions, I have asked the Minister to come to the House to make a statement and, indeed, have kept him at the Dispatch Box for over an hour and a half. Today he was here for well over an hour, and I must give some consideration to other business before the House. In answer to the hon. Gentleman's point, I assure him that notes are taken and those who were not called today and were disappointed will not be disappointed next time.

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I take the matter a step further? You will recall that before the recess, I pointed out that the Prime Minister himself had indicated that he was taking personal charge of the foot and mouth crisis because it went across all Departments. Indeed, from the answers given by the Minister of Agriculture this afternoon it is apparent that a number of issues are the responsibility of other Departments. Is there any way, Mr. Speaker, that you could make representations to ensure that the Prime Minister himself came to the House, not for a debate which, frankly, would be of lesser use, but simply to answer the questions that some of us want to ask about interdepartmental responsibilities?

**Mr. Speaker:** Those matters are not for me, as the hon. Gentleman knows. However, I am sure that someone will take note of what he has said.

# Orders of the Day

## Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill *[Lords]*

*As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.*

### New Clause 1

PROVISION OF MOBILITY AND INDEPENDENCE EDUCATION

'In the 1996 Act insert the following section—

**"324A Provision of mobility and independence education**

(1) An assessment of the educational needs of a child with visual impairment or multi-sensory impairment under section 323 or section 331 must include an assessment of their mobility and independence needs.

(2) Where a local education authority makes a statement of special educational needs for a child with visual impairment or multi-sensory impairment under section 324 or section 331, any needs for mobility and independence education shall be specified as special educational provision in the child's statement.".'.— *[Mr. Win Griffiths.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

2.31 pm

**Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause is meant as a probing amendment, which the Royal National Institute for the Blind and Sense were keen to have debated on Report. They want to highlight the need for mobility and independence education for visually impaired and multi-sensory impaired children to be treated as, I underline, a special educational provision, which must be provided by local education authorities if specified in a statement, rather than as a form of non-educational provision that LEAs may arrange. The RNIB and Sense want the revised code of practice on special educational needs to set out clearly that important principle.

Visually impaired children and children with multi-sensory impairment experience huge problems getting around safely and confidently and, more generally, in understanding and negotiating their environment. Aspects of self-care, such as grooming, dressing and cooking, may present huge challenges. Addressing those needs is an essential part of the children's education and must start from the earliest possible age to maximise future independence. The new clause therefore refers to section 331 of the Education Act 1996, which deals with the assessment of the under-twos. Even at that young age, children need to be encouraged and motivated to explore their immediate environment safely and to move around it confidently.

Mobility and independence education is fundamental to visually impaired and multi-sensory impaired children's access to education. Put simply, if children cannot find their way around their classroom or school safely and confidently, and if they are not given the practical skills that they need to move around safely in the playground and participate fully in physical education and drama classes, they cannot be said to be included. Furthermore, if children are denied the opportunity to learn self-care skills such as dressing and grooming, they cannot be said to be receiving an education appropriate to their needs. Training for that involves a specialist mobility teacher acting as programme planner, staff trainer and adviser—the child's teachers and support workers must be closely involved—as well as direct training.

The latest RNIB research, detailed in "Shaping the Future", which was published in 2000, shows that nearly two in three pupils attending specialist schools for blind and partially sighted pupils have received mobility education, but that fewer than one in three visually impaired pupils in mainstream schools have received mobility and independence education. One in 20 16 to 25-year-olds of average learning ability have no mobility education, but would have liked to have had it. Moreover, when such education is provided, there is evidence that it is treated as a marginal element of the curriculum, which is not in the spirit of the commitment of the Department for Education and Employment to fully inclusive education. Only three out of 117 pupils who had had mobility education had it built into their timetables.

As a result, one in three mainstream secondary pupils said that they felt left out of some classroom activities; more than one in four said that there were school clubs and activities in which they would have liked to participate, but had not done so, and of that proportion one in six said that that was due to their sight difficulty. Moreover, lack of mobility education was found to be one reason why blind and partially sighted children and young people are less likely than their sighted peers to travel independently and confidently. Lack of self-confidence in travelling was an issue for six in 10 primary school pupils, more than one in three secondary school pupils and four in 10 16 to 25-year-olds.

As well as training starting at an early age, it is vital that children receive it consistently and for as long as they need it to prepare for adult independence. Tackling those problems is central to the Government's goal of ensuring that inclusion in mainstream education is a more realistic and effective option for children with sensory impairment. As things stand, mainstream placements are clearly not delivering mobility and independence education consistently or effectively to sensorily impaired children.

**Mr. Tom Levitt** (High Peak): I am attracted to my hon. Friend's proposal, but it would be nice to think that it was not necessary. Does he agree that independence education of sensorily impaired children is necessary, but that there must also be greater awareness among their peers about how to relate to them? It should be possible to extend the proposal to include the peers and classmates of children with sensory impairments.

**Mr. Griffiths:** I agree with my hon. Friend. In fact, specialist teachers, to whom I referred earlier, and who maintain close contact with teachers and others in the classroom, should try to ensure that the whole class and school appreciate the tremendous problems of sensorily impaired children. I experienced those problems a week or so ago in Westminster Hall, when I had a brief go with a blindfold and a guide dog.

**The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett):** I hope that it was not mine.

**Mr. Griffiths:** I assure my right hon. Friend that it was not.

*[Mr. Griffiths]*

That certainly brought home to me how disabling lack of sight and partial sight can be. I believe in the participation of the whole class and school.

**Mr. Andrew George** (St. Ives): The hon. Gentleman's argument is persuasive and I believe that his new clause is reasonable. Has he or the organisations to which he spoke made any financial assessment of the impact on the DFEE of introducing such a provision?

**Mr. Griffiths:** I do not have such information, although I understand that it is available, I do not believe that the provision would be a great financial burden. I shall refer later, without specifying figures, to matters in Wales which show that the commitment would not account for a huge part of the education budget. The costs involved would be offset by the huge benefits that would be gained for partially sighted and sensorily impaired children.

Part of the problem is that mobility and independence needs are frequently not specified as special educational needs in part 2 of the statement, and consequently are not identified as educational provision that the LEA considers it necessary to make under part 3 of the statement. Instead, special educational needs may be included in part 5 of the statement, which deals with non-educational needs, and in part 6, as the non-educational provision agreed between the LEA and health and social services.

LEAs have a duty to arrange the special educational provision specified in part 3 of a statement, and parents have a right of appeal to the tribunal if they disagree with the description of needs, the provision or any plans to stop making the provision by ceasing to maintain the statement. However, none of that applies if mobility and independence training are included in parts 5 and 6 as non-educational provision. LEAs simply have the power to arrange provision. The RNIB considers that a significant factor in explaining why so many children are not gaining access to the training that they require.

Recognising mobility and independence training as educational needs within the statutory assessment and statementing process would provide LEAs with the necessary incentive to ensure that what is specified in the statement is carried out. If mobility and independence training becomes part of the specified provision, it will be possible for children who are visually impaired or have multi-sensory impairments to receive, under the statement, properly specified, the help that they need through mobility and independence education.

As I said, such training is fundamental to allow the children to play a full and proper part in their school. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will respond positively to the issues that I have raised, and that when the special educational needs code of practice is published it will take account of those needs.

I should be interested to know what other plans for action the Department has to meet the needs of children with visual and multi-sensory impairments so that they can participate fully in the schools that they attend, particularly when those are mainstream schools, in accordance with the Government's aim to make inclusion a reality for those children and their families.

**Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): Not for the first time, as we know from having heard his contributions in the Standing Committee, the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) has performed a service by raising issues sensitively and with a good deal of perception. I agreed with a good deal of what he said, and it is right that Ministers should respond to it—although in view of the load of business that we have this afternoon, we will all have to keep our remarks as short as possible.

I share many of the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Bridgend and have had many of the same experiences. I, too, had a trial run with a guide dog, and found that interesting. At the edge of my constituency is the centre for dogs for the disabled. Those people do not necessarily have sensory impairment, although they may have various impairments. I have been able, through the work of the centre, to see the great skill required to train the dogs, and then the users of the dogs, to make the best of that partnership.

2.45 pm

I shall summarise the points set out by the hon. Gentleman. The first, to which we refer in other new clauses, is the importance of the setting in which any mainstream education is to be delivered, and the importance of induction and training for all the participants—that is, the pupil, the teachers and, as was mentioned in an intervention, the other pupils, so that the best is made of the situation and nothing creates a difficulty.

Secondly, a continuing motif of our debates has been our concern about the comparatively low overall attainments of children with special educational needs, in terms of their final outcomes. We need not dissect that in detail today, and I certainly do not want to give the House the signal that we expect children with one or other special educational need necessarily to do badly in their school, particularly if they have a sensory impairment. Indeed—this is the last time that I shall mention it—the Secretary of State gives the most eloquent possible lie to that.

It is essential that every child should be able to perform to the best of his or her ability, and that any difficulties are effectively overcome. That is the entirely proper motive for the new clause. There must be concern, especially in what may be termed straightforward cases of sensory impairment—blindness or deafness—that those give rise to underperformance, which should not have happened.

The third point, which the hon. Member for Bridgend was right to raise, is the importance of a holistic approach. It is not simply a matter of putting children into the classroom, telling them that they are now included and part of the mainstream, and expecting them, the school, the other pupils or anyone else simply to get on with it. All the various aspects must be brought together. As the hon. Gentleman reminded the House, the new clause brings together the special provision of an educational nature that is specified in the statement, and the other things that an LEA may do to support the child.

There is a detectable functional distinction between those two categories, which hinges on what is or is not educational. An analogous case is the fraught issue of what is nursing care and what is support or personal care in residential care or nursing homes. We will get into difficulties if we seek to draw absolute distinctions between categories, especially where, by implication,

the funding streams are different. We do not have an immediate answer to those problems, and we need to focus rather more on finding our way through them.

If Ministers tell the House that that is all secured under present arrangements, we will be reassured, but we will retain a degree of scepticism, as does the RNIB, about whether that is the case in practice. We should explore the issues in the spirit in which the hon. Gentleman moved the new clause, as a probing measure, and listen carefully to the ministerial response. The problem deserves attention and will not go away.

**Mr. Andrew George:** The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) emphasised the fact that the new clause raises issues that we may have overlooked in Committee. The intervention by the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) highlighted the importance of ensuring that the needs of pupils with a severe sensory loss are taken into account in the wider school environment and among other pupils. That is essential.

In the spirit of the new clause, which is meant as a probing amendment, the key point is for the Under-Secretary to reassure those who believe that the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) has raised an important matter that our concerns are encompassed in the Bill or in some other way. It would be helpful if such clarification were put on the record. Will she also comment on the difficulty and additional ties that the new clause would create for local education authorities, the Department for Education and Employment and local schools?

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** I omitted to mention what the RNIB said about Wales, which is relevant to the hon. Gentleman's remarks. It believes that two or three centres could be established in Wales to provide a service to all local authorities. Obviously, not every local authority would have the expertise that is necessary to make the provision. The scale of the proposal in terms of Welsh local authorities would be extremely small.

**Mr. George:** I am grateful for that helpful clarification of the extra dimension in Wales.

The Liberal Democrats support the spirit and purpose of the new clause and we look forward to hearing the Under-Secretary's response.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Ms Margaret Hodge):** Like other hon. Members, I welcome the opportunity that my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) has given us to discuss a crucial issue. The new clause deals with a matter that is of concern to many families with children who have a visual or multi-sensory impairment: the training that such children receive to enhance their mobility and independence.

All hon. Members accept that it is vital for children with a visual or multi-sensory impairment to learn how to get around independently and safely in the school or institution in which they are undertaking their learning. Without those basic skills, visually impaired children will not enjoy properly inclusive education and will be excluded from society as adults. If visually impaired children are not taught the basic life skills that make for independence, they will be excluded from life at school and from society as adults.

**Mr. Boswell:** The Under-Secretary has made an excellent start to her speech, but does she agree that even if skills training is not given in school, it will still be required somewhere and will have to be given outside that setting? It might as well be done in the most appropriate place.

**Ms Hodge:** That training needs to be provided in the most appropriate place and by the most appropriate people. Perhaps that will become clearer as I develop my remarks. As the hon. Gentleman said earlier, the purpose of the Bill is to equalise opportunities, so facilities for visually and sensorily impaired children are integral to it.

As I think my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend acknowledged, a range of agencies are involved in providing support for the children to whom the Bill relates. I pay tribute to the active and helpful role of Sense and the RNIB, both of which I meet frequently, and of others in promoting mobility and independence. Those organisations have worked effectively with local education authorities throughout the country to provide training where it is needed.

LEAs do and must work in partnership with health authorities, social services departments and voluntary organisations to ensure that children get appropriate support and training. As the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George) acknowledged, not all the services will be funded through LEAs. The way in which a service is funded and the agency that is selected to provide it will depend on the individual circumstances and needs of the child in question.

I hope to give some reassurances to all hon. Members who have participated in this short debate. LEAs are required to specify in a child's statement the special educational provision that is necessary to meet his or her special educational needs. They are also required to set out the non-educational needs of the child and the provision that is needed if he or she is properly to benefit from that provision. Indeed, the non-educational provision that is necessary to enable the child to benefit from his or her education provision can also be specified in the statement. That can encompass all needs, including those that relate to mobility and independence.

Our current code of practice and framework for special educational needs are somewhat different from what is suggested by the new clause, which would require LEAs by law specifically to assess mobility and independence as part of the statutory assessment of every child with visual or multi-sensory impairment. It would also require them to specify as educational provision in their statements the provision of mobility and independence training. I am not sure that such legislation is either necessary or appropriate.

As I hope that I have demonstrated, the current SEN framework allows for the holistic approach that we all acknowledge to be necessary for the children. It allows for the consultation of specialist teachers in appropriate individual circumstances when a child's special educational needs are assessed—a matter that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend. When we

*[Ms Hodge]*

establish our policies, we will require a framework that encourages all the agencies that have a role to work together.

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** I accept everything that my hon. Friend says, but let me point out the problem that is apparent from research and surveys carried out by the RNIB. Although children get the help and support that they need in specialist schools, such support is not always available in mainstream schools because of the different standing of such provision within the statement. Will she assure us that the new code of practice will ensure equality of treatment? That would be very encouraging.

**Ms Hodge:** I acknowledge that the standard of current provision is not as high as we want it to be, and that it is not as integrated as we want it to be. I hope that my assurances about the steps that we are taking will show my hon. Friend that we are genuinely trying to achieve the aims to which he and the organisations in whose name he makes his representations aspire.

I hope that my hon. Friend will accept that it is important for us to establish a framework that facilitates, encourages and demands multi-agency working, rather than one that allows some of the agencies to opt out of their responsibilities in respect of dealing with the children's needs. As the new clause deliberately specifies the obligations in terms of the LEA, it might enable social services and health departments to opt out of their legitimate responsibilities in that regard.

**Mr. Boswell:** Those are helpful remarks, but I am not sure whether the Under-Secretary can secure her intentions in the Bill. Does she at least agree that it is incumbent on all agencies, whether they are specifically educational or not, and whether they are national or local, to collaborate and exchange information so that the overall holistic solution can emerge? I understand her point about not shifting their responsibilities away, but one of those responsibilities must be to work with other agencies in order to achieve the right outcome.

3 pm

**Ms Hodge:** I accept that those responsibilities must be shared and that collaboration must occur. One of the challenges that we face in trying to provide and improve services is finding methods of enhancing collaboration, thus ensuring that the needs of the child are central, and replacing traditional attitudes and practices, which tended to leave people in funnels. We want to encourage work across the professions.

The current SEN framework allows a holistic approach to need. We must ensure that it is appropriate to the needs of every child, and acknowledge that they may differ. The new clause would constrain our response to shifting the burden on to one authority. That may be inappropriate for some children, who may require more input from social services or health departments on mobility, independence or other needs. The disability provisions will ensure that every school makes reasonable adjustments to its policies, practices and procedures, and to access to the curriculum and the building. That will ensure that all children, including those with visual impairments and sensory impairments, are fully included in the life of the school.

I acknowledge the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend made about low incidence impairments. We want to take advantage of the experience and expertise of specialists, yet enable children to be taught in mainstream schools in their locality when possible. The new clause shows that there is much work to be done and I do not pretend that we have achieved our aim yet. As my hon. Friend said, we need to spread the best practice of specialist schools in mainstream schools.

The aim of many of the SEN and social inclusion policies of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary with responsibility for school standards is to fund, through SEN regional partnerships and the SEN small programmes fund, mechanisms that will enhance the capacity for specialist schools to pass on their knowledge, experience and expertise to the mainstream sector. I am delighted that we have been able to increase so substantially the money that we are putting into the standards fund, which will support the training of teachers in mainstream schools and others to deal with impairments, especially low incidence impairments.

We need to do much more on early identification and intervention. We spent much time in Committee, as did another place, on that subject. If we can improve that, we will ensure that children can develop their full potential and live a more inclusive life. We are therefore investing a large sum of money in special educational needs in the early years, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on Second Reading. We have also announced the establishment of a multi-agency working group to develop guidance on identifying the special needs of children under two so that necessary provision can be made for them at the earliest opportunity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend raised another issue, about which I share his anxiety. We need to try to ensure greater consistency in provision throughout the country, especially for low incidence impairment. We have therefore issued our consultation document on quality standards in education for children and young people with visual impairments. As hon. Members know, it is designed to secure the right sort of services to help pupils to be independent learners. We refer specifically to the need to ensure support for mobility training when needed. We await the final comments from the consultation exercise, and we shall then distribute a final version to local authorities. I hope that we can use the document to ensure greater consistency across the country.

Multi-agency working is the key to ensuring a holistic approach. Several Government initiatives will support that. From sure start to the Bill, our policies will provide a framework based on the needs of the child rather than the interests of the professionals.

Clearly, we need to continue to seek improvements in our response to the specific needs of children with visual impairments and other sensory impairments. Together with the RNIB, Guide Dogs for the Blind and Opsis, we are funding a one-year research project, which considers the mobility and independence needs of children and young people from two to 16 and the training needs of those who work with them. That research will help inform future policy decisions, and we shall keep the issue under review.

I hope that I have been able to persuade my hon. Friend to withdraw the new clause, and that we can proceed with introducing the much-needed Bill.

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** I thank my hon. Friend for her response to the new clause, which, as I said earlier, is a probing motion. I did not intend all responsibility to fall on the local education authority, but I wanted the special provision that we are considering to be equal to other special education provision. The disability provisions, the aim of equal treatment and the research project, to which my hon. Friend referred, will help. I am therefore happy that the Department, in conjunction with the many agencies and voluntary bodies, is dealing with the matter. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

## New Clause 2

NEEDS OF THE INDIVIDUAL CHILD

'The Secretary of State shall, in exercising his powers under the 1996 Act with respect to the education of children with special educational needs, take such steps as may be necessary to ensure that provision by bodies in receipt of public funds for meeting those needs should treat the needs of the individual child as paramount so far as that is compatible with the provision of efficient education for other children.'.—*[Mrs. May.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mrs. Theresa May** (Maidenhead): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 1, in clause 1, page 1, line 15, leave out "efficient" and insert "effective".

**Mrs. May:** I am conscious that the principle that underpins new clause 2 is not unfamiliar to those who have followed the Bill through its various stages in another place and in the House. It deals with the emphasis that the Bill should place on the needs of the individual child in the context of special educational needs provision.

The matter was raised in another place, on Second Reading and in Committee, where the details of the measure were thoughtfully and thoroughly debated. I pay tribute to the members of the Committee, especially my hon. Friends the Members for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), who have worked hard to try to ensure that the measure works in the interests of children with special educational needs and disabled children.

New clause 2 would put the needs of individual children with special educational needs and those of individual disabled children at the heart of the measure. We have discussed the principle previously, but I hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), will respond positively today. If members of the public were asked what should be paramount in determining provision for special needs children, their reply would undoubtedly be the needs of the child. That is common sense. They might also mention other aspects, which the Bill covers, such as parental choice about the provision for their children or ensuring that the child's education was provided efficiently and did not damage that of other children. Those needs must be balanced when making a decision about one child.

Although I believe that most people would say that it was common sense for the child's needs to be the first consideration, the Government have thus far been unwilling to include that principle in the Bill.

New clause 2 proposes that a duty be given to the Secretary of State to ensure that, when consideration is given to the provision of education to a child with special educational needs, the needs of the child should be paramount in that consideration. Two arguments have been raised by the Government about why the needs of the child should not be incorporated in the Bill, and should not be the prime consideration. The first is that it is unnecessary because the needs of the child are already provided for in legislation in a variety of ways; the second is that it would be a mistake because experience has shown that if the needs of the child are put first, that can be used by the various bodies involved to argue, in a counter-productive way, that the child should not, for example, be in a mainstream school. That second argument is the one raised most often.

The Under-Secretary wrote a helpful letter to my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry on 24 April, setting out various aspects of existing legislation that the Government say safeguard and protect children with special educational needs. The Minister wrote that under section 7 of the Education Act 1996 parents have a duty to ensure that their children receive full-time education that is suitable to their age and any special educational needs.

The hon. Lady also pointed out that section 9 of the Act sets out the need to ensure that parents have a choice, and that schedule 27 of the Act ensures that the individual needs of the child are taken into account in deciding whether to name a parent's choice of maintained school in a statement. Those provisions refer to the needs of the child, but they do not put the needs of the child at the heart of the decision as to the sort of education with which the child should be provided, be it in a maintained school or a special school. That is my concern.

The Government's reliance on those existing provisions is a very convoluted way of approaching a simple, common-sense issue that could easily be incorporated in the Bill so that everyone making decisions about where a child with special educational needs should be educated would know that the paramount consideration should be for the needs of the child. That is important because, sadly, today the needs of the child are being put to one side in relation not only to the ability of children to enter mainstream education, but, in a reverse sense, sometimes through attempts to ensure that children are not provided for in special schools. The legislation on which the Minister is relying represents a convoluted way of dealing with this issue. We have an opportunity to take a simple approach, and to state in the Bill that the needs of the child are what matter. Let us put that up front, accept it and say that that is where the focus should be in any decisions that are taken.

I mentioned earlier that the second argument against making the needs of the child paramount, and including that in the Bill, was that experience showed that if the child's needs were put first, various bodies involved could use that requirement counter-productively. Indeed, on Second Reading, the hon. Member for Kingswood

*[Mrs. May]*

(Mr. Berry) referred to local education authorities that had used the argument about the needs of the child to prevent certain children from going into mainstream education, saying that a place in a special school was more appropriate.

It is a bad principle to use examples of where putting the child's needs first has acted against the child's needs as a reason for not incorporating such a provision in the Bill. That is an argument for examining how local authorities are interpreting the needs of the child, and putting those principles into practice, rather than for leaving the needs of the child off the Bill. My fear is that the kind of situation to which the hon. Member for Kingswood referred could be exacerbated if there were no provision in the Bill to ensure that, when considering such decisions, the needs of the child must be centrally placed and paramount.

I am worried not only about circumstances in which, without this provision, a child could be prevented by a local authority from going into mainstream education. Given that the Bill emphasises two considerations—parental wishes and the provision of efficient education within the recipient school—a situation could arise in which parents were worried about the prospect of their child going into mainstream education and were naturally fearful of the child not being in a special school. The mainstream school in question may argue that there might be some difficulties involved in teaching the child, despite the fact that the needs of the child would clearly be best met by being in that school. If that third consideration of the individual needs of the child, that balancing item, were not in the Bill, it would be all too easy in those circumstances for that child to be prevented from having a place in the mainstream school simply because we had not accepted the importance of those needs.

3.15 pm

These arguments can act in another way, too. I am conscious of the problems faced by a number of special schools. They have considerable expertise in providing for the needs of individual children in a way that mainstream schools are often unable to meet. So far in this debate, considerable emphasis has understandably been placed on the needs of children with disabilities. That is a central and very welcome part of the Bill that we support. However, special educational needs do not simply relate to children with disabilities.

Many schools commenting on the issue of including children in mainstream education state that they have no difficulty with the principle, although there might be resource implications, for example, in accommodating a child who was a wheelchair user. However, those schools are concerned about children with emotional and behavioural difficulties who can cause real disruption and damage to the education of other children.

That is why it is so sad to see what is happening to schools such as Oldfield House school in Twickenham, which I visited yesterday. It is a special school for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties which is under threat of closure by the local authority. The school has had very few children referred to it, and the local authority has been running down the number of statements and referrals that it has been making to it. The head teacher made the point that the school had a group of teachers with expertise in dealing with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties, and if its children were placed in mainstream schools, there would be an impact on the rest of the children in the classes, and the teachers in the mainstream schools would find it very difficult to cope with them. Furthermore, the needs of the children with emotional and behavioural difficulties would not be met. They might be physically included in the class, but in many other ways they would be excluded from the educational provision of the school.

In considering where a child with special educational needs, of whatever sort, can best be educated, it is important that the wishes of parents and the efficient provision of education should be considered, and the Bill rightly makes provision for those considerations. However, it is also simple common sense and in the best interests of children to ensure that their needs should be placed at the heart of the Bill. Their needs drive the Bill, and their needs drive our intention to provide the best possible education for them. We should recognise that in the Bill, and new clause 2 aims to provide that recognition.

**Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) about the needs of the child being paramount. It is rather surprising that we have had to table this new clause. One would assume that, as the Government have said how important it is to introduce the Bill to help children with special educational needs and disabilities, such a provision would not be missing from it. The children about whom we are talking are the very children whom the Bill is supposedly designed to help.

I know that there is probably general support for the Bill's principles, but I have a little difficulty with it because of experiences that I have had in my constituency. I do not want to take up too much of the House's time in going over the ground that I covered on Second Reading and in Committee, but I have some concerns about what is happening in special educational needs at the moment.

I accept that many children with SEN can be included in mainstream schools. Many already are, including children in my constituency. In Gloucestershire, however, the Labour party and, indeed, the Liberal Democrats on the county council seem determined to challenge the need for so many special schools, and even to embark on a programme to close such schools. As I have said in the House before, a school in Stroud, Bownham Park—it is not actually in my constituency—is scheduled for closure. We are challenging the decision, because it is felt that if that school is closed a number of other schools in Gloucestershire will also be closed, which would reduce the amount of SEN provision in the county.

Although it is possible to provide special education in mainstream schools, it is important for a number of special schools to be available for children to attend if that is their wish and the wish of their parents. I have already accepted that many children can go to mainstream schools even if they have special needs, and that many do; but if children, or their parents, decide that education in special schools is really necessary, the facility should be provided.

What is surely of overriding importance—what must matter more than any fine theories that we may propound here, and more than any political dogma or political

correctness—is that each child should be assessed on the basis of what he or she needs, and that the child is offered education that will suit those individual requirements.

Many children at special schools are currently feeling rather challenged. They sense that their schools are under threat, and fear that their voices are not being listened to. There is a great movement towards inclusion, which is justified in many instances; but many children are frightened by the Bill. They are frightened by the prospect of their schools' being closed as a result of political correctness or party dogma, and they want people to listen to them.

Last month, I welcomed a delegation from Alderman Knight school, in my constituency, to the House of Commons. One girl who knew that she had special educational needs spoke to the meeting, very bravely. She came out with a phrase that I will never forget for as long as I am elected to this place: she said that no one was listening to her.

Surely politicians in all parties have a duty to listen to what is said by those whom we are supposed to be trying to help. I support the new clause because I fear that we are not listening to expressions of concern from individual pupils with special educational needs.

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough): New clause 2, which I support, deals with the challenging tightrope that the Bill attempts to walk. On the one hand there is the commendable and correct principle of including children with special needs, in order to further their integration in society and help them to develop as fully as possible. No one argues with that. On the other, there is the reality: it may be in the best interests of both child and school for some SEN children to be educated in schools that focus specifically on their needs. I consider it essential for what the new clause describes as the "best interests of the child" to be enshrined in the Bill.

I spoke to a number of teachers in my constituency this week, in order to be briefed on their views and those of their schools about the new clause and the Bill in general. They expressed concern—this is their opinion, not mine—that the Bill might force children into mainstream schools when that would be manifestly unsuitable owing to their needs. A clause ensuring that the best interest of the child was always a priority would be invaluable.

**Dr. Evan Harris** (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The hon. Gentleman said that the phrase "best interests of the child" was in the new clause. I cannot find it there. There is a distinction to be drawn between the needs of a child and the best interests of that child.

**Mr. Leigh:** I note what the hon. Gentleman says, but I should have thought that a new clause requiring the Secretary of State to

"ensure that provision by bodies in receipt of public funds for meeting those needs should treat the needs of the individual child as paramount"

was using language denoting "the best interests of the child". The hon. Gentleman's point strikes me as being merely semantic, but he has his own view, and he is entitled to make his own speech in his own way.

**Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): It might be helpful if the Liberal Democrats told us whether they would support the new clause if it included the alternative wording which, as my hon. Friend says, is similar to what is there now.

**Mr. Leigh:** No doubt we shall discover the Liberal Democrats' view later, but I do not think that we should trade debating points. We are discussing a serious issue. Whether we refer to the best interests or the paramount interests of a child—I do not mind what we call it—we are talking about people with severe difficulties. Let us put them first.

**Mr. Levitt:** At every stage, Ministers and those of us who support the Bill in its entirety have made it clear that the Bill not only provides a framework for the successful integration of children with special needs in mainstream education, but strengthens parents' right to make informed choices about where their children are educated. Can the hon. Gentleman give us any evidence—apart from hearsay, originating from people who may not yet be familiar with the Bill—to demonstrate that the Bill will not achieve what it sets out to achieve?

**Mr. Leigh:** If it is indeed true that those who have framed the Bill are determined to give parents freedom of choice, I do not see why they should be concerned about the admirable wording of the new clause. We have not yet heard from the Minister, who, of course, may accept it. The new clause simply suggests that the Secretary of State should treat

"the needs of the individual child as paramount"

I said that I wanted to relay the views of teachers in my constituency. I think that their views are worth hearing. A connected issue, which teachers constantly mention to me, is the provision of special schools. Teachers say that the initiative to encourage more children into mainstream schools—with which, in principle, everyone is quite happy—carries the danger that more and more special schools will be closed down. That point was made earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson).

Ofsted put the rate of closure of special schools at 30 per cent. last year. If that continues—this directly answers the question asked by the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt)—parents will have little choice in regard to where they send their children. It is a mockery of the notion of choice to say that parents can decide at the statement stage of discussions with the local education authority to put that child in a special school—which may be the best solution for the child—and then be told that the nearest special school is miles away, or has just been closed. That is the point that we are trying to make in the new clause, and that is why we must ensure that the child's interests are paramount.

**Miss Anne Begg** (Aberdeen, South): I think every Labour Member accepts, and has reiterated throughout debate on the Bill, that nothing in the Bill will stop the special education of children who cannot be integrated in mainstream schools. The hon. Gentleman, however, refers to the distance that a child may have to travel to find a special school. That is why it is so important for smaller units in mainstream schools, or attached to them, to deal with children who have severe disabilities, enabling them to be closer to their homes. The children will not be in special schools; they will be in mainstream schools,

*[Miss Anne Begg]*

but those schools will have special provision for them. That may be to their advantage, because they will be close to home rather than having to live in dormitories hundreds of miles away.

**Mr. Leigh:** That is a fair point. I am delighted by the intervention, because it leads me straight to a point about the funding of mainstream schools.

**Mr. Levitt:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Leigh:** I will, although I am trying to reply to the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg).

3.30 pm

**Mr. Levitt:** The hon. Gentleman seems to assume that all special schools are the same. Even when there were more special schools than there are now, if a child needed a particular type of special school—say one that specialised in the education of autistic children—parents might have had to travel a long way and pass several other special schools. The hon. Gentleman also misses the point that many special schools were closed under the previous Government and 13 have opened in recent months under this Government.

**Mr. Leigh:** I take the point that in the past children may have had to travel long distances to special schools. That is why nobody is arguing in principle with the thinking behind the Bill that it is good to try to encourage children into mainstream schools, if they are nearby, funding is available and the right education and care can be given. However, it must be done properly and that is why we need some serious arguments from the Government about why new clause 2 is not acceptable.

**Dr. Harris:** Does the hon. Gentleman think that the wishes of the parents or the needs of the child should be paramount, because both cannot be?

**Mr. Leigh:** That is a debating point. The reality is that discussions will take place at the statement stage and the course of action that is in the best interests of the child will become apparent to the parents. After all, few parents go out of their way not to put the interests of their child first.

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** My hon. Friend mentioned the need to travel long distances to special schools. Will he speculate why parents and children might be prepared to travel those distances? Could it be the special treatment and care that children get at those schools? Parents and children often have to travel at their own expense, but they consider it to be well worth it.

**Mr. Leigh:** That is a fair point, and I know that my hon. Friend also represents a rural constituency. In fact, there is a special school in Gainsborough. My constituency is geographically the same size as Greater London, which has 73 constituencies, but parents will travel many miles to that school because they believe that it meets the special needs of their children.

The fundamental issue is funding. Teachers in my constituency are, on the whole, extremely sceptical about the promised funding from the Government to implement the admittedly desirable objectives of the Bill. Teachers do not think that they will receive enough funding to meet all the extra demands placed on their schools by the policy of inclusion, and nor are they impressed by the training on offer to equip teachers to cope. The Bill needs to be covered by adequate funding if it is to work and our children are to get the best possible education.

If funding is inadequate, the law will be made to look an ass. Schools will refuse to take on more SEN children because they cannot afford to financially; or because it would push the school over the edge of teachability, as one head teacher in my constituency fears; or because schools would be unable to cope with children with special educational needs, who would be far worse off than if they had stayed in their special schools.

Paul Strong is the head teacher of a large, successful comprehensive school in my constituency. It has come high up the league tables and recently, with my help and that of others, has acquired a sixth form. Mr. Strong has said:

"there are some children for whom mainstream education may be manifestly unsuited"—

and he thinks that it would be bad for their dignity to put them in such education. He wants to ensure that it is in the interests of the child to come to his school, and that should be put above the Government's commitment to inclusion. He is happy to receive children with special educational needs, provided that the funding is available and it is in the interests of the children. Another teacher has given the example of a child with Asperger's syndrome who finds it difficult to be with large numbers of other children. Clearly it would not be in the best interests of that child to be included in mainstream education.

I have received a letter from a teacher who specialises in teaching those children with special educational needs. She says:

"Special Schools have historically catered for one type, or possibly two or more similar types, of SEN: Autism, sight impairment, hearing impairment, physical disability . . . In those schools, class sizes range from 6 or fewer, to 12, or at most 15 where the needs are not too severe. The teachers are supported by 1:1 SSA's where appropriate, as well as by a trained classroom assistant. The particular needs of the children are met by fully qualified staff, so that, for instance, Physio's and OT's are closely involved with developing and monitoring programmes for children with mobility problems. Speech Therapists work regularly with children with speech and language or hearing difficulties, and psychologists and behaviour therapists have counselling roles with disturbed children. The teachers themselves benefit from training specifically for meeting the needs of the children they are working with, and from a complex support structure within their schools. Life skills are a feature of every child's IEP, and are given appropriate space in their educational day. Furthermore, the school buildings are adapted and modified to accommodate the needs of the children they serve, and they have the resources and equipment necessary for the children's full educational and pastoral needs.

By contrast, Mainstream schools have classes of 30 children, regardless of the range of need within those classes. One teacher may be supported for some, and in Early Years possibly all, of each day.

However, every school can now expect to be obliged to accept children with any type of SEN, and be required to provide as best it can for their varying needs. Buildings may not be appropriate, resources and equipment may not be available, and staff may have

no training, expertise or understanding of how best to support the children whose parents have opted for Inclusion, but that seems to matter little to those who are promoting this policy."

Those are not the words of a politician or the head teacher of a comprehensive school, but of a teacher who has dedicated her life to teaching children with special educational needs. She has a right to have her view heard by the House, otherwise we could deal a serious blow to the happiness and education of some of the most vulnerable children in our society. The views of such teachers should not be brushed aside by the House.

The Government must give assurances that they will not water down the specificity of the statements that are given to children. The Government backed down in the Lords and now refuse to say when they will issue the code of practice that will outline the rules. Those rules must not be watered down to obscure the funding that a child deserves. Parents must be able to see clearly their child's entitlement and what they can claim from the local education authority.

Another school in my constituency is undersubscribed and has been struggling to attract pupils, for various reasons that are not the fault of the school. I must make it clear that it is a different school from the one I mentioned earlier—William Farr school—which is a highly successful and oversubscribed school. The head teacher of the less successful school told me that inclusion was a very good principle and was necessary for the good of society, but he also said that his school could not take any more SEN children. More money would not help him because he cannot employ staff as it is. He spoke of a vicious cycle in his school in which more SEN children means standards and behaviour declining, which means good pupils and teachers leaving—

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Jacqui Smith):** That is outrageous.

**Mr. Leigh:** Labour Members may not like that, but they must listen to the reality of the education world. We cannot frame legislation simply on the basis of good intentions. I am reporting the views of a head teacher of a comprehensive school in this country and he says that good pupils are leaving, making more spaces for SEN children and so the cycle continues. Some comprehensive schools could be pushed further into unpopularity.

**Mr. Levitt:** I hope that the hon. Gentleman will regard this comment as helpful. If what we have heard is a genuine description of what is happening in two of his schools, I recommend that he invite Ofsted to look at the situation immediately.

**Mr. Leigh:** That, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind me saying so, is a rather silly point. A very successful, oversubscribed school is, in principle, prepared to have more children but it needs the funding to do so, while the head teacher of another school is doing his best in a difficult situation but could be pushed into taking action that would make the school unpopular. It is a vicious cycle. These people must be listened to; it may be difficult, but life is difficult.

**Miss Begg:** I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman was quoting a head teacher. I am disturbed that head teachers with such views are teaching in comprehensive schools. I was a special educational needs pupil and I was a teacher in a comprehensive school with special educational needs—my own. I find it incredibly insulting that there are some in the education system who make the assumption that because people have special educational needs or a disability they will cause a problem or be badly behaved. That is simply not true.

**Mr. Leigh:** I am not saying that. I am simply trying to describe the real situation. Often we may not like the real world as we find it. However, the fact is that schools nowadays are competing with each other for pupils, competing for teachers in a very difficult job market and competing in the league tables.

The head teacher I mentioned was not against the principle of the Bill—he is all in favour, in principle, of inclusion. He is simply saying that we should be careful, pause and not rush into a situation in which, in the real world, SEN children may be dumped into certain mainstream schools. *[Interruption.]* Yes, dumped. I have to use that word. It is no point Labour Members looking shocked. This sort of thing goes on, I am afraid. There is no point in framing legislation full of high ideals if, in the long run, children with special needs suffer.

**Mr. Roger Berry** (Kingswood): The hon. Gentleman says that in the real world SEN children are dumped into mainstream schools. Will he advise the House which local education authorities behave in that way?

**Mr. Leigh:** The hon. Gentleman has deliberately misrepresented what I said. I said that if the Bill is enacted, and if the interests of children are not paramount, that is what may happen. I am delighted that what I have said appears to have stirred up a hornets' nest on the Labour Benches. I have obviously touched a raw nerve. Many children receive first-rate education in special schools but there is a danger that if this process continues, they may not receive sufficiently good education.

**Mr. Berry:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Leigh:** I do not want to delay the House but as the hon. Gentleman is anxious to intervene of course I will give way to him.

**Mr. Berry:** The only reason that I intervened is because the hon. Gentleman referred to "the real world". His description is inconsistent with anything that any local education authority I have ever encountered would do. He talks about dumping children with special educational needs in mainstream schools as if that were the practice of local education authorities. If that is the case, he should either name the local education authorities concerned or apologise for what I regard as a deep slur on what the professionals are trying to do.

**Mr. Leigh:** The hon. Gentleman has altogether too thin a skin for this House.

**Mr. Berry:** The hon. Gentleman is throwing insults around.

**Mr. Leigh:** I am not. I am simply describing what may happen unless we are very careful. I am perfectly entitled to articulate my point of view, and I will not be bullied into taking it back.

**Mr. St. Aubyn:** I have listened with great interest to what my hon. Friend has told us happens at the sharp end.

*[Mr. St. Aubyn]*

Labour Members are forgetting that it is no longer LEAs that choose which schools children go to but parents. That is where the problem arises. If there is an imbalance in the number of children of a certain type at a certain school, that may impact on the school's success in attracting a broad range of children and therefore on its success as a school.

3.45 pm

**Mr. Leigh:** My hon. Friend has summed up the situation much better than I could. That is what happens in real life, as I was trying to explain.

I have already mentioned Paul Strong, the head teacher of William Farr. Another head teacher, Barry Tointon of Caistor Yarborough school, said that it was essential for adequate money to be provided. They both said that there was nothing that they could do to incorporate more SEN children into their schools without more money and more resources. They do not have any more money lying around to spend on more assistance. They both appreciate the benefits that can be gained but say that it is not possible to do it without the relevant support, funding and training for them and their teachers.

Cherie Taylor, a new SEN co-ordinator in my constituency, said that training was very hard to come by but that she had been fortunate to get a course for a master's degree in the subject. She is in favour of inclusion but emphasises the need for funding.

If the legislation is to be a success, the Government must ensure that sufficient resources are made available to prevent the law from becoming ineffective and damaging to children. The £70 million promised for 25,000 schools per year amounts to an extra £280 per school—hardly a lot of money. It is not enough for the inclusion of more SEN children.

There is no point in the Government producing worthy legislation and putting more burdens on teachers and local authorities without providing the means to make the Bill work. The constant refrain of the teachers I have talked to is to give them the money and they will do their best to carry out these requirements in a difficult situation.

Other fears voiced by SEN teachers include the widespread belief that the Bill does not allow or sufficiently encourage the communication and co-ordination that we have become accustomed to hearing about, but not seeing, in what is supposed to be joined-up government. They believe that there is a need for more communication between the many different agencies that may be involved in a single child's case. That would encourage them to share their information and expertise and to work for the holistic and rounded treatment of a child with SEN. I hope that all right hon. and hon. Members agree with that point of view. Such co-ordination is also needed between the NHS and the Department for Education and Employment to ensure that there are enough staff to meet all the child's needs. For example, there may not be nearly enough occupational therapists or speech and language therapists to meet the demands of schools for their children with SEN.

Let me make a point about regulation which also concerns the interests of the child. A teacher told me that he had been raising money for a stair lift over the past few years and had finally got the necessary funds through voluntary fund raising, and so on. However, it was not allowed to be installed by the authorities because the stairwell was too narrow by less than 20 cm. The chair lift was deemed to be inappropriate and could not be installed for the use of children with special educational needs. The teacher made the point that children, in his experience, are well behaved and do not cause problems in other narrow stairwells. However, he was not allowed to put in the chair lift thanks to health and safety regulations.

We need more common sense, fewer counter-productive regulations and more communication. We need to ensure that the best interests of the child are paramount. We need to ensure that special schools are not closed down, thus reducing choice, and that there is proper funding. These are the points that I have tried to make in my brief contribution and I hope that the Government will listen to them.

**Dr. Harris:** We will be opposing new clause 2 for the reasons that we gave in Committee when discussing similar issues. I shall not rehearse them at length.

We heard an interesting contribution from the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), as always. However, his undoubted passion and sincerity led him astray in certain areas. To argue that schools should not somehow be able to garner to them pupils with particular needs or aptitudes—irrespective of whether that is a good or a bad thing for SEN children—is strange coming from a party that recommends selection by the schools themselves. By definition, that means that some schools do not have the opportunity to get the children that they want because they have been cherry-picked by other schools.

The hon. Gentleman could have made the same analogy with regard to secondary moderns. In areas where there are grammar schools, they have a higher proportion of pupils from poorer backgrounds and poorer educational backgrounds who never get the life chances that are available in excellent comprehensive schools. By analogy, the hon. Gentleman is on dodgy ground, regardless of the merits of the point that he was making. On that, I share the views of those right hon. and hon. Members who intervened on him.

**Mr. John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings): I really cannot allow that attack on secondary modern schools to go unchallenged. Many secondary modern schools where grammar schools exist provide a first-class education. An example is the Gleed girls school in my constituency, which achieves better results than many comprehensive schools. I am sure that, when the hon. Gentleman has had time to reflect on his ill judged remark, he will want to withdraw it.

**Dr. Harris:** I am conscious that I am about to speak to amendment No. 1, but the evidence is clear that comprehensive education has delivered better standards than was delivered by the system of grammar schools and secondary moderns.

Before I turn to amendment No. 1, I should say that Liberal Democrat Members oppose new clause 2, for reasons that we gave in Committee. I was somewhat shocked—although not surprised—to be accused by the hon. Member for Gainsborough of making a debating

point when I asked him to ensure that the terminology he used was appropriate. After all, this is a debating Chamber. I know that the hon. Gentleman was not a member of the Standing Committee, but we made it clear there that it is important not to conflate expressions such as the "rights", "wishes", "needs" and "best interests" of children. Those expressions can refer to different things.

I agree with the hon. Member for Gainsborough that there are similarities between action taken to deliver the educational needs of children and action taken in their best interests, but the notion of "best interest" is always subjective. For example, if there is a conflict between doctors and parents over medical matters, it is often left to the courts to decide whether doctors pursued a child's best interests. In connection with education, the views of parents, local authorities and schools may well differ about what is in a child's best interests.

My second point is that two separate criteria cannot be paramount. Both can be important and worthy of consideration, but my dictionary shows that the word "paramount" implies that one consideration must be placed above another.

We accept assurances given in this House, in another place and in the letter sent to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) that the Bill is designed to ensure that the educational needs of any child are met, particularly when those needs are special. However, within that general approach, the Bill stipulates that the wishes of parents should be paramount.

In Committee, the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) said that the wishes of parents—invariably and by definition—were in the best interest of the child. I consider that that may not always be the case, but if one accepts that it is generally right to trust parents, the new clause introduces a conflict in that regard.

Conservative Members say that they want there to be more respect for parental choice. Their belief—which I consider flawed—is that that can be delivered by allowing schools, rather than parents, to select. The language of the new clause is not consistent with that belief.

Many members of the Standing Committee made two points, at length. The first was that a provision similar to the one contained in the new clause has been used to deny children places in mainstream schools when that would have been in their best interests. That is a historical fact and must be taken into account. The second is that most of the organisations that support the rights of children with special educational needs oppose the new clause and support the undertakings given by the Government.

As I have said before, that in itself is not a sufficient argument for the rejection of the new clause, as it is the job of the House to question the Government regardless of what outside bodies say. However, a powerful impression is made when such bodies form a coalition to oppose a new clause such as this. I accept that the proposal is well intentioned, but it is critically flawed.

Amendment No. 1 would substitute the word "effective" for "efficient" in the caveat contained in proposed new section 316(3)(b). As drafted, that new section states:

> "If a statement is maintained under section 324 for the child, he must be educated in a mainstream school . . . unless that is incompatible with . . . the provision of efficient education for other children."

I raised this matter in Committee, and we have tabled the amendment today because I did not get a satisfactory answer. Those seeking to make decisions on this matter will look at what the Minister said. There is a difference between "effective" and "efficient". To many people, the word "efficient" implies financial considerations that are not implied by the word "effective".

Clearly, there is a duty to consider the delivery of effective education. For example—and the circumstances that I shall describe are much rarer than is often claimed—it may be impossible to deliver effective education to a child with special educational needs arising from challenging behaviour in class. By effective education, I mean the delivery of the curriculum in a safe way. However, it might be possible to deliver that education safely, but at an increased cost. By definition, the extra steps that would have to be taken in my example would render the delivery of education less efficient than it would otherwise have been. There is therefore some peril in the use of the word "efficient" which would be avoided by the use of the word "effective".

Do the Government accept that there are significant funding restrictions on schools and local authorities? The Government always quote figures to show how much money is going into education, but those figures are pretty meaningless. As was discussed in Committee, who would not say that another £20 million would always make things better? The Minister must accept that an insistence on the word "efficient" will mean that some schools and local authorities may well say that they are suffering from the financial restrictions arising out of the unfair and undemocratic capping regime that the Government have retained.

The hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson), for example, waxed lyrical in Committee—and eloquent today—about the Gloucestershire local education authority. Authorities like that could well argue that lack of funding forces them to reject a mainstream place for a child with special educational needs, even though effective and safe education can still be delivered for other children.

In Committee, I had to drag a response to that point out of the Minister. She said:

> "The term 'efficient education' is used throughout the Education Act, in, for example, schedule 27 and section 7. It is appropriate to use it here to ensure consistency."

That is a circular argument, or even a Conservative one: how could the law ever be changed, given that a changed law would not be consistent with what went before? Amendment No. 2 was not selected for debate today, but it shows where the consequential amendments would have to be made to achieve a new consistency if the right thing were done and amendment No. 1 were accepted.

The Minister's response in Standing Committee went on:

> "I have reassured the Committee on the extent to which we are putting extra resources into achieving inclusion and into the education system as a whole. Nevertheless, it is not unreasonable to expect LEAs to have regard for the efficient education of children, regardless of the fact that significant extra resources are being provided."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 27 March 2001; c. 69.]

To me, that suggests that the Minister was being honest and accepting that it may not be possible for the Government to afford to make provision in a mainstream

*[Dr. Harris]*

school to provide effective and safe education for other children because of the cost of doing so. However, I draw to her attention the fact that, if cost is the issue, the cost of providing that education separately may be much higher than the cost of providing it in a mainstream school.

Conservative Members ought to bear that in mind as well. I do not want to go into the merits of individual cases or of Conservative policy in general, but the Conservative proposal to ensure that there are more exclusions would have cost implications for any special units that are set up. Accountants would regard the proposal as a less efficient way to ensure delivery of education for children with special educational needs, even though it may be appropriate for the effective and safe education of other children.

The point at issue is a serious one. If cases are to be challenged at tribunal or later in the appeals process, it is important to know what is the Government's thinking on the question of cost as a factor. Unless she is going to accept the amendment, I hope that the Minister will explain why she is not happy with the proposal to substitute the word "effective" for "efficient".

**Mr. Levitt:** The whole House will know the reputation of the three Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen, the hon. Members for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) and for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman). All three are absolutely committed to the cause of disabled people and to children with special needs. All three have served as officers of the all-party disablement group. Whatever they may say, therefore, I am sure that they will have been as embarrassed by and ashamed of the rant from the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) against mainstream integration of children with special needs as we on this side were. The hon. Gentleman was either telling us a story based on partial evidence, ill-informed evidence and hearsay, or describing the very attitudes which will guarantee that integration will not work—that disabled children and children with special needs should be out of sight and out of mind, and that the integration of these children cannot succeed because it could only ever happen at the expense of the majority. Every Labour Member, Liberal Democrat Member and, I believe, Conservative Front-Bench Member would distance themselves from that attitude wholeheartedly.

4 pm

**Mr. Leigh:** May I inform the hon. Gentleman that I have two children who have special educational needs and are at mainstream primary schools?

**Mr. Levitt:** I am delighted to hear it. I am sure, therefore, that the hon. Gentleman can come up with examples of how integration in the mainstream can work.

I remind the House that the Bill, which we all thought would proceed in the amiable, positive and progressive way in which it has from the word go, aims to ensure, first, the effective integration, where that is the choice, of children with special needs in mainstream schools and, secondly, the informed choice of parents and children about the use of special schools, accepting wholeheartedly that there will continue to be a role for special schools, in particular for children with severe hearing impairments.

**Laura Moffatt** (Crawley): Does my hon. Friend agree that the contribution from the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) almost sought to create a conflict between teachers in mainstream schools and those in special schools that does not exist? It is a great shame that such a debate should make those in different settings feel that this House thinks there should be some conflict.

**Mr. Levitt:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right and pre-empts what I was about to say. Teachers from special schools are assisting teachers in mainstream schools who teach those with special needs. There is a thoroughly seamless and integrated approach.

In Derbyshire we have the concept of the enhanced resource school. It is a mainstream school teaching children with special needs in an integrated way, but with additional funding from the local authority for additional staff and resources, not only to make integration work but to make sure that the extra help that children with special needs get is not in any way at the expense of anyone else. Such examples of good practice exist. I previously commended the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), for her decision a couple of weeks ago to provide funding through a private finance initiative scheme for the replacement of a special school in my constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) acknowledges that she is in the same position. That shows the Government's commitment to the parallel provision of mainstream and special schools in taking special needs education forward.

The Conservative party does not believe in having too much government, so presumably it believes in having the minimum number of words in a Bill and in not including unnecessary words. Yet today that party is arguing for a new clause which on the face of it looks unarguable and pious. At the same time it perhaps disguises fears and "stirring up" on the part of people like the hon. Member for Gainsborough. Yet it is wholly unnecessary in terms of improving the Bill and making it more effective. I am surprised that hon. Gentlemen are pursuing it.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough talked about his chair lift. He told us how the funding for it was raised from voluntary sources—only to find that the lift could not be used. Clearly, that school needs to be aware of the schools access initiative, that there is Government funding to make schools accessible to children with disabilities, and that, by 2003, the sums going into schools will be 10 times what they were when the Tory Government left office. The purpose of the funding is to allow for integration.

This is a wholly uncontroversial Bill, save to say that the Special Educational Consortium, which comprises 200 organisations representing disabled children, is of the view that the Bill does not require further amendment and should not be amended. With that thought in mind, I hope that the House will reject new clause 2.

**Mr. St. Aubyn:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to my feet 21 years almost to the minute after I rose to give a very different speech at the reception

following my wedding. I must apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) for missing the first few minutes of her speech introducing the new clause. I was called out of the Chamber to receive a flower, which is now in my buttonhole, from my wife. I hope that the House will accept her contribution to this afternoon's debate as she is both a governor of a special school and an assistant classroom helper at that school.

The debate needs some lightening after the last two contributions from the Labour and Liberal Democrat Benches. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) was trying to make and succeeded in making an important point which certainly struck home with me from my knowledge of education in my constituency. We had a school with a preponderance of children with special educational needs. Whether we like it or not, that was a discouragement to parents of other children from applying to that school. That is a sad comment on social life in Britain today. If we are to encourage people to accept the integration of children with special needs in mainstream education, we must move at a pace that they are willing to accept. No longer is it the education authority that dictates where children go to school; it is the parents who have a choice. We have to be alive to their choices. The vast majority of parents welcome the school that cares for children with special educational needs as well, but they want a school with a broad base of children with all types of special interests and skills. That is what makes a successful school. The aim of getting that balance right must be at the heart of our policy.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) in his laborious, long-winded attention to definition was getting to the heart of the matter. Over 18 years the previous Government developed a body of legislation concerning special educational needs. The underlying assumption behind that was that we were talking about the needs of the child. This afternoon and in previous debates it appears that the Government and their supporters think that we are talking about the needs of the parents or the need for the efficient education of the other children. Surely we must be talking about the needs of the child, and that is the point about the new clause. It is to enshrine in the Bill the fact that the needs of the child are paramount—that child's special educational needs and no one else's.

We need to do that because there is a real worry about resources. In 1997, the leading firm of accountants, Coopers and Lybrand, identified what they described as an expenditure time bomb—the rising cost of spending on educational needs, as, during the past decade, the number designated, formally or informally, as having those needs has doubled as a proportion of children in school. In fact, in only four years, specific expenditure on the special educational needs of children with statements rose from £290 million to £370 million—an increase of 25 per cent.

The worry for people whose children have such needs is that through the Bill—overtly or not—the Government intend to rein in, by moving the goal posts, the spending that must be committed to those children. That worry is what is behind the new clause. It is to prevent at some point—if not at present, in the future—the goal posts being moved through the enactment of the Bill, with future provision for children suffering as a result.

This afternoon, we have heard a great deal about integrating children's education. Where that can be achieved, it is of course the right way to go. However, the professor of special educational needs at the university of Manchester, Peter Farrell, said that social inclusion is not necessarily the same as educational inclusion. Gosden House, the school where my wife works, makes a fantastic contribution to our community. It is proud of the children who leave to go into mainstream education, but it is also incredibly proud of the children who leave the school to go into mainstream society.

The other day, I attended the school's open day—a peace day—when the children gave a wonderful performance in the school hall. I met several former pupils who had come back to support Gosden House. It was striking how many of them were making a success of life in mainstream society. Surely, we should not lose sight of that vital goal—the needs of the child, which are not necessarily the same as those of the parent or of other children in the education system.

The education authority has to balance a host of demands in meeting educational needs. When the Conservatives came back to power in Surrey, spending on special educational needs was about £70 million a year. Of that, £10 million was for transport. That seems a totally disproportionate amount to all of us, so we must look forward to a time when schools are able to use the resources they are given for special educational needs more flexibly and more imaginatively. When they do so, the attraction of mainstream schools for children with special needs will increase.

When the Select Committee on Education and Employment visited the United States about a year ago, we visited several charter schools. I well remember one successful school, the City on the Hill in Boston, which was run by a head teacher who was clearly on the left of the Democrat party. She looked straight at me and said, "Nick, what you have to remember is that charter schools are where the radical left meets up with the radical right." Of course, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead has demonstrated that she is a member of the radical right, because she promotes the idea of free schools, which borrows very much from the success of the charter school movement in the States. We recognise that if we give money directly to schools, their success will be enhanced.

One of the ways in which the City on the Hill has achieved success is that its budget for special educational needs does not depend on children being statemented at all. The education authority gives the school a subvention on the assumption that it will be prepared to accept its fair share of children with special educational needs and that it will do its best for them where they need support. That means that the seamless progress that hon. Members have been talking about this afternoon can happen without the need for constant definition and review of the child's position on the spectrum of special educational needs and mainstream provision.

4.15 pm

That is the approach that we look forward to in the new clause. Money would go directly from the Secretary of State to schools, so the Secretary of State must give direction to those schools and ensure that they fulfil the requirements of such an approach. In due course, I believe that we will move to such a system because—goodness

*[Mr. St. Aubyn]*

knows—the present system is excessively bureaucratic. Ofsted says that only one in five schools fulfils its statutory requirements to provide for special educational needs, and that more than a third misuse some of the money that they receive, or fail to implement a proper strategy for meeting the special educational needs of their children. Clearly, the current approach is not working. To change the definitions, as the Bill proposes, will do nothing to help. In looking forward to that time, I support the provision because it envisages a direct relationship between the Secretary of State and the mainstream schools which provide for special educational needs.

Finally, I remind the Government of the Secretary of State's comments on the code of practice during an earlier debate on the Bill. Having got his fingers burnt at an earlier stage of the Bill's proceedings, when the whole world of special educational needs cried foul at the suggestion that the specifying provisions, which are in the present code, might be removed, the Secretary of State withdrew and said:

"The code will state clearly that statements should 'describe clearly all of the child's special educational needs in full'".—[*Official Report*, 20 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 218.]

All we are saying in the new clause is that that principle is so important that it should be enshrined in the Bill and not merely left to a code of practice that might be amended by a future Secretary of State.

**Jacqui Smith:** I shall begin my response by dealing with the proposed new clause. As the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) rightly says, it returns us to the important issue of the needs of the child, which we debated at some length both on Second Reading and, constructively, in Committee. Indeed, the new clause has many similarities to amendment No. 5 and new clause 5 tabled in Committee.

The debate in Committee was constructive and I thought that it had helped to allay some concerns. To that extent, I am marginally disappointed that we are going over the arguments again. Some of the issues raised were considered previously and some are new; I hope to respond to all of them.

The key point is that I am sure that everyone in the Chamber believes that the interests of individual children with special educational needs, and their peers, must be safeguarded. I hope that no one doubts the Government's commitment to that. However, it is worth remembering the context within which the argument began. It related to the Government's decision, following consultation, to remove what was, in effect, a caveat on the placement of children with special educational needs, which argued that the needs of the children should be paramount. A point rehearsed today—one which was certainly made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on Second Reading—is that such a caveat in the Bill would have acted in a way that many of us would consider unsatisfactory. It is important not to forget that we are operating in that context.

We also decided to drop that caveat because we firmly believe that safeguards exist elsewhere which adequately protect pupils with special educational needs, so I shall argue, first, that there are some technical difficulties with new clause 2; secondly, that to include provisions about the needs of the children as new clause 2 proposes would, in effect, act against what we are trying to achieve; and, thirdly, that we ensure that the interests of the child are covered elsewhere through a whole range of legislation and in the processes that are undertaken in relation to children with special educational needs.

I shall take the third argument first. In Committee I outlined those safeguards in detail and, as the hon. Member for Maidenhead mentioned, I wrote to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) to set them out, copying that letter to other members of the Committee. In particular, in addition to the legislative bases that the hon. Member for Maidenhead referred to, I drew attention to the fact that the SEN code of practice and the statementing process ensure that children's educational needs are identified and that appropriate action is taken to help them to achieve their potential.

In many ways, the final point made by the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) reinforces our arguments that new clause 2 is unnecessary. Statements will specify the provision to be made, so local education authorities are under a duty to arrange for it to be made. Therefore the important issue of children's needs and the provision that should be made for them is enshrined at the heart of the statementing process.

Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools will monitor the new inclusion framework. That monitoring will include looking at whether the needs of pupils with special educational needs are being appropriately provided for under the new framework. We believe that that will help to prevent abuses, if they were to occur, and to ensure that the needs of the child are safeguarded.

As I also highlighted in Committee, sections 496, 497 and 497A of the Education Act 1996 allow the Secretary of State to intervene where local education authorities or maintained schools are acting unreasonably or failing to fulfil a statutory duty. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has used those powers to protect the interests of pupils with special educational needs. I outlined in Committee some of the occasions on which that has happened.

**Mr. Boswell:** Given the context and the reference to the reasonability provisions, which the hon. Lady rightly mentioned, while we cannot necessarily treat a hypothetical case here, would it not seem extraordinary if Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools were to draw attention to a dereliction of duty on the part of the local education authority in implementing the inclusion framework, if the Secretary of State were not then, as an Executive act, to call in and question the reasonability of that action by that authority?

**Jacqui Smith:** I am not completely clear what the hon. Gentleman is referring to.

**Mr. Boswell:** I was trying to do it in my cod lawyer language, but let us do it in English. If the inspector says that there is something wrong with the way in which the LEA is operating inclusion, would it not be sensible as a matter of course—although I am not asking for a formal commitment—for the Secretary of State to call in the local authority and ask what it proposes to do about it?

**Jacqui Smith:** As I believe we made clear in Committee and as I have made clear today, the opportunity does exist,

through those provisions, for the Secretary of State to use powers where maintained schools or LEAs are acting unreasonably or failing to fulfil a statutory duty.

In Committee, when we discussed amendment No. 1, which covered similar ground to the new clause before us, I asked Opposition Members what practical and workable arrangements could be put in place in addition to the Secretary of State's existing powers. No examples have been provided in Committee or since. That suggests that what already exists is adequate.

During today's debate, some Members have expressed concern about the suggestion that, as a result of the Bill, children could be forced into mainstream schools. Our legislation is drafted in such a way that, when parents do not want a mainstream place for the child, the duty to provide mainstream education is lifted. That does not mean that LEAs cannot name a mainstream place in a child's statement, but where LEAs do so and parents disagree they of course have a right of appeal at a SEN tribunal.

We also had some discussion—some of it measured, some less so—about which children it may or may not be appropriate to include in a mainstream school. Of course I accept that there are questions about which children are appropriately included in mainstream schools and those for whom it would be less appropriate. Obviously, the learning and safety of other children must not be jeopardised, and where the efficient education of other children cannot be safeguarded, a mainstream place should be refused. Where that is the case, there needs to be a range of alternative, high-quality provision, but it does not necessarily follow that it is impossible successfully to include in a mainstream school a child who has, for example, emotional and behavioural difficulties. There are plenty of examples of where that does happen, and we want to empower more schools to emulate their example.

There has already been comment on some of the remarks by the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who did, I fear, in a slightly less measured way than we have experienced until now in debate on the Bill, suggest, whether or not he meant to, that including children with special educational needs in a mainstream school is necessarily disruptive, and that those children will be difficult and pose a problem.

The vast majority of children with special educational needs are not disruptive. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) admirably described, children with special educational needs cover the whole range of the ability spectrum and can be a positive benefit to mainstream schools. One of our arguments for developing, where possible, and in the pragmatic way that we are, inclusion in mainstream schools is that we consider that that is of benefit not only to the children who are included in those schools but to all children in those schools.

The hon. Member for Guildford, in a slightly more measured way—it may be the good influence of the day, and I am sure that everyone in the Chamber would want to extend their congratulations to him on his anniversary—argued that where schools are well resourced and teachers are well trained, which is of course important, inclusion in mainstream schools can be of benefit both to the children who are included and to the other children in those schools.

There were some concerns that if we did not accept new clause 2, we would put special schools at risk or make it harder to obtain a special school place. I reiterate that our proposals in the Bill do not make it harder for parents whose children have statements to gain a special school place. We have always argued that one size does not fit all. That is why we have signalled a continuing role for special schools, and a very important one.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead rightly said that there is significant expertise in special schools, which should be increasingly shared with mainstream schools. That is one of the major objectives of the increased investment that we are making—through the standards fund, for example. It was the intention of the CD-ROM that I launched last year to bring together good practice that showed special schools and mainstream schools working together constructively.

Other hon. Members have suggested that our proposals risk bringing about the closure of some special schools. I can only reiterate that special schools have nothing to fear from the Bill, and repeat that although the size of the special school sector dropped from serving 1.3 per cent. of children in 1991 to 1.2 per cent. in 1995, it has remained constant in each of the last six years, catering for 1.2 per cent. of all children or roughly 97,000 pupils. We do not envisage that that will change dramatically.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South made a very important point about the dangers of looking at raw closure data, because in doing so one ignores the many excellent resource bases that have been set up to provide high-quality specialist provision in mainstream schools. We know that, as my hon. Friend suggested, parents and children like that sort of provision, and that teachers like it especially as it often ensures that the children can be educated in the community with their friends.

I hope that I have reassured hon. Members that what we believe exists, and what we believe will continue under our legislation, is a buoyant and vibrant specialist sector, which has an important contribution to make in educating individual children and in developing the whole education system.

4.30 pm

Hon. Members have also mentioned resources—an important issue. I can only repeat the arguments that we used in Committee: the Government are providing significant resources to ensure that these measures are effective and that children receive the education that they deserve—whether in mainstream or special schools. As well as the extra £540 per pupil increase in school funding and the total capital spending on schools, which will be £8.5 billion for the next three years, specific funding is aimed at some of the issues that hon. Members have raised today.

The standards fund, which covers important issues such as special educational needs training, has been increased from £55 million in the previous financial year to £82 million in this financial year. That sum is more than four times the £17 million available in 1997–98. I am sure that that will reassure the hon. Member for Gainsborough. As my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) said, the schools access initiative stands at £220 million over the next three years, so 10 times as much money will be available from that source in 2003–04 than under the previous Government.

*[Jacqui Smith]*

Hon. Members will also be pleased that we announced today a further £4 million package, outlining our commitment to partnerships—an issue that several hon. Members have raised. The voluntary sector will receive just over £1 million for projects under the SEN small programmes fund, bringing together different agencies and the voluntary sector to work with mainstream and special schools. Some £1 million will be used to support the continuing work of the SEN regional partnerships, and £2 million will be used to support training for the independent people who will facilitate the new dispute resolution arrangements.

As I have suggested, there are technical problems with the new clause, but I shall concentrate on the effect that we know from experience it will have. As with other amendments, the new clause threatens significantly to undermine our proposals to strengthen the right to a mainstream place for children with special educational needs. Whatever the intentions behind the new clause, its effect would be to reinstate provisions similar in effect to the first caveat in section 316 of the Education Act 1996.

That is why, in a letter sent to the hon. Member for Maidenhead, a member of the Council for Disabled Children said:

"I also note that you feel concern that the needs of the child are being ignored. Clause 1 of the Bill amends only one Section of the 1996 Education Act. Elsewhere in the Act, and in the associated regulations and the Code of Practice, the 'needs of the child' are explicitly stated."

It is also why the Special Educational Consortium, which represents many of the organisations that operate in the field, said:

"On the face of it, it appears contradictory that a Consortium that has come together to campaign around the needs of children with SEN is arguing that the needs of the child do not need to be explicitly stated on the face of the Bill. However, SEC does not believe it to be necessary, and is concerned that, if re-instated, this condition could be further misused."

For those reasons, I hope that the hon. Member for Maidenhead will feel able to withdraw the new clause. We believe that our proposals protect all pupils—those who have special educational needs and those who do not. They will ensure that inclusion is based on sound foundations and that an inclusive education service offers excellence and choice.

Under amendment No. 1, the word "efficient" would be replaced by the word "effective" in proposed new section 316. As the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) suggested, it is driven by the concern that the use of term "efficient education" could be interpreted unscrupulously to limit inclusion or resources. He implied that it was somehow rather unprogressive of me to suggest that we need to have consistency in legislation. Dare I say that, although it might not be exciting, consistency in legislation is rather important if it is to operate properly and to have the effects that we want. Therefore, the inclusion of the term "efficient education" in very many other provisions in education law is an argument for its appropriateness to the Bill.

It might be helpful if I explain how the efficient education caveat will work in practice. We believe that it will be possible to demonstrate that a child's inclusion will be incompatible with the efficient education of others only in a small number of cases. For example, a mainstream place should not be provided where it can be clearly shown that a child's behaviour is so challenging that the safety of others cannot be guaranteed, where other children's learning would be persistently and systematically disrupted, or where, even with other support, a child's inclusion would involve the teacher spending a greatly disproportionate amount of time with the child in relation to the rest of the class.

Of course we would allow that caveat to be used only if maintained schools and LEAs were unable to show that there were reasonable steps that they could take to prevent that incompatibility. In considering what is reasonable—that is, whether an LEA or school can take reasonable steps to prevent a child's inclusion being incompatible with the efficient education of others—cost will be taken into account, but cost will not be a factor in deciding whether a child's inclusion would be incompatible with the efficient education of other children.

Given that commitment and the fact that the new inclusion framework will be monitored by Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, who has been asked to pay particular attention to the use of the new caveats to ensure that they are not abused, I hope that the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon will not press amendment No. 1 to a Division.

**Dr. Harris:** I shall deal briefly with new clause 2 and the contribution of the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn). I join hon. Members in congratulating him on his 21st wedding anniversary, but I hope, for his wife's sake, that he provides her with more than a copy of that mention in *Hansard* as his gift. He fell into the same trap of being too loose with some of his terminology that other Conservative Members have. As the record will show, he said that it is important that the needs of the child should be rated more highly than those of society or parents. I do not know where he got the expression "parents' needs" from, but I cannot find the expression "needs of the parent" or "parents' needs"—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal):** Order. I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. If he wishes to make a contribution now, he must seek the leave of the House.

**Dr. Harris:** I will not seek the leave of the House to press that point. *[Interruption.]*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. Clearly, it would appear that the hon. Gentleman does not have the leave of the House.

**Mrs. May:** This important debate has gone right to the heart of the issue of whether we should aim to provide the education that is right for every child. We believe that we should, and that is why we tabled new clause 2.

The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) was generous in his references to the Opposition Front-Bench team and to our commitment to working for disabled people. However, I must disabuse him about our views on the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh). It is incredible that Labour Members tried to silence the voice of teachers, because it is their voice that my hon. Friend tried to express to the House. Their views may not be convenient to Labour Members, but they need to be heard.

The Bill provides that children with statements of special educational needs must be educated in mainstream schools unless that is incompatible with the wishes of parents or with the provision of efficient education for other children. I simply believe that it is common sense that those two points should be balanced by the consideration of the needs of the child. What is important is not what is right to meet Government targets, but what is right for the individual child. The needs of the child should come first, and that is why I wish to press the new clause to a vote.

*Question put,* That the new clause be read a Second time:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 102, Noes 236.

**Division No. 197]** **[4.40 pm**

**AYES**

Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Peter Atkinson and Mr. John Randall.**

**NOES**

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnett, John
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McNulty, Tony

MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Opik, Lembit
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Clive Betts and**
**Mrs. Anne McGuire.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

## New Clause 3

INSPECTION OF SPECIAL NEEDS PROVISION

'In carrying out area inspections, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools must report in connection with any report on the education of children with special educational needs on—

(a) the adequacy of local choice of settings for parents of such children;

(b) the mechanism for ensuring that the funds intended to meet the special needs of the individual child are so provided and spent; and

(c) the adequacy of arrangements for the reception and induction of children with special educational needs into educational establishments situated within the area or serving its pupils.'.—*[Mr. Boswell.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mr. Boswell:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

The new clause relates to an important aspect of the Bill to which the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), referred several times. It deals with the role of Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools and the inspectorate to keep tabs on what is to happen as part of the new inclusion framework. Although we do not have much time, it is opportune that we should spend some of it on how inspections work. We must bear in mind the important caveat that the Office for Standards in Education is an independent department. It is not directly beholden to Ministers. One of its great strengths is that it can say what it thinks.

As evidence to support my remarks, I have a letter from Chris Woodhead—

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): Excellent man.

**Mr. Boswell:** I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend's robust remark.

The letter is almost Chris Woodhead's valedictory contribution as chief inspector, and it is specifically on this subject. It was sent to me on 30 November last year in response to a parliamentary question that was referred to him because of convention, and it has been lodged in the Library. Even though Chris Woodhead was sometimes a controversial figure, I do not think that any Member would take exception to anything in that letter. It was very trenchant and to the point, and I will return to it in a moment.

I must point out to the House that there may be a technical error in the new clause. *[Interruption.]* The Government Whip, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), wants me to sit down, but he should hear what I have to say.

The error reveals my personal background in further education because it refers to area inspections. I think that the Minister is aware, and has been briefed accordingly, that it was my intention to deal with all inspections carried out by the chief inspector, including those of local education authorities and of areas under the Learning and Skills Act 2000, so the new clause goes wider than further education, taking in schools, colleges, the lot.

A few general remarks are called for about the inspection of special educational needs provision. I tabled my parliamentary question last November because I felt that insufficient attention was paid to that. It was also in my mind that as we move towards our stated intention of greater inclusion, or of the right to inclusion wherever possible, the role of the inspector will become ever greater. It is one thing for an inspection to be carried out in a special school—it has already been pointed out that many of those are excellent and appropriate to the job that they are doing—but it is a little more difficult to focus on special needs provision in mainstream schools. It is not an impossible task, and the inspector's letter to me, to which I referred, makes it clear that inspections can be general. There is no reason why they should be confined to special educational needs.

The letter said:

"For the inspection of provision for pupils with Special Educational Needs . . . in mainstream schools, contractors are instructed that in some circumstances inspectors are required to have additional skills or expertise to inspect pupils effectively. If an SEN 'unit' or resourced provision in a mainstream school has a significant proportion of pupils with any of the following"—

he then lists a number of difficulties—

"then the inspection of these should be led by an inspector endorsed to inspect that specialism."

Those are the assurances that the House wants to hear about the inspection of, for example, dedicated special provision in a mainstream school.

The inspector also pointed out that Ofsted has commissioned four short documents that focus on pupils with SEN, boys and girls, gifted and talented pupils and ethnic minority backgrounds as being specialist areas of concern. There are also forthcoming reports on the implementation of the national literacy strategy in special schools and on the evaluation of the national numeracy strategy in special schools. A lot is going on in the inspectorate, which is entirely welcome, and not as many of us are aware of that as we should be. It is clear that as we move towards greater inclusion, there will also be greater dispersion of the activity that caters for special educational needs, and it is important that the inspection process should reach into those areas so that inspectors can satisfy themselves about what is going on.

I want now to make more specific remarks about the new clause, which is designed to reflect the particular context that the Bill will change and the move towards the new inclusion framework, as well as the concerns that we have expressed in debates about the Bill. New clause 3(a) invites the inspector to look at

"the adequacy of local choice of settings for parents"

of children with special educational needs. It is very well for Ministers and, I dare I say, my hon. Friends and me, to express an opinion; we all have a position and we all have local constituencies which, we hope, we know. We are lobbied on particular schools and interests. From my constituency experience, I know that parents often lobby on special education, and I am pleased that they do. They sometimes have an interest in inclusion and may have their heart set on a school that is not appropriate for their child. That situation may exist and may need testing, but it should not arise accidentally as a result of machination by the local authority.

5 pm

In our debates we have already emphasised that informed and genuine choice is important. Burrowing into SEN structures, one cannot but be struck by huge disparities. My hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) may wish to speak about that when he moves a subsequent new clause. However, I noticed a large disparity in the levels of statementing by different local authorities that were set out by the Minister in a recent written answer. In my own county of Northamptonshire, for example, 2.8 per cent. of the school population have statements, and that percentage is broadly similar in Leicestershire. In Nottinghamshire, the contiguous county to the north of Leicestershire, also in the east midlands, 1 per cent. of the school population has statements. My hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings, who knows that county well, has referred to a tradition of not statementing.

That extraordinary disparity in special educational needs clearly derives from the traditions of different local authorities and is the kind of matter to which Ofsted may wish to return. Similarly, the House will be familiar with the different patterns of provision affecting the balance between special and mainstream education and the types of special school provided by different counties and LEAs. In carrying out inspections, it is important that Ofsted takes an interest in that matter, is able to draw its concerns to the attention of Ministers and the general public, and then—this point is often forgotten—something will need to be done about the problem. Hence my earlier exchanges with the Minister about what will happen if Ofsted points to a problem under the inclusion framework.

**Mr. Andrew George:** The hon. Gentleman is making some interesting and telling points about the adequate provision of local settings on which parents can make an informed choice. What assessment has he made of the challenges which, inevitably, will be posed by remote rural areas? Clause 39 deals with the extension of provision to the Isles of Scilly, where providing special needs education will be particularly challenging, as there are small groups of children on islands and in remote rural communities. Surely there is a particular challenge in such areas.

**Mr. Boswell:** I strongly endorse that point. The challenge applies particularly to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but he will be the first to acknowledge that it is not confined to it. The matter should be resolved by the professional judgment of Ofsted in the light of all the circumstances. However, living only hundreds of yards from a county boundary, I believe that other factors must be borne in mind. Most hon. Members will be familiar with the fact that much of the delivery of special education is outsourced across local authority boundaries because of the need to match needs to provision and find the best solution. Ofsted should take an interest in exactly that kind of matter.

**Mr. Bercow:** I recognise that my hon. Friend is describing an inspection, rather than a consultation, function. Nevertheless, will he confirm that, under new clause 3, the chief inspector would consult the LEAs in the areas in question, but his work would not consist exclusively of consultation with such bodies? Instead, it would involve listening to the views of parents and consultation with them, educational organisations and others.

**Mr. Boswell:** My hon. Friend is on to an important point. It is right that in carrying out the inspection, the inspectorate should look for itself and see what is happening, and that it should not be nobbled by any particular interest. Thank God that the present chief inspector is an independent person who will want to take into account everything that is going on, but will not adopt a view necessarily aligned with that of the local education authority. Our concerns about practice in the past suggest that it would be unfortunate if some LEAs were allowed to get away with their traditional practices. I shall not comment further on that. Independence is important, and Ofsted is probably the right vehicle to deliver it.

My second point, relating to subsection (b), may be summed up in the single word "transparency". Right across the SEN world and within the consortium, although there is general satisfaction with the Bill there is some concern about whether funds provided to LEAs and through LEAs, in accordance with the special educational

*[Mr. Boswell]*

needs of children and the stages set out in the code, are delivered and expended on those children. It is an opaque area.

In Committee I mentioned Dr. John Marks, who has shown that there is a high expenditure which may broadly be called SEN expenditure, that it has risen fast, and that nobody knows a great deal about it. It is an important professional role of the inspectorate to identify what money came in, what money was allocated for provision and on what basis, and whether it was delivered and spent on that provision. That is in the interests of parents and children with special educational needs and of mainstream parents as well.

The third point, which is set out in subsection (c), concerns

"the adequacy of arrangements for the reception and induction of children with special educational needs into educational establishments situated within the area or serving its pupils."

That covers the point made by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George) about cross-boundary provision.

Educationally, induction—the moment of arrival—is the most difficult. I have come across distressing cases of children who have been well served in special schools, and have then been moved forward through an inclusion agenda or an inclusion philosophy to secondary schools where they enter mainstream provision. The arrangements made for their induction, including the training of teachers, which is critical, were not as good as they should have been, and the result has been a great deal of distress, usually leading to a retreat back into special provision. That is not satisfactory by anyone's standards, and I am sure that it is not what the Minister wants. It is a matter to which the inspectorate should pay particular attention.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): As my hon. Friend knows, there has been a change of provision in my constituency, which has been a bitter experience. Residential pupils were asked to go to a different facility because of the closure of another one, and girls were transferred into what had previously been an all-boy environment. Subsection (c) addresses precisely the difficulty that occurred in that case.

**Mr. Boswell:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that constructive point and the way in which he expressed it. Whatever we may say about the Bill, and however much people may or may not be enthused by inclusion, there are always practical problems, and it is foolish to try to minimise them or sweep them under the carpet.

In our earlier discussion of new clause 1 we dealt with matters related to mobility and independence, and the education and preparation of pupils for that. It was agreed in all parts of the House that those are important matters, which go a little wider than simply educational provision. It seems to me that Ofsted could, at least in principle, be the gatekeeper in this matter. It could draw attention to areas where it feels that there is no holistic approach to the needs of the child. It could also have a role when an important provision that bears on these matters, but which is not strictly about a special educational need, is not being adequately discharged.

That is the sort of arrangement that we have in mind. I emphasise to the Under-Secretary with responsibility for school standards—in fairness, I think that she has already made this point—that Ofsted has a heavy responsibility with regard to inspections not only of special schools, but of mainstream provision for special educational needs and the new inclusion framework. Indeed, its responsibility is greater than ever. We want the process to be successful and comprehensive, and we know that it will be professional. As new clause 2, which concerns the rights of the child, was not agreed to, such an arrangement seems an especially sound basis for ensuring that the possibility of inadequate provision, recriminations and the need for remediation is identified and dealt with.

**Jacqui Smith:** I welcome the responsible way in which the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) introduced the new clause, but I believe that it is unnecessary. Ofsted has the power to monitor SEN provision, and it does so. We believe that the arrangements that are currently in place and which are being introduced for monitoring SEN provision and related matters are sufficient. I hope that I can reassure him by speaking about some of them.

The hon. Gentleman made an important point about the skills of those who are involved in the inspection. He will be aware that the personnel who are selected to carry out inspections and the way in which their inspections are conducted are matters for the chief inspector of schools. Ofsted issues guidance to its inspectors on the inspection of SEN provision, and Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools already has the power to advise the Secretary of State at any time on any matter related to the provision of education. The inspector also has a duty to provide advice and to report on such matters as the Secretary of State specifies in a request.

On inspections of individual schools, Ofsted inspectors evaluate and report on the quality and range of opportunities for learning that are provided by a school for all its pupils, including those with SEN and disabilities. They also consider schools' policies and plans, which include, for example, their SEN policies. That consideration will involve information on how resources are allocated among pupils with SEN. Of course, the hon. Gentleman spoke about transition, reception and induction, with which I shall deal in a moment. I am sure that he will be reassured by the fact that, as inspection of early-years settings becomes more prevalent and we ensure a proper SEN policy for them, the inspection regime will also bite in that context.

5.15 p.m.

The inspectors must report on whether schools manage their resources effectively, including those that are spent on SEN. The hon. Gentleman spoke about transparency in relation to such spending. I am clear about the importance of ensuring transparency in respect of money that is delegated to schools and spent by local education authorities. That is why the Department for Education and Employment is working on how to identify good practice in authorities that delegate provision. We are also working on how to ensure that LEAs have more responsibility to demonstrate how they are delegating money for SEN and to make it clear what they expect from schools in terms of that money.

The Secretary of State can use his powers under section 2 of the School Inspections Act 1996 and section 38 of the Education Act 1997 to require a report from Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools on any school or

local education authority functions that relate to education. As the hon. Member for Daventry pointed out, when the Bill was being debated in another place the Government made a commitment to ask the chief inspector to consider the impact of clause 1, especially proposed new section 316(3), on inclusion when the Bill is enacted. The chief inspector said that he would do that. That commitment was welcome in the House and in another place. We will also look to Ofsted to take account of schools' implementation of the relevant guidance in the revised SEN code of practice in future inspections.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned local education authorities. Her Majesty's chief inspector already has the power to inspect LEAs. Special educational needs is one of the four core activities of an Ofsted LEA inspection.

New clause 3(a) deals with choice of settings. The changes that we are making in SEN provision will give parents of children with SEN and a statement a better deal than they currently have. They will offer better chances of securing a mainstream place for their child. Although there has never been a duty on LEAs to provide a choice of settings, they must arrange sufficient SEN provision in their area. However, as they have never had a specific duty to provide an adequate choice of settings, Ofsted cannot properly comment on that.

Local education authorities have to present for approval school organisation plans which cover the way in which they will make sufficient provision, including SEN provision, for children in their areas. Under its framework for inspection, Ofsted must comment on the key functions of the LEA, including the provision of sufficient school places and the preparation of the school organisation plan.

**Mr. Boswell:** I want to put on record that although there is historically no specific obligation on LEAs to require a range of choice of settings, section 11 of the Education Act 1996 obliges the Secretary of State to

"exercise his powers with a view to . . . improving standards, encouraging diversity and increasing opportunities for choice."

I presume that that duty on the Secretary of State is also likely to cover local education authorities' discharge of their responsibilities. It should be viewed as an encouragement of the desirable aim of diversity and choice, which is supported in different ways by all parties.

**Jacqui Smith:** The hon. Gentleman has achieved his aim of putting that on the record.

I was dealing with an LEA's role in ensuring sufficient school places and preparing the school organisation plan, which requires local education authorities to provide adequate places for children with special educational needs. That is part of an LEA's key functions, which would be inspected in an Ofsted inspection of a local education authority.

The framework also provides for Ofsted to comment on the allocation and provision of resources across all local education authorities' functions, including provision for special educational needs. I think that that covers some of the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised about transparency. The Bill provides for the normal inspection framework for schools and local education authorities to cover functions relating to their duties to plan for improving accessibility, including the preparation, quality and implementation of such plans.

The new clause also draws attention, as did the hon. Gentleman, to the importance of adequate arrangements being in place for the reception and induction of children with special educational needs. I agree with him that that is a particularly important part of the transfer from one educational establishment to another. That is why the revised code of practice will reflect the importance of the transfer of information between all relevant parties when children or young people transfer, and of the particular arrangements that address this issue.

In reporting on schools, Ofsted will comment on the quality of the provision for all children, including those with special educational needs. If Ofsted feels that the arrangements for the reception and induction of such children are adversely affecting the quality of provision for those children, it can draw the school's attention to that as part of the school's inspection.

Given the reassurances that I have given to the hon. Gentleman about the current scope for Ofsted inspections and about future plans, I hope that he will feel able to withdraw his new clause.

**Mr. Boswell:** In the light of the Minister's helpful assurances, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

*Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.*

### New Clause 4

SPECIFICATION OF PROVISION

"In section 324 of the Education Act 1996 (statement of special educational needs) after subsection (4) insert—

"(4A) In drawing up any specification of provision for a child's special educational needs the local education authority shall so far as is practicable have regard to the need for adequacy and quantifiability of such provision".—*[Mr. Hayes.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mr. Hayes:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

I am delighted to move new clause 4, which draws our attention to the important issues of statements and statementing. It is probably fair to say that the business of statementing, which was conceived by Baroness Warnock in her report, given life by the Education Act 1981 and reinforced by subsequent Acts, has, more than any other measure, given status to special needs education and to children with special educational needs.

Statements also give a feeling of power to parents. They give parents the feeling that they have rights over their choices in respect of their children and the treatment that their children are likely to receive. However, statements do a great deal more than that. They are a tool for the detailed analysis of individual needs and the implementation of appropriate education to fit those needs. That is why the suggestion that statementing was to be diluted was greeted with such horror. That suggestion was given its head in the Government's Green Paper, some of whose implications many Labour Members, possibly including some on the Front Bench, probably regret.

In Committee, I think that it was the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) who referred to the Green Paper as a green light for the closure of special schools. She said that some local authorities had even taken the

*[Mr. Hayes]*

Green Paper as a stimulus for the closure of special schools. However, we have moved on from there, and one does not want to be too critical. The Government have learned their lessons, and they listened to the wiser heads, many of which were to be found on the Conservative Benches. The Government amended their proposals and we are pleased to see that statements are not now going to go the way that we thought they might.

It is important for us to understand that statements need to be sufficiently specific, particular and well targeted, so that they can deliver the sort of educational opportunities that will allow each child to fulfil their potential regardless of their particular special need or disability. There is an issue here about the willingness of local authorities to offer a statement. There is also an issue about the marriage between statements and the real provision available to turn those statements into an educational reality, in terms of the choice and experience enjoyed by the individual child or student.

I think that the House knows about most of our problems with statementing, but they are worth amplifying. First, parents and others often see the system as complex, esoteric and confusing. I believe that, in Committee, I said that parents were frequently bamboozled. Moreover, local education authorities are not always as humane and sensitive as they might be when parents are going through the difficult business of obtaining a statement.

Secondly, local education authorities are often variable in their willingness to offer children statements. We know of that variability from a brief study of the position across Britain. I have Government statistics here that give the details, and although I do not propose to quote them exhaustively—I am sure you would not let me do that, Madam Deputy Speaker, and the House certainly would not tolerate it—I think it worth considering one or two. Some relate to London boroughs.

In Bromley, 2.9 per cent. of children have statements, whereas down the road in Croydon the percentage is only 1.4 per cent. In Stockport the figure is 3 per cent., while in Oldham it is just 1 per cent. In Doncaster it is also 3 per cent:; in nearby Sheffield, it is 2.2 per cent. It is clear that some authorities are rather keener than others to issue statements.

The third problem is the time scale. Local education authorities are obliged by statute to provide statements within 26 weeks, although the Audit Commission measures performance on the basis of an 18-week period, which seems perfectly reasonable. There is enormous variation between local education authorities in terms of not just the issuing of statements, but the time that it takes them to do so. According to the official statistics, in Conservative-controlled Wandsworth 100 per cent. of statements are prepared within 18 weeks—a record that I am sure we all wish to celebrate and be proud of—while in Greenwich the figure is 75 per cent., in Liverpool it is 41 per cent., and in Rotherham it is 56 per cent. For some reason, Stoke-on-Trent can only produce statements within 18 weeks on about 4 per cent. of occasions. I do not want to speculate on what is happening in Stoke-on-Trent, but it is clearly not good news for children with special needs or for their parents.

**Mr. Bercow:** My hon. Friend is making his point with the eloquence and panache with which we customarily associate him. He has made a semi-political point. I do not wish to do so on this occasion, but does he not agree that of the essence—whether or not a statement is decided on—is the privacy of the interests of the child? Surely what should be regarded as intrinsically objectionable in any local education authority is any notion that foot-dragging is taking place for the purpose of saving costs.

**Mr. Hayes:** Eloquence is my stock-in-trade: I struggle a bit more with panaché, but I manage to achieve it occasionally. I am delighted that my hon. Friend recognises that.

My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the reasons for the variability to which I refer. He is right to suggest that some authorities may be pursuing the matter lethargically not just because of inefficiency, and that there may be a more sinister cause. I shall deal with that shortly, when I refer to the insistence in the new clause that local education authorities deal with specificity. It does not merely ask for that; it insists on it.

5.30 pm

I also wish to pick up the implied point that my hon. Friend made about the balance between statements and real provision. It may be that the reason why local authorities are not producing statements in sufficient number and are dragging their heels is that they do not have the provision to match the statements. Without the matching provision, a statement is not only a worthless document but a major embarrassment to the local authority.

**Mr. Win Griffiths:** I apologise for not being in my place at the start of the hon. Gentleman's contribution, but I have studied the new clause and heard the thrust of his argument and I wonder what is the point of drawing attention to the long time that some authorities take to draw up statements, other than to decry the practice. The new clause says nothing about the time that a statement should take, but that is what I would have liked it to do.

**Mr. Hayes:** On that basis, I shall rush to the point in my speech that deals much more closely and specifically with the content of the new clause. I wondered how long it would take the hon. Gentleman, who is always astute about such matters, to recognise that I was speaking rather broadly to the new clause to put the matter into its proper context.

The new clause addresses the need to ensure that statements are specific and target the needs of the child precisely, and that the provision that ensues is equally well targeted. The problem is not only that the provision of statements is patchy, but that the provision of special needs education is patchy. The Minister said, with typical sincerity and the plain speaking for which she is renowned—

**Jacqui Smith:** How charming.

**Mr. Hayes:** I am charming as well as being eloquent and possessing panache. The Minister said that the number of special schools is stable. That is true. There have been some closures since 1997, but the trend started before that date and may be partly due to the greater

number of children being integrated into the mainstream. We cannot argue simply that closures have happened unjustifiably or without proper explanation. However, it is true that provision is by no means uniform, and that is highly relevant to the matter of statements. If a child needs a specific sort of educational provision that cannot be met locally—or sufficiently near to the child's home to allow real access to it—that may be an incentive for a local authority to fail to provide the statement or to make it so vague and woolly that almost any provision will do in response to it. Statements must be closely tied to the breadth and diversity of provision that predicates proper choice, because without that statementing will be diluted.

From a close look at how special schools are situated across the country, we know that some local authorities have particular problems. The problem may not be so great in London, where it could be argued that people can travel easily across borough boundaries. However, it is worth pointing out that Barking and Dagenham has 58 schools in total but only one special school, while Redbridge has 89 schools in total and five special schools. There may be local reasons for that—

**Ms Hodge:** Yes, there are.

**Mr. Hayes:** I have no doubt that the Minister could tell me what those reasons are, but I presume that she does not wish to prolong the debate unnecessarily.

Let us look at the north-west of England where my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) has taken a particular interest in these matters. He has been a doughty defender of the interests of special needs pupils, parents and special schools. I hope that I may beg your indulgence for a moment, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to pay tribute to my hon. Friend. He has played a key role in defending the interests of Brook Farm school and its pupils. It was kept open for a year due, almost entirely, to his efforts and those in the community whom he backed. I was lucky enough to visit that school, as was my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition on one occasion.

In Cheshire, which has 380 schools, there are 17 special schools. In the Wirral, which has 154 schools, there are 13 special schools. These percentages, or ratios, suggest that the provision of special education, or, certainly, special education in special schools, is by no means uniform.

**Mr. O'Brien** *rose—*

**Mr. Bercow** *rose—*

**Mr. Hayes:** I shall give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury and then once again to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

**Mr. O'Brien:** The Minister is familiar with Brook Farm school because we have had a number of meetings and a lot of correspondence about it. Following the school adjudicators' adjudication, the school has been confirmed for closure. I have a letter from the chairman of the governors of Brook Farm school saying how disappointed and saddened they all are by the decision.

There has been great concern in Cheshire—quite a widespread county geographically that does not have a huge number of schools—that many parents were having to drive children 20 miles to that school from the other side of the county. If parents have to accept the school that is being offered as an alternative—and there are many reasons why we do not believe that it is a good alternative—they will have a further 20 miles to travel, resulting in a major cost, time and dislocation disadvantage. The adequacy issue in new clause 4 would help to address that problem.

**Mr. Hayes:** I do not want to be taken to Cheshire for the whole of my speech, although that would be a happy journey and a pleasant experience. My hon. Friend is right to give that example as an illustration of a bigger problem. It is true, as the hon. Member for Colne Valley said in Committee, that some local authorities have assumed that they have a green light to close special schools. The closure of special schools, like their survival, is a patchy matter. In certain parts of the country it is difficult, in practical terms, to gain access to the sort of special school that parents might choose if they thought that that was in the interest of their child and if the child's statement specified that it would provide the most appropriate education for them.

**Mr. Bercow:** I say nothing to detract from the perspicacity of my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien). However, my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) said that he did not want to spend the whole of his speech in or around Cheshire, so may I take this opportunity to put on the record a fact of which I think that my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings is aware? The Furzedown special school in Winslow in my Buckingham constituency, whose head teacher is Mr. Norman Ward, does an outstanding job. It receives relatively little credit or attention and I wonder whether it could have the pleasure of a tribute from my hon. Friend.

**Mr. Hayes:** I do not hand out tributes lightly but I am always happy to pay a tribute to anyone recommended by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham), for any friend of my hon. Friend is a friend of mine. I know that he would not advertise the good work of that school unless it were entirely justified.

**Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas** (Crosby): I am listening closely to the hon. Gentleman, and I think that we are in the realm of red herrings. To talk about the number of schools per authority implies that we need X number of schools for X number of statements. Does he agree that a statement requires a provision that matches its needs and that such a provision can be offered just as well in a non-special needs school as in a special needs school? I am hoping that there will be a time when no authority will have special needs schools and all children, regardless of ability, will be integrated into one school.

**Mr. Hayes:** I do not share that view; I think that there is a need for a diversity of provision, by which I mean a mix of children who have been properly and well integrated into mainstream schools, of special units attached to mainstream schools and of special schools which exist, for example, for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. There will always be a number of EBD children who may be better educated outside the mainstream.

*[Mr. Hayes]*

Different children have different disabilities. The hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) is not present at the moment, but he said in Committee, and again today, that he considers that children with profound hearing problems are often educated better in special schools. The same will be true of children with other problems.

A point made in Committee is worth repeating today—that we should remember that special needs are dynamic. There may therefore be a need for children to move in and out of mainstream schools as their special need changes. I am thinking particularly about children with acquired brain injury, which is a special interest of mine. The special need of such children is hard to define, and it will change and have to be redefined. The skills to teach those children are difficult to impart to teachers. Those children may at some times receive better education outside the mainstream, although they may be moved back into the mainstream at certain points in their educational progress and personal development.

I therefore do not entirely share the view expressed by the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas), but I acknowledge—I thought I had done so already but I shall repeat the point—that it is not enough to say that patchy provision means that all children do not receive a good education. Education delivery may depend on the relative success of integration strategy: authorities that took such a strategy seriously early on are probably further down the road to the successful integration of special needs children into mainstream schools. That will have an effect on the number of special schools that remain in existence in those authorities.

However, it is not possible to assume that that will always be the case. I do not mean that as a partisan statement. Some local authorities give greater priority and emphasis to special educational needs than others, and some have integrated children into the mainstream much more successfully than others. Some allocate greater resources for the task, and place greater emphasis on good special schools than others.

The word that I used earlier to describe that variable provision was "patchiness", which affects detrimentally the availability for many children of appropriate education that is in line with statements. The new clause would strengthen the rights of parents and children to have statements that are appropriate and quantifiable. It would ensure that statements were sufficiently specific to allow proper education to be provided in line with children's needs.

**Mr. Andrew George:** The hon. Gentleman's primary criticisms of the statementing process are that it is esoteric and resource-driven. It is in parents' interest to seek a statement for their child, as it brings further focus and resources to that child's education. I hope that the hon. Gentleman—with his characteristic charm, panache and eloquence—will say to what extent this rather esoteric new clause would deal with the esoteric nature of statementing. How will it deal with the problem that the statementing process is fundamentally resource-driven?

**Mr. Hayes:** I invite the hon. Gentleman to look closely at the new clause, which deals with adequacy and quantifiability. If a statement is made more specific, and is tied more closely to proper provision, questions of adequacy and quantifiability are unavoidable.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** On the particular point about specificity, I have received letters from my constituents, Mrs. Pritchard and Mr. Nicol, both of whom have children with special needs. It is clear from their letters that they are deeply concerned about the specifics of the Bill, especially as the final proposed code of conduct was not available in advance of this debate. They are worried that the new statementing regime could be watered down. What matters to them is to know how many hours of extra educational support their children will receive. Unfortunately, it is thought that the new code of conduct will mean that statements need describe only what is necessary, and that they will not quantify what is to be provided, nor demonstrate its adequacy.

I fully support the new clause, for the reasons that my constituents have highlighted so cogently.

**Mr. Hayes:** With typical perspicacity my hon. Friend has anticipated the summary point that I was about to make. He will not, however, have anticipated that I have a copy of the letter to which he refers. He is right in saying that the lady who wrote to him and the two sets of parents with whom he has corresponded are anxious that the statement should be specific in detail and quantified in terms of the number of hours of ancillary or specialist teaching or support required in order to meet the statement, and that the statement will not be so vague or woolly as to allow the local authority to place a child in a school which would be unable—perhaps not unwilling—to meet the needs of the statement in terms of the education it provided. There are real doubts about that.

Earlier in today's proceedings organisations and umbrella groups were cited. Members may be familiar with Action on Entitlement, an umbrella organisation which includes Action Support for the Special Needs Child, the Advisory Centre for Education, All Children Together, the Association for Spina Bifida and Hydrocephalus, the Centre for Studies in Inclusive Education, the Child Growth Foundation, the National Deaf Childrens Society—I could go on. It makes the very point that my hon. Friend has made and which his constituents are anxious should be articulated in the Chamber today. They ask that the code of practice which will accompany the measure is absolutely specific on the nature of the child's educational needs and the amount and frequency of special educational provision required to meet them. The statement should specify the kind and quantity of special education provided. This is the quantifiable and adequacy point that we seek to reinforce through our new clause.

There are real worries about what the legislation will do in this respect and what the code of practice may not do to supplement it. Unless the code of practice reinforces the very points made by Action on Entitlement, my hon. Friend, his constituents and Committee members, it may be—to paraphrase the hon. Member for Colne Valley whom I only wish was here to hear herself quoted a third time—a green light for all sorts of measures which no hon. Member would wish to see in terms of watering down the quality and quantity of good special needs education, be it in mainstream or special schools.

In those interests and with that cause in mind I propose the new clause. It adds to and reinforces the good principles which lie behind much of this legislation and which certainly lie behind the intentions of hon. Members throughout the Chamber.

5.45 pm

**Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): I do not intend to detain the House for long. This has been one of my long-standing interests. I came in to listen and found myself becoming increasingly concerned about the tone of the debate.

We seem to be encouraging parents to use a statement as a weapon against the local education authority or other provider of services. I agree that this has been the only weapon that parents have had in the past. While resources were run down under the previous Government, local education authorities were finding it extremely difficult to provide for children with special educational needs. As a result, parents grasped the idea of statements as being a tool against local education authorities in the battle for resources. I feel uncomfortable about that. Local education authorities should be on the parents' side. They should be trying to raise standards and raising standards by giving children with special educational needs the resources that they need to meet those needs. So I feel uncomfortable about the tone of the debate. We should be encouraging much more co-operation and trying not to set up this rather confrontational position that we seem to have got ourselves into.

My main reason for attending the debate is that I, too, have received a letter from the parent of a child with Down's syndrome. She expresses concern about the proposed change in the code of practice for special education. Indeed, there must be a national campaign, because the quotation read out by the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) equates closely to words in the letter from my constituent. However, there is obviously real concern that unless the statement is specific, parents will not receive the help and provision to meet their child's special educational needs.

My constituent tells me:

"There is a suggestion . . . from what the Department has written . . . that the wording might say provision should be quantified 'as necessary'. This gives the impression that often it will not be necessary to put the hours of help in the statement when in fact the reverse is true . . . I know a vague statement will not ensure the help my child requires."

I am looking for an assurance from my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary that it is not the intention to remove that power—that tool—from parents. There should be a more co-operative attitude; local authorities should be on the side of parents and should recognise that the only way to raise standards is by providing the resources needed by individual children.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** I do not want to pursue the matter too far, but there is clearly a coincidence of interest between the hon. Lady and me, given the respective letters that we received from our constituents. I shall put that into the context of her opening remarks, which slightly concerned me although I bow to her greater experience in these matters. Does she agree that, rather than a weapon against local authorities, what parents most want is confidence in circumstances that are often stressful, difficult and protracted, when ultimately it is they who have the best interests of their child at heart? If there can be partnership between the LEA and the parent, that is all well and good, but it may not apply in all cases. I should have preferred the hon. Lady to have put that gloss on her opening remarks.

**Mrs. Campbell:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman and I agree that maximum partnership and co-operation between the LEA, the school and the parent are in the best interests of the child. That is the best way to meet those interests.

Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary assure us that the Government want to encourage that co-operation and partnership, and that the changes in the wording do not mean that children will be deprived of the resources that they need?

**Jacqui Smith:** I thank the contributors to the debate. I congratulate the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) on his self-proclaimed panache and charm. To show hon. Members how well informed I am, I wonder whether they might be interested to learn that "panache" is the name of a weak French beer—although I am sure that the 1958 vintage was splendid.

The hon. Gentleman outlined concerns about the whole issue of statements, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell). I shall respond to some of the points that were made.

The first point relates to the different degrees of statementing in different local education authorities. It is, of course, impossible to set up hard and fast national criteria for SEN provision, when the nature, complexity and pattern of individual children's needs and the pattern of school provision vary so much. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) pointed out, a child might require an SEN statement in one area, but might not need one in another where, for example, there was more school-based provision. That does not necessarily mean, however, that there is a difference in the quality of provision made for each child.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge pointed out, the confidence of parents is crucial. In the past, parents believed that obtaining a statement was the way to get the provision that they wanted for their children. I hope that the improvements in parent partnerships and support for parents—not only in the revised SEN code of practice but in the Bill—will help to make parents feel more confident in the system.

The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings raised the issue of the different lengths of time that local education authorities take to issue statements. He quoted the Audit Commission figures, which actually show that there has been an improvement in the performance of authorities in England in recent years. In 1996, only 40 per cent. of draft statements were produced within the time limit, but in 2000 that figure was 77 per cent. None the less, we have asked, and continue to ask, poorer performing authorities to explain why their performance is disappointing, and for evidence of improved performance. We have provided good practice guidance and reported from the best performers to those whose performance could be improved, and we shall continue to take steps to help bring all authorities up to the standard of the best and to improve overall performance, not least in the improvements that we intend to make in the new code of practice.

*[Jacqui Smith]*

The proposals represented in the new clause are unnecessary and would not necessarily serve the best interests of children with statements. Its requirement for the LEA to have regard to the need for adequacy of provision is unnecessary. Local education authorities are required to carry out a statutory assessment of the special educational needs of children for whom, effectively, they believe that they may need to maintain a statement. Those assessments are a thorough investigation of a child's learning difficulties. They involve a range of advice, and the LEA has a duty to seek and consider that advice before deciding whether to issue a statement for a child.

The revised SEN code of practice will set out the expectation that LEAs will also seek and consider the ascertainable views of the child. If, having completed an assessment, they decide to issue a statement, they must set out the special educational needs of that child in light of the assessment, and they must specify the provision to meet those needs. By its very nature, the process requires the LEA to specify provision that is adequate: it must meet the child's needs.

The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings also raised the issue of quantification. If the new clause is designed to establish a need for local education authorities to quantify provision in statements, whatever the needs and circumstances of each individual child, I believe that it would not be in the best interests of individual children with statements of SEN. There will be occasions when it would not be appropriate to quantify provision. Given the shortness of time, I shall give only a brief example.

A child with a speech and language impairment could be expected to progress rapidly in some areas. The content and detail of speech therapy provision will therefore need to change, often weekly. A deaf child who needs help specifically with communication skills from a specialist teacher of the deaf for a certain time each week may have a statement that specifies access to such a teacher, perhaps for a minimum amount of time, which could be revised in light of progress towards the objectives set out in the statement. The key point is that we monitor progress toward objectives.

The point of the example is to illustrate the importance of the principle of specifying provision—which is not necessarily the same as quantifying it in all cases—for each child individually, according to their particular needs and circumstances. That principle is enshrined in the current statutory requirement in section 324 of the Education Act 1996, backed up by the requirements of the Education (Special Educational Needs) Regulations 1994.

I accept what the hon. Gentleman has said about the sincere views that are held on this issue, and I am aware of the responses to our consultation on the code, so I emphasise the fact that we considered the matter extremely carefully, and have responded by making changes to the guidance in the final version of the code. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I have said many times that we have no intention of weakening the legal protection for children with statements, or of encouraging vague statements. Vague statements do nothing to secure the right sort of help for a child with SEN, and they do not help a school to know what is required of it in helping a child to learn and progress.

The right way forward is to make the guidance in the improved SEN code of practice better. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has outlined how we intend to do that, and said that we will retain the requirement in the SEN regulations for provision to be specified, matching the terms of the duty for LEAs set out in the Education Act 1996. On quantification, the code will make it clear that there may often be a need for provision—

*It being Six o'clock,* MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Question necessary to dispose of proceedings on consideration, pursuant to Order [20 March].*

*Question put and negatived.*

*Order for Third Reading read.*

6 pm

**Mr. Blunkett:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I want to put on record my thanks to the Under-Secretaries, my hon. Friends the Members for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) and for Barking (Ms Hodge), and to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts), who was the Whip in Committee, for the enormous amount of work that they, and other Members on both sides of the House, did in Committee, and for ensuring that we reached this stage this evening.

Perhaps such Bills do not receive the publicity that they deserve. Perhaps there is not the interest in the media—but there is enormous interest among our constituents and in the education service, and there is an enormous gain to be made in approving such Bills. I am very proud that—together and, I hope, with unanimity tonight—we have been able to take the Bill through the House and ensure that it becomes an Act, and to take sometimes modest, but important and valuable steps towards greater equality of opportunity.

Legislation can play a part, but only a part, in changing attitudes and restructuring the culture, and in ensuring that people think a little more about what is necessary and about how they can help. During the consideration of the Bill, there have been disagreements about certain points. The debates have been important. Some hon. Members have said things that they may regret when they read them in print, but that has happened very little. Most of the discussion has been about the nuances, and hon. Members have agreed to differ, rather than fundamentally opposing the Bill, and that is how it should be. Given the assurances that have been obtained during the passage of the Bill in the Lords and in Committee in the Commons, and given that people have been able to hear that there is unanimity on so many of the points that have been made, I hope that we can make progress tonight.

It is fair to say that there are times when people feel that others have different attitudes, when they have nothing of the sort. I am sure that the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) will forgive me for referring to the fact that on Second Reading, he implied that my experience of specialist residential provision for special needs had coloured my view. It certainly did so when I was a youngster and in my early political life, but I hope that we all mature to the point where we can balance our experiences with the needs of others.

On Second Reading, the hon. Gentleman said:

"It is on the record—and I am sure that the Minister will accept—that the Secretary of State did not entirely enjoy his experience at school."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 271.]

Well, I did enjoy some of it and I put that fact on the record, as some of my old teachers are still alive and they might have felt that they had been maligned.

The hon. Gentleman talked about his brother-in-law and his wife's sister, who have major sight problems. He said that their experience had been very different and that I had all the power and they had none. Let us forget all that. The Bill is not about power and different experiences; it is about getting the balance right between supporting inclusive education properly and making residential and specialist provision available where it is needed. It is about maintaining the right balance for the individual child, and about how that can be made acceptable to schools, by changing attitudes and practices. As was said at the beginning of our debates this afternoon, there is a need to provide, in the classroom and the school, the support systems that make it possible for youngsters to experience genuine inclusion.

I shall conclude my remarks by recalling the case of a parent whose little five-year-old child could not see, but attended a school in my constituency. The policy of inclusion had resulted in that youngster being isolated in the school playground. He was desperately lonely, feeling that he had no future. His parent came to me and asked whether we could do anything about that. I said, "Yes. First he has been included inappropriately; secondly, he has not been supported; thirdly, his cry for help has not been heard; and fourthly, we need to get him into a setting where he can learn the skills, obtain the tactile provision and receive the support for mobility and confidence so that he can be re-included in future if that is right for him." We must get it right for every individual child. I am committed to that, and I sincerely believe that Members from all parties are too.

6.6 pm

**Mrs. May:** I join the Secretary of State in his congratulations to the members of the Committee on the thoughtful and careful way in which they considered the Bill. It was a good example of the way in which the House works at its best. As he suggested, such work is not always seen by those outside this building. I also include in my congratulations the Members of another place who started the work on this Bill; after all, much of the work was carried out there. They should be congratulated on the thoughtful consideration that they gave to the Bill.

As the Secretary of State said, we all have the same aim. It is to try to improve the educational opportunities for disabled children and to ensure that children with special educational needs have their needs properly provided for, so that they can develop to their full potential and in a way that is right for them.

It is unfortunate that some Labour Members have sometimes appeared to suggest that anyone who questioned any part of the Bill was against disabled children and wanted to destroy the concept of inclusion in mainstream schools. Nothing is further from the truth. It is essential that we get such a Bill right, and essential for the interests of children that their needs are met. We must ensure that what we do in the House, albeit with the best of intentions, does not, inadvertently or otherwise, act against the interests of children. That is why it was necessary to ensure that the Bill received careful scrutiny, and to consider the implications of its implementation.

There is no doubt that in the past, some children with special educational needs who would have benefited from education in a mainstream school setting have been denied such education. It is entirely right that we should attempt to ensure through legislation that no children lose out in that way in future. Those children for whom a mainstream education is right and appropriate and who would benefit from it should have such access. However, it is also true that education in mainstream schools for special educational needs children will often work only if the proper level of resources are provided to back up the support within the school. Otherwise, physical inclusion can become educational and social exclusion in the school—the Secretary of State provided an example.

Therefore, we should be cautious and take note of the resource implications of the Bill. If it is to work well and if children with special educational needs are genuinely to be given the opportunities in mainstream schools from which they will benefit, resource provision needs to be made to support them. Without it, their experience in the mainstream school may be far worse than it would be in alternative provision. I make that point because the issue of resources was not addressed in the debates in the Chamber as fully as it might have been. I recognise that it was considered in Committee, but the question of resources has not been brought to the fore as much as it should have been on Second Reading, or, for the obvious reason that we had to consider specific amendments and new clauses, on Report.

Some children with special educational needs will certainly benefit from the opportunity that the Bill provides to be in a mainstream school. However, we must accept that for others the special school environment is right and appropriate. Labour Members, including the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith)—in her response to new clause 2, I think—said that it was scaremongering to suggest that special schools were closing, and that that was not the intention. However, many local authorities are using the push for inclusion of SEN children in mainstream schools as a means of reducing numbers in special schools, which they then close.

I have met parents throughout the country who are worried that the intentions behind those decisions by some local authorities are not always driven by the best interests of children, but by the efficiency of being able to close a school, perhaps because the site can then be sold and the asset realised. That is unfortunate. We must send a clear message that what matters is providing for the needs of children. We must make it clear that we do not want local authorities or others to think that they are being pressed to meet a political agenda on inclusion instead of making decisions on inclusion that are in the best interests of children.

In the debate on new clause 2, I referred to Old House school in Twickenham, which I visited only yesterday. It is for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. In my experience, schools for EBD children and children with moderate learning difficulties find that the greatest pressure to close comes from local authorities. In the case of Old House school, the local authority has stopped statementing and referring children to the school in recent

*[Mrs. May]*

years. The numbers have dwindled to the point at which the authority can say, "Well, we need to do something about the school because it has such low numbers."

That practice is going on, and it puts pressure on special schools. Parents are concerned that their children are not being properly provided for. Teachers are worried not only about their situation, but about children for whom the particular expertise that they need is not available from teaching staff. They fear that children will not be able to make the best of their educational opportunities because of the closure of special schools.

Teacher training has been mentioned in various debates, although it did not receive much of an airing today. An important aspect of providing places in mainstream schools for children with special educational needs—notwithstanding additional support that they might receive from classroom or special needs assistants—is ensuring that teachers have the expertise necessary to encourage, help and support the children in their classes.

We need to examine the provision of special needs training within the teacher training curriculum. Some people have told me that only half a day was spent on special needs during their teacher training. That is wrong, and we need to ensure that teachers receive much more training so that they can meet the needs of children with special needs who are in their classes. If that is not done well, children with special needs will be in a class, but not receiving the education that they deserve and that we would wish them to have.

The whole point about providing extra access to mainstream schools is to enable children to have the best education. It must meet their needs and ensure that they develop their full potential. That has been the aim of the amendments and new clauses that we tabled in both Houses. The Bill aims to improve educational opportunities for children, and we have tried to ensure at all times that we do just that. We do not want clauses that can have a counterproductive interpretation or attitude taken towards them.

Attitude is of course very important, and I am sure that all hon. Members are struck by the experience of mainstream schools that have included children with special educational needs, in particular disabled children. Those schools say that inclusion is a benefit not only for individual children, in that it improves their educational opportunities, but for other children in the class. That experience benefits not only that educational environment, but society as a whole.

It is important that we improve opportunities for disabled children and provide for the needs of children with special educational needs, but in doing so we need to keep a balanced provision. We need to ensure that parents can choose between mainstream and special schools, and that special schools do not close because local authorities believe that they should meet a political agenda rather than the needs of children. In everything we do, we must ensure that we are genuinely improving educational opportunities for children and meeting their needs.

6.16 pm

**Mr. Berry:** I shall not detain the House for more than a few moments, but I should like to make three brief points. Throughout Report, and so far on Third Reading, too, hon. Members have concentrated almost entirely on part 1, which deals with special educational needs. Part 2 is concerned with attacking discrimination in education on grounds of disability. How welcome it is that we finally have provision to make unfair discrimination unlawful not only in the schools sector but in further and higher education. The Bill corrects a major deficiency of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995—the exclusion of education from part III of that Act, which outlaws discrimination in the provision of goods and services.

The previous Government's arguments were that education had to be excluded because it was dealt with in other legislation, and because the money would be spread too thinly. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State referred to things in print that people might regret, and when I popped out for a sandwich half an hour ago, I read part of the report of the Committee proceedings on the Disability Discrimination Bill, during which some pretty strange arguments were given for excluding education. I am delighted that this Bill will ensure that disabled people have the same rights and opportunities in education as they have elsewhere in society.

Secondly, I congratulate the Government not only on the high priority that they have given the Bill, but on the extensive consultation that has taken place. I shall not labour the point because I did so on Second Reading. It is difficult—indeed, impossible—to find any organisation of disabled people, parents or teachers, inside and outside special education, who do not welcome the Bill. They want it to be enacted as soon as possible.

Before 3 May, some organisations asked me whether the Bill would be passed before the general election. I suggested that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State might have thought of that possibility and that provision might have been made to ensure that the Bill would be passed before any general election. The consultation exercise had been so extensive and had commanded such popular support that the Special Educational Consortium and other groups were afraid that the Bill might not get through. I am delighted that it looks as if it will be passed before the next general election.

Thirdly, the Bill is clearly part of the Government's policy to implement our commitment at the last general election to secure comprehensive, enforceable civil rights for disabled people. Part 2 is an absolutely fundamental part of meeting that commitment. That is welcome, and is part of the wider agenda on disability rights, including the establishment of the Disability Rights Commission, the new deal for disabled people, the disabled persons tax credit and so on.

Of course, there is still a lot to do. I have many concerns about charging disabled people for personal services—which perhaps the next Government will address more vigorously than has been done so far. By any fair assessment, the Bill and other measures introduced by the Government seeking to secure equal rights and opportunities for disabled people have made a break with history. Progress over the past four years has been dramatic and fundamental. I congratulate my right hon. Friend, his colleagues and all those who have helped to introduce the Bill and the other measures. Today, many disabled people will celebrate the fact that the Bill and the other Government measures have reached the statute book.

6.20 pm

**Mr. Roger Gale** (North Thanet): You will appreciate more than most, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that my parliamentary duties in other Committees prevented me from serving on the Committee that considered the Bill. However, I pay tribute to those on both sides of the House who did so, as it is clear that a great deal of hard work has gone into the Bill.

I have followed the progress of the Bill through all its stages in both Houses of Parliament with great interest and have participated on the rare occasions on which I have been able to do so. I did that because I have particular constituency interest in the Royal School for Deaf Children in Margate, in my constituency of North Thanet. I am therefore a parliamentary supporter of NASS—the National Association of Independent Schools and Non-Maintained Special Schools—which has made representations to me and, through my hon. Friends on the Front Bench and me, to the Committee and Ministers.

After all that hard work, I am left with two areas of considerable unease. It was plain in exchanges earlier this afternoon on new clause 2 that, in spite of fine words, there is a hidden agenda which says, "Mainstream good, special school bad", or at least, "Mainstream good and preferable, special school under some circumstances, if all else fails." That is unacceptable and I share the view expressed by the Prime Minister's wife, Cherie Booth—as she liked to be known when she fought the North Thanet parliamentary seat in 1983—when she recently visited Gap House school in Thanet. After her visit, she told the local press that mainstream education was not suitable for every child.

I agree entirely, and I did not get the feeling from Government Members who responded to the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) that they believed what they said. As I said, I have followed the debate very carefully indeed. Not every child is suited to mainstream education and not every mainstream school is suitable to provide for the needs of children with SEN. It is a case of horses for courses and using existing facilities, whether in the maintained or non-maintained sector. The hearing-impaired unit at Hampton primary school in my constituency, for example, provides an excellent facility; it is underused because there appears to be an imperative to send children to the school of parental choice which may, or may not, be able to provide for them and may not have the facilities that Hampton primary school can provide for hearing-impaired children.

A few moments ago, my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) said that special schools feel that they are under threat. Indeed they do. Gap House school, which the Prime Minister's wife visited, feels under threat, as does Foreland school. Rightly or wrongly, they feel that the Bill sends out the message that mainstream education is preferable at all costs. Inevitably, that means that some special schools will close.

**Ms Rachel Squire** (Dunfermline, West) *indicated dissent.*

**Mr. Gale:** It is no good the hon. Lady shaking her head; my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough read from teachers' letters this afternoon. Labour Members did not like what he said, but he merely expressed what teachers were saying. I am merely voicing concerns expressed by those who speak with practical experience on the ground. The fear is there. The Bill will go through, but we shall watch carefully. When in government, we shall change it if it has the effect that some of us fear it may have.

I shall deal briefly with the position of the non-maintained schools. There is a feeling on the part of NASS that their voice has not been properly heard. I hope and believe that, even at this stage, Ministers and particularly the Secretary of State will meet NASS to discuss its concerns.

I want to place on the record the comments made to me in a letter by David Bond, who is the absolutely excellent principal and director of the Royal School for Deaf Children. He states:

"There remains a danger that pupils with very low incidence disabilities will be overlooked, until it is too late. We"—

that is, the Royal School for Deaf Children—

"continue to experience the aftermath of some apparently 'overlooked' and apparently unplanned and under-funded 'inclusive' provision for pupils with sensory impairments who have additional disabilities. This includes pupils who come to us with significant emotional behavioural problems, which in some cases might have been preventable".

Mr. Bond continues:

"I am still seeing and hearing from parents who have not been advised about the existence of Non-Maintained Special Schools, when the Non-Maintained Special School may well have been the best provision available for their deaf child who has additional special needs."

The letter goes on:

"Because of their deafness there is very often a delay in the verbal educational skills development of deaf people, and it is for this reason that they require specialist provision or support in ordinary education via facilities and services for deaf people. Settings which are not appropriate for deaf pupils and students will damage their linguistic, communication and verbal educational development if the support is inadequate or if the difference between the deaf child and his or her peers is too great, i.e. if the deaf child is unable to identify with or to communicate effectively with his or her peers."

Mr. Bond continues:

"We also see damage to the deaf person's mental health—hence deaf pupils become more vulnerable in respect of their mental health (a deaf child is at least 1.5-2 times or more likely to develop mental health problems than a hearing child). The lifelong cost to the individual and to society is substantial, particularly when the risk can be reduced substantially by ensuring appropriate provision and support. Some of those issues highlight the importance of ensuring optimum use is made of expertise in the Non-Maintained sector."

As I said, I have listened to the debates relating to the Bill and have participated in some of them. I remain of the view that the opinions expressed by NASS have not been taken on board, and that there is a bias against the non-maintained sector. I note in passing that there is a strong bias against parents who choose to send their special needs children to private schools. Those parents and those schools receive no support from the state.

I urge Ministers, when the Bill is on the statute book, to meet NASS and listen to its views. Instead of shunning the provisions offered by the non-maintained sector, they should recognise its value, harness its expertise, and use it to the benefit of the people who matter most, the special educational needs children—not the parents, not the local authority and not the Government.

*[Mr. Gale]*

6.28 pm

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** Most of us who have a long-term interest in special educational needs will look back to the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s and realise that that was a time of great change. Children who would otherwise be relegated to their home were suddenly brought out by the Warnock report and offered an opportunity that they had not had before. The Warnock report was a great turning point and brought about important changes. Subsequently, there was a period of settling down. Since the inception of the present Government, there has been a great surge of provision for people with disability and for people with learning difficulties, and no more so than in education for children.

Reference was made earlier to statements being used rather like a weapon by parents. The Bill is not a weapon, but a tool whereby authorities will take forward an agenda and offer parents, families and communities provision for children, irrespective of their ability. Many of us were left with a deep anxiety that, during the 1990s, children with learning difficulties had to accept provision that was substantially poorer than that for other children.

The Bill is one of a series of steps towards redressing that imbalance. I think that a lot more needs to be done. The Bill allows children with learning difficulties to enter mainstream schools, but many of us will want to know that the quality of provision in those schools is as good for such children as it is for those without their needs. There is currently a great disparity. I look forward to the day when there is equal provision, when teachers receive appropriate training that can be measured and which parents understand and appreciate, and when there is greater inclusion, which is what the Bill provides.

6.31 pm

**Dr. Harris:** I, too, welcome the prospect of a successful Third Reading. The Secretary of State was right to say that the Bill was unlikely to have received much attention from the media and little general comment outside the House, but people whose lives are touched by the issues with which it deals will know that those issues are debated relatively rarely. In that respect, the Bill has been a good vehicle for debating many matters that are related to special educational needs provision. That was not least the case in the House of Lords, whose numbers meant that useful concessions were extracted from the Government on reviewing how some of the provisions would be put into practice. Fruitful negotiations were also pursued in the other place about the wording of the code of practice on special educational needs.

The Standing Committee was an enjoyable one on which to serve. The tone of the debate was made possible by the contributions of Ministers, Back Benchers and the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), who is a model of courtesy and erudition—a word that I used when I did not understand some of his classical allusions.

A number of recurrent themes have arisen during debate on the Bill. They include the important point that was made earlier by the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn), who is no longer in his place. In a Third Reading-style contribution, he said that the Bill might be seen to lead to integration in the mainstream sector at a pace that was too quick to be tolerated by the people who were hostile to it. He spoke about a school with a relatively large number of children who have special educational needs. One has to be careful before basing policy on attempts to meet—"appease" is too strong a word—the concerns of those who might be hostile to it. We do not have to look far back in history to find analogies with racial integration and to see that Governments and legislators sometimes have to lead public opinion when the evidence shows that what is being done is right.

There are questions about the effective education of other children when those with severe disabilities or challenging behaviour are brought into a mainstream setting, but the enormous contribution of inclusivity to the social development of all children has far too often been lost in some of our debates. Of course, Front Benchers of all parties have raised that issue, but many Back Benchers, especially in the Conservative party, have stressed the problems rather than the opportunities that are created by integration.

The hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) made an important point about resources. She knows that the Liberal Democrats share her concern about the need for adequate resources. I say to Ministers that it will be important to ensure that the adequacy of resources is not judged by input and the recitation of figures, which can be seen as more or less impressive, depending on the analysis. They should try instead to judge the need for resources and then see whether it can be matched. Any shortfall in a cash-limited system should be acknowledged. Research into resource needs, outside a feverish pre-election setting in which we all debate tax and spend, will be useful.

The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) eloquently drew attention to the threat to special schools. I believe that it is important to provide enough special school places locally to meet need. That does not mean that every existing school, some with buildings that are perhaps unsatisfactory, will survive. Some special schools will close while others are built. Sufficient places are the main requirement. When we consider hospitals, the number of beds is more important than the number of buildings. We must be wedded to the concept of provision, not buildings.

The number of places has remained more or less the same in the past 10 years. That will also be the case after the Bill is enacted. Advances in medical science mean that more severely disabled children, who previously would not have survived, are included in the education system. Stable numbers therefore probably mean greater integration. However, integration is generally inadequate.

The Bill and the attendant resources will not be a panacea. It is important to acknowledge that local authorities that are not only cash strapped but capped will find it difficult to statement quickly and make adequate provision for special support. The reviews and research are therefore especially important. On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) made the point that special schools—and mainstream schools that specialise in SEN provision—can be centres of research. We can learn from their experience.

I am grateful for the important clarification that resources will not be a barrier to integrating children or placing them in SEN settings, with the caveat that such provision must be efficient. Again, it will be important to monitor and collect data from tribunals to ascertain the way in which the measure is bedding down.

I agree with the comments of the hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) on part 2. The Bill will be of great benefit and will be broadly welcomed. I welcome the constructive contributions by Members of all parties.

6.37 pm

**Mr. Levitt:** I shall make one of the briefest contributions to the debate. I want to take the opportunity to reassure the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) that, in Committee, I made many of the points that he raised about the education of deaf children. I reminded the Committee that the Government took action two years ago to save a school that educates deaf children in a sign language environment and was threatened with closure. The replies that Ministers gave in Committee satisfied me, and I speak as a trustee of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People.

It has been a privilege to contribute to all stages of the Bill. I should like to thank the Government in the manner that some of my deaf friends would wish, in sign language. I am signing, "Thank you for the Special Needs and Disability Bill." Let us see how *Hansard* reports that!

6.38 pm

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** I cannot follow that, so I shall speak in the normal way, if that is acceptable.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), I feel a little uneasy about the Bill, as I have said previously. My unease is based partly on one or two words in the measure—and, indeed, on some matters that are not included—and partly on the Bill's tone. The assumptions in it are worrying.

The Bill depends heavily on statementing. This morning, I received a letter from the worried parent of a child with special needs that said that statementing was all very well, but that its effectiveness depended on the amount of detail in specifying the requirements of each child. Of course, that is extremely important. It would be very easy for statements to be prepared for children that would give them the opportunity to go to special schools. However, if those statements were not properly prepared, the child would end up at the wrong school. That is an aspect of the Bill about which I am very concerned.

The tone of the Bill, and the motivation for it, also worry me. Having sat through the Second Reading debate, and been privileged to serve on the Standing Committee, I have been concerned about a number of its aspects. There has almost been an assumption that all children are clamouring and absolutely desperate to be included in mainstream schools. There is no doubt that some are. Many children are already included in mainstream schools and there is no doubt that there have been some, in the past, who should have gone to mainstream schools but did not.

There is, however, another side to that argument. An awful lot of children are desperately frightened of being sent to mainstream schools, and they will not be particularly reassured by the Bill. We have heard many sad examples, particularly in Committee, of children being excluded from mainstream schools and suffering as a result. We also heard of children with special needs going to mainstream schools and benefiting from it. Hon. Members have given very real examples, but there are also examples illustrating the other side of the argument, in which children have been sent to mainstream schools that have palpably failed them. I was surprised but pleased to hear the Secretary of State give an example of a child who was sent to a mainstream school but, at that point in his education, it was not right for him.

We can all quote examples such as that, but they are not all one-sided. Many people who have been to see me and other hon. Members are desperately frightened of being sent to a mainstream school because they and their parents know that they need to go to a special school.

On Second Reading, I rather unkindly, but probably accurately, described parts of the Bill as a triumph of theory over reality. I regret having had to say that, and I would not have said it, had not my experiences in Gloucestershire taught me that it is the case. It is no use Ministers saying that the Bill, and previous statements on it, are not a green light for the wholesale closure of special schools, because that is what is happening in Gloucestershire. There is a systematic closure of special schools. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members are speaking from sedentary positions. If they want to come to Gloucestershire to see what is going on, I would be delighted to pick them up at the station and take them to the schools, to show them the feeling there.

**Laura Moffatt:** If, as the hon. Gentleman states, the wholesale closure of special schools is happening now, how can he presume that the Bill will have the effect of causing that?

**Mr. Robertson:** I said that that was happening in Gloucestershire. I cannot speak for what is happening in Lancashire or Yorkshire. As it is the Liberal Democrat and Labour alliance in Gloucestershire that is closing the schools, it is up to that alliance to explain why it is drawing the inference from the Government's actions that it is drawing. It is not for me, as a Conservative Member, to try to interpret the Bill or the reasons why the alliance is closing special schools in Gloucestershire. Bownham Park school in Stroud is under threat of closure. The notice has been served. I cannot explain why that is so, but that is the reality. Ministers have to accept that reality.

We have discussed whether resources will follow children, and whether sufficient resources will be put in. My hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) made those important points. I have a further fear, also based on my experience in Gloucestershire. Rather than the resources following the pupils to the mainstream schools, quite the reverse can happen. Some local authorities are trying to close special schools to save money. Far from the resources following the children, the special schools are under threat of closure in Gloucestershire to save money.

To prove my point, the former director of education in Gloucestershire let slip a comment at a meeting that he had forgotten, for a moment, that I was attending. When challenged about saving money on the education budget, he said that, through the SEN programme, he was doing his damnedest. I rest my case.

*[Mr. Robertson]*

6.45 pm

**Mr. Boswell:** This has been—perhaps predictably, but certainly agreeably—a pleasant debate on a series of important issues involving parents, children with special educational needs and wider educational aspects. It has been very much in keeping with our earlier deliberations on the Bill.

The House may need to be reminded of what I consider to have been the most striking remark of the day. It was, I believe, the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) who pointed out that this was a debating Chamber, that it was necessary for issues to be raised in it, and that, just occasionally, we might need to disagree.

I certainly consider it incumbent on those of us who have a reputation, however ill-justified, for being broadly in the consensus stream of politics to bear it in mind when we are passing what might be loosely described as consensus legislation—in an atmosphere of good will and general bonhomie—that, on certain occasions, that is not the right thing to do. The example of the Child Support Agency demonstrates that we must not take our eye off the ball, and must not forget our obligation to consider issues in detail.

I am now learning—not least from experience relating to what is now the Learning and Skills Act 2000—how to consider Bills that have already been considered in another place. Historically, we have tended to rely on the other place to tidy up after our mess; in some instances, especially that of this Bill, we are then faced with the task of validating the good work done there, which is perhaps more agreeable but is occasionally more inhibiting.

Consideration of the Bill has been, in a sense, politically anaesthetised from the start. That could have created an invidious situation, although I do not think it has done so in the event. Faced with the threat of the ultimate test outside this place—that of a general election—Ministers have put it about that if one jot or tittle of the Bill were altered, that might threaten its passage. I do not suggest that the SEN consortium is unduly credulous, but Ministers have certainly persuaded the consortium that that may happen.

On Second Reading—doing, I modestly hope, our job as Her Majesty's Opposition—we tabled a reasoned amendment expressing our main concerns about the Bill. The Government went around saying, "If you take any notice of these people, the whole thing will fall down flat." I think that on the whole we, as well as the Government, are relieved that that did not happen, that we have had proper discussions, and that we have made some progress.

I must add, however—in the spirit of our consideration—that the Opposition have not succeeded in amending the Bill. We have tried to do so, and we have had some interesting debates, but the Government have persisted in their policy of no change. One element—I acknowledged this in Committee, and I do so again—is that, in comparison with one or two other Bills that I may name later, this Bill is comparatively coherent and well drafted. I realise—I hope that Ministers do as well—that there may be some awful man trap in the detail, which we have not spotted so far. It is possible, for instance, that the schedule in the Bill that amends schedule 27 to the 1996 Act will cause great grief later. As far as we can see, however, the Bill is coherent and sensible. I hope that that will speed the Bill's passage, and ease its implementation.

Let me give encomiums where they are due. The Under-Secretaries the hon. Members for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) and for Barking (Ms Hodge)—the Ministers who handled the Bill in Committee—Labour Back Benchers, and Liberal Democrat Members have all done their best to be both conciliatory and, on the whole, receptive to points made by my hon. Friends and me and, indeed, by other Committee members. There has been a sense of a working session, in which serious assurances have been both sought and, in general, received. That is also a good omen for the way in which matters will proceed in the future.

I am also very grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) for sharing the burden in Committee with me, and to my Back Bench colleagues for the way in which they made their points. That also applies to Back Benchers who have contributed to this debate, because it is important—even when we broadly agree on objectives and wish to be as conciliatory as we can—that we should have opportunities for Members to record, accommodate and consider their concerns so that they can be properly addressed and, if necessary, remedied. For example, this afternoon we had an interesting debate on the role of the inspectorate. The most important outcome of today's deliberations should not be our clucking about the great advance we have achieved—although we have done so—but a determination to make something of the matter in the future and to continue to attend to problems and difficulties as they arise.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) has a particular constituency, as well as personal, interest in non-maintained and special education, and he performed a valuable service by making his point. Indeed, one of the points that I had noted for mention tonight was my concern that the National Association of Independent Schools and Non-Maintained Special Schools still had some outstanding problems with the Bill. I hope that the Minister will agree to the suggestion of a meeting with the association. A communication problem appears to have arisen with the eastern regional consortium, and concerns have been expressed that some local authorities may have hidden agendas—although no one alleges that the Minister shares them—to try to exclude the non-maintained sector from consideration. It is important that parents have a right to know about non-maintained schools and that such provision should be secured, if it is most appropriate for the child. That returns me to the particular and entirely proper insistence by my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) that the rights of the child should come first.

The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) mentioned the civil rights aspect of the legislation, which we tend to overlook. When I was in government, we were aware of difficulties with that aspect—not least that of resources and, in some cases, of governance—but it is time to move on to include education in the civil rights agenda, given that the Disability Rights Commission and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 have now bedded

down. The Conservatives have no problem conceptually with that, we wish it well and we hope that it will work as well as it has done in other sectors so far.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) expressed passionate reservations about the provision of special schools in his constituency and local education authority. We feel a certain unease in detail but generally accept the common aspiration to move towards inclusion wherever possible and to ensure that it works. However, therein lies the rub for the future. We can all get together in an atmosphere of consensus, but we must also recognise that we cannot achieve our aims just by aspiration and fine words. Much hard work and resources must go into achieving it. From the experience of the parents of children in special education, or those with special needs who are included, practitioners and some local education authorities, several problems still have not yet been ironed out and the Bill will not automatically remove them. There will have to be continuing work in looking at local authorities that do less well, individual schools that are failing or examples of inclusion that are not as good as they should be. Other specific areas of special need should be considered; Ofsted's current attention to the autism spectrum, for example, will need proper exploration. That work must be done; it cannot simply be wished through on the basis of our good will.

When we began considering the Bill in this place, after their Lordships had considered it, we had substantial reservations. There has been some progress in meeting those reservations, and we are glad about that. However, we continue to have some reservations about the practical delivery of this measure and its future resourcing.

Inclusion is a fine aspiration. I have often said that even if children with special educational needs are not included in school they are, by definition, included in life, and will have to come to terms with an adult world that is not always receptive to them. We have to find ways through this, but simply talking about inclusion as a kind of totem or as an aspiration that can be delivered automatically or on the cheap is not sufficient. We must ensure that it works.

I indicated earlier that I might have some news for the House. I am conscious of what the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has said, what has been said during the Bill's proceedings, the strong interest of the educational needs consortium and, indeed, the interest of my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings in special education. That goes across the House. We are not in the business of making difficulties unnecessarily or of subverting legislation unless it is imperative to do so. We have a common objective, which is to serve the needs of children with special educational needs. In conclusion, we may be able, if not positively to assist the Government, at least not to resist them on Third Reading tonight.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill read the Third time, and passed, with an amendment.*

## Football World Cup (Television Coverage)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

6.57 pm

**Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): During the last football World cup in 1998, there was an average of 600 million viewers worldwide per match, with a total of 37 billion viewers worldwide for the tournament. In Bayswater, where I rent my London flat, a multitude of restaurants serve cuisine from all around the globe, encompassing every taste from Spanish to Brazilian to Japanese to Iranian. During the 1998 finals, every one of them seemed to have installed one or two ordinary television sets for the month of the tournament to cheer on the wide variety of teams of their choice and to animate their customers evenings.

FIFA is the custodian of this great international tradition. However, two years before the France 1998 World cup, on 5 July 1996, FIFA brought shame upon that tradition and upon themselves when its executive, by nine votes to six, with three abstentions, voted to sell the European television rights to the 2002 and 2006 tournaments to the German media entrepreneur Kirch and the worldwide rights to his associates, ISL. It stipulated only that the final, semi-finals and any match featuring the national team should be on terrestrial television. The other 50 to 60 matches could be sold off to subscription television.

The press release subsequently issued by Kirch's agents, Prisma, is remarkable in that it begins with a couple of paragraphs praising the impact of the coverage of past tournaments on terrestrial television. It said:

"Following the record television ratings for France 98, with audiences of up to 80% of the market share in leading European football nations, the FIFA World Cup proved again that it is the most compelling television spectacle on earth.

World cup football transcends all other football. It consolidates audiences like no other sport, with breathtaking viewing figures that add up in billions. It is watched by men and women, by children and grandparents. It appeals to all kinds of people, from every walk of life"—

*It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.*

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Mike Hall.]*

**Mr. Grogan:** The press release continues:

"It can empty the streets of traffic. It can fill major cities with jubilant fans."

The release has a cynical punch line, however. It states:

"The 2002 FIFA World Cup will be more widely available to broadcasters than ever before . . . The drama and excitement, the universal appeal and commercial potential of the 2002 FIFA World Cup are now available to broadcasters throughout Europe."

There is no mention of fans or viewers. The key word in the press release is "broadcasters". By its own admission, FIFA was prepared to sell out billions of ordinary viewers to court a handful of subscription television companies, whose agenda was clear.

That action is in sharp contrast to that taken by the International Olympic Committee, which has adopted a principle of making the summer and winter Olympic

*[Mr. Grogan]*

games as widely available as possible. It also contrasts with the decision of UEFA, which has sold on the rights to the next two European football championships, beginning with the 2004 tournament in Portugal, to the European Broadcasting Union. That will ensure that everyone with a basic television—young or old, rich or poor, in Manchester, Munich or Milan—will be able to see all the action.

It is worth remembering that, in recent months, FIFA officials have been courting Europe's political leaders on other matters, such as help over transfer fees. Millions of pounds of public and lottery money throughout Europe goes into building football stadiums. Would not it be timely for European Governments or the European Parliament to suggest to FIFA that it might be in its own long-term interests to show a more responsible attitude when it gets around to considering future broadcasting rights?

Fortunately, the United Kingdom has a long tradition—going back to the Eden Administration in the 1950s—of protecting for the nation the broadcasting of the crown jewels of sport. That relatively modest intervention in the market is designed to ensure that we can all enjoy and share in the great sporting events of national or international importance. It allows us to experience the tension and excitement together, and to be part, for a little while, of something bigger. It means that we can all, in some way, be in the ground or stadium where an event is taking place.

If the great sporting occasions were not free to all, that feeling—that frisson—would be lost. Many people would merely hear the cheers coming over the wall, and for the majority the result might well mean exclusion from the stadium altogether. Among the people so excluded might be the children who could grow up to be tomorrow's stars.

The precise list of the crown jewel sporting events to be protected has been amended and reviewed down the years. The entire football World cup finals tournament has been listed since at least the prime of Baroness Thatcher in the 1980s. In 1997, the new Government instituted a review of the listed events and set up a committee under Lord Gordon. That committee suggested delisting the bulk of the World cup finals tournaments. In my opinion, it badly misjudged public and parliamentary opinion. The 1998 tournament reminded us all of the thrill and joy of watching teams such as Brazil and Cameroon, regardless of who they were playing against. It also reminded us that, despite Lord Tebbit's cricket test, many British citizens, as well as keeping an eye on England's fortunes, wanted to check on Jamaica, which was making its first appearance in the World cup finals.

Wisely, Parliament decided to maintain the protection of the listed events legislation for the whole of the World cup finals. That list was subsequently ratified by the European Commission under the relevant clauses of the TV without frontiers directive, whereby members of the European Union agreed to respect each others lists.

It is true that different nations place different weights on the importance of the various events. No other European nation lists the finals tournament in its entirety as Britain does, but some—such as Denmark, for example—go further than we do in other respects. Denmark has decided, unlike Britain, that all World cup matches—even those in the qualifying rounds—that involve the home nation must be shown on terrestrial television in Denmark. Outside Europe, the Australians passion for sport means that they list nearly 50 events—including, incidentally, our own FA cup final.

It is important that rightholders respect the law of the land of the different countries to which they want to sell their products. Contrary to some claims, Kirch knew full well in 1996, when he did the deal with FIFA, what British law consisted of—if he overbid for the rights, that is essentially his problem.

No one is saying that Kirsch has to give away the rights for free. Under the terms of the legislation, any deal which involved any exclusive element of live coverage of the World cup for subscription television would be subject to the agreement of the Independent Television Commission. The ITC would have to be convinced that the terrestrial broadcasters had been offered the event at a fair and reasonable price. Under the terms of the legislation, they would take into account previous fees for the event or similar events, the time of day for live coverage of the event, the revenue or audience potential associated with the live transmission of the event, the period for which the rights were offered, and competition in the marketplace.

The BBC and ITV have, according to newspaper reports, made a bid of £50 million for the 2002 finals. This may not be the £150 million to £200 million for which the Kirch Group was hoping, but it is 10 times what was paid in 1998. Given that during the 2002 finals in Japan and Korea most of the matches, instead of preceding or following on nicely from "Eastenders" and "Coronation Street" in prime time—as happened in 1998 in France—will be in the middle of the night, £50 million sounds reasonable. It also seems reasonable that ITV and BBC, to find this considerable sum, should pool their sport budgets to make a joint bid.

The Kirch Group is having none of all that. It has written to all interested Members of Parliament saying that it wants to start an auction process. It is widely rumoured and feared that Kirch is waiting for an election to be called before beginning the auction. Moreover, the group has claimed to have started proceedings in the European Court of First Instance to challenge the whole concept and scope of the United Kingdom's list. Fortunately, the Government have been robust in their assertions that our law must prevail. Moreover, in recent days Sky Sports has declared that it is not interested in participating in any auction for the World cup rights. Vic Wakeling, head of Sky Sports, told the *Financial Times* on 23 April:

"We're not going to be used just because they've overvalued the European rights for the event without doing their homework. You've got two broadcasters (BBC and ITV) who, between them, have got a lot of money. They've winced at the price and I don't blame them. I think the price Kirch wants is absolutely outrageous—we wouldn't pay that sort of money even if we were allowed to."

It is interesting to note that Sky, which has made an enormous contribution to the televising of sport during the past 10 years, has thrived despite the listed events, the concept of which it opposed in 1997. As Wakeling sees it in the *Financial Times* interview:

"we've never gone for a listed event. It's the consistent coverage of a particular sport which has helped us"

drive subscribers,

"not the listed events."

The issue of the television coverage of the next two World cups has become a major one in several European countries. In Spain, World cup rights have been sold to a satellite company called Via Digital. In Germany itself, where there are no listed events, the issue is even more sensitive. Chancellor Schroeder's Government put considerable pressure on the terrestrial broadcasters which have paid Kirch over DM500 million just for live coverage of 24 of the 62 matches in 2002, with only a possible option on covering 2006. Consequently, although Germany beat England for the rights to stage the World cup in 2006, ordinary Germans may be able to watch only a handful of matches on television compared with United Kingdom citizens, even though millions of deutschmarks of taxes will have been spent on the stadiums. Not surprisingly, in Germany a campaign is starting to have a similar list of crown jewels to that which we currently enjoy. British football fans of both the fanatical and casual variety will not rest easy until Kirch signs a deal with the BBC and ITV. It is clearly in the interests of the company to come to a deal without unnecessary delay.

In another field, the company has already been forced to retreat from its plans to transfer Formula 1 racing to subscription television because of pressure from car manufacturers. Further damaging publicity could make the Kirch Group public enemy No. 1 among sports fans across Europe.

FIFA, too, needs to step in and sort out this problem. In recent days, Neil Wilson of the *Daily Mail* has brilliantly exposed how ISL—FIFA's agents who handle television rights outside Europe—is close to bankruptcy. Apparently, Latin American television companies paid up to $100 million to ISL accounts that have been frozen due to the company's horrendous debts. Rumours abound that the Kirch Group itself is in some financial trouble. Both Kirch and ISL have made promises to FIFA that they may be unable to fulfil.

It is possible that, on Wednesday 6 June, England will play Greece in a crucial World cup qualifier. I say "possible" because, as of half an hour ago, FIFA had still not decided whether to kick Greece out of the tournament because of various irregularities. Hopefully, that match will go ahead on 6 June. If it does, it is possible that the following day—7 June—will be one of more than usual political significance. Harold Wilson always blamed—at least in part—England's defeat by Germany in the 1970 World cup for his own subsequent loss at the polls. As a Member holding what could be considered by some people a marginal seat, I will thus have a double reason to cheer on England loudly on 6 June, should the match take place. The good news is that I shall be able to watch the match live on terrestrial television—the BBC on this occasion. I only hope that the same will be true of the final of the World cup tournament next year. The matter is certainly not one of life or death, but for many ordinary people it is of some importance.

7.11 pm

**Mr. Ivor Caplin** (Hove): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) and the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting for allowing me to say a few words. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Selby on initiating the debate.

I speak as a football supporter—a fanatical one; as my hon. Friend pointed out, there are different types. I speak also as an officer of the all-party football group. As nearly a third of parliamentarians are members of the all-party group, we like to think that we are the voice of football supporters in the House.

I begin my remarks with a quotation from Mr. Greg Dyke, the Director-General of the BBC, who spoke at the European Broadcasting Union conference on 27 March. He said:

"Of course the real villain of the piece is FIFA who sold to Kirch instead of the EBU. I do grow tired of certain hypocritical sports rights holders who, on the one hand, speak of the importance of universal access and the significance of their events being open and available to all while at the same time selling their rights to the highest bidder regardless of their commitment to those same principles."

The problems that we face in this country about televising the 2002 World cup have been caused by FIFA, whose responsibility as guardian of the world game should be first to football fans and football supporters. It is possible that only four of the 64 matches will actually be shown on terrestrial television in the United Kingdom, if England and Scotland do not qualify and others buy the rights. That is a scandal, so it is right and proper that we are holding this debate, especially as matches between countries in the 1998 World cup drew audiences well in excess of 7 million—and very reasonable they were too.

FIFA's handling of the television rights issue has been a shambles—as has its marketing. On Friday 20 April, *The Guardian* stated:

"Fifa's plans for the next World Cup are in chaos following the sacking of the tournament's marketing chief . . . The ISL fiasco has added to the growing criticism of Fifa's handling of the 2002 World Cup."

The article also makes the interesting revelation that

"Kirch is sweeping the UK auction under the carpet until the general election is over."

I do not think that Kirch is waiting until then; it is waiting until the House is not sitting. Kirch is waiting for that moment to take the opportunity to go to auction over the television rights.

I shall briefly address the issue about FIFA, and the sheer arrogance shown by leading members of it. The general secretary, Michel Zen-Ruffinen, said in Edinburgh:

"There has been a misunderstanding that all matches were available to be sold to subscription or satellite TV channels, but this is not the case. We want the finals to be seen by as many millions of people as possible."

His view about finals is simple. He is talking about the World cup final itself. In this country, when we talk about the World cup finals we mean every match, because all football fans, whether fanatics like me or casual supporters like other hon. Members, want to see those during the World cup.

I very much hope that tonight the Minister can give us a real and absolute commitment to the 1998 listed events legislation and confirm that our Government, the Labour Government, will not be bullied by Kirch on this issue. We, the football fans throughout the United Kingdom, will stand up and say that the World cup in 2002 and in 2006 must be available across the UK on free-to-air TV. We can, as a House, send that clear message to Kirch tonight, and make it plain that, as *The Guardian* said, we do not want any auction swept under the carpet. Kirch should come clean and speak to the House of Commons, and specifically to Ministers, about its plans, which it has simply failed to do in the past few weeks.

*[Mr. Ivor Caplin]*

Nine World cups have now been jointly covered by the BBC and ITV in this country, with growing audiences each time. It is clearly a successful formula for Britain, football fans and the United Kingdom. They say that football is the beautiful game. It is for me at the moment, because I am a Brighton and Hove Albion supporter, and not only have we been promoted but we are about to win our first championship for 36 years. But the World cup is the biggest event in football—the greatest football tournament in the world—and every single person in this country should be able to enjoy it on free-to-air television.

7.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Janet Anderson):** I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) for bringing this very important issue to the attention of the House. I am only sorry that the Opposition Benches are empty, because I think it a matter of great importance to many people in this country. I am well aware of the considerable concern among Members of the House about television coverage of the football World cup finals tournament. That has been clear in the list of signatories to my hon. Friend's early-day motion on the subject, and I welcome the opportunity to address some of those concerns.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mr. Caplin) for his contribution. He has freely admitted that he is a football fanatic. I could not describe myself in that way—although my two sons could probably be put in that category—but I should like to take the opportunity to wish Blackburn Rovers all the best for the coming Saturday and look forward to its promotion to the premiership, which is where it truly belongs.

We all know the importance of sport—and particularly of football, our national game—to the everyday life of so many people. We also know that the health of sport in this country depends to a great extent on the broadcasting sector. Television income is used to develop sport at all levels. A number of major United Kingdom sports invest a substantial proportion of broadcasting revenue at the grass roots under the Central Council of Physical Recreation's voluntary code on broadcasting. Sport has also been vital to the development of many new television services in recent years. The emerging success of digital television has been largely driven by subscription services and, in particular, by coverage of major sporting competitions. The nation has a great appetite for televised sport, and that shows no signs of abating.

The Government do not intervene unnecessarily in the sports broadcasting market. Our main concern is to ensure that everyone has access to those events which have a clear national resonance. Those events, including the World cup finals tournament, form part of the national calendar and make an important contribution to our sense of national identity. They are included in the list drawn up for the purposes of part IV of the Broadcasting Act 1996. Those listed events have a central place in our national life.

Although the broadcasting rights to those occasions are owned by governing bodies, many people regard them as public property. People have come to expect to be able to see those events covered live without having to pay extra for the privilege.

In relation to the World cup, listing seeks to ensure that free-to-air broadcasters, with a reach of at least 95 per cent. of the population, are given a fair and reasonable opportunity to acquire the rights to broadcast live coverage of such crown jewel events. At present, those broadcasters are the BBC, the ITV network and Channel 4. Listing does not guarantee that any event will be broadcast live. Rights holders are not required to sell live rights and broadcasters are not obliged to purchase them or to show the events. However, the legislation clearly stipulates that where live rights are made available for the World cup, they must be made available to free-to-air broadcasters on fair and reasonable terms.

The Independent Television Commission is responsible for ensuring compliance with the 1996 Act and maintains a code on the operation of the legislation. Any United Kingdom broadcaster that obtains the rights to live coverage of the World cup cannot broadcast exclusively live in the UK without first seeking the consent of the ITC. The ITC will wish to be satisfied that broadcasters had a genuine opportunity to acquire the rights on fair and reasonable terms—it is important to emphasise that point—taking into account various criteria set out in its code.

There is no doubt that the World cup has a special place in the nation's heart, as my hon. Friends have mentioned. The whole tournament, which involved 64 matches in 1998, has been listed in its entirety since 1985. Interest in World cup matches goes well beyond those involving the home nations. FIFA requires that the opening game, the semi-finals and the final should be shown on free-to-air television, and we would expect those matches to attract large audiences in the UK and elsewhere, but the interest in many of the other matches is perhaps more surprising. During the 1998 tournament, the average UK viewing figure for all matches was 8.4 million. That is an astonishing figure and, even if the prime matches that I mentioned a moment ago are excluded, the average viewing figures for the rest was 6.7 million.

**Dr. Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test): I am delighted to hear my hon. Friend say that the British Government are taking a robust position. Does she agree that the signal that a robust defence of this country's crown jewel matches would send to the world is important in ensuring that it is understood that sporting events across the world should not simply be hoovered up by those who wish to restrict viewing to a minority audience who happen to have the wherewithal to see them? Does she therefore agree that what she is talking about could well be of much greater significance than just to the viewing public in the UK?

**Janet Anderson:** Yes, I could not agree with my hon. Friend more, and I am grateful to him for making that point. I reassure him that the Government are taking a robust stance and that we will continue to do so. It is essential to protect those crown jewels, and I was interested that my hon. Friend the Member for Selby said that Germany is considering a similar system.

The figures for some individual games were remarkably high, with 10.2 million people watching Jamaica *v.* Croatia, 9.3 million tuning in to Morocco *v.* Norway and 9.8 million watching Germany *v.* Iran. Against that background, I can well understand the concern, expressed not only in the House, but among the general public—

hon. Members are reflecting the public's views—that UK viewers may be denied the opportunity to watch the whole of the 2002 World cup live on free-to-air television.

As we have heard during the debate, the German media company—the Kirch Group—acquired the rights to the 2002 and 2006 World cup matches from FIFA in September 1996. I was interested that my hon. Friend the Member for Hove quoted Mr. Greg Dyke, the Director-General of the BBC, and I could not agree with him more. He said:

"Of course the real villain of the piece is FIFA who sold to Kirch".

As my hon. Friend the Member for Selby said, he continued:

"If you contrast the action of FIFA with the International Olympic Committee—who have ensured the Olympics have remained universally available—the comparison is stark."

I hope that that message will go out from the House tonight.

As we have heard, the Kirch Group acquired the rights in September 1996. Sadly, negotiations between Kirch and the BBC and ITV for the sale of the rights to the 2002 tournament fell through because Kirch did not consider that those broadcasters' joint offer reflected the true value of the rights. From what we have heard in the debate, it is clear that BSkyB has confirmed that it is not interested in bidding for the rights because it thinks that the terms that Kirch is considering are outrageously high, especially when one considers that the BBC and ITV paid about £4 million each for the rights to the 1998 tournament. Negotiations with the BBC and ITV fell through, and the Government clearly cannot comment on the rights and wrongs of Kirch's decision, but we expect it to comply with the listing legislation. We have protected these special events in law, and we want to see the objective of that law upheld.

To that end, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has written to Dr. Dieter Hahn, the managing director of the Kirch Group, and our officials have held a meeting with representatives of the group. It has been made fully aware of the requirement in our legislation that the whole of the World cup tournament is a listed event and that any broadcaster purchasing live rights from Kirch would have to comply with the provisions of the Broadcasting Act 1996.

We understand that Kirch now intends to hold an open auction for the live UK broadcasting rights. The auction rules are expected to be published in the next few weeks. Kirch has said that it intends to comply with the legislation and with the ITC code. Although we cannot foresee the outcome of that auction, we are confident that the ITC will take all proper steps to ensure that the law works in the way that it was intended to so that UK viewers have the opportunity of seeing the whole of the 2002 World cup finals on free-to-air television. That is the result that we want to achieve.

This has been an interesting exchange. Once again, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Selby for bringing the issue to the attention of the House. I shall conclude by quoting a further extract from Greg Dyke's speech in Brussels in March this year. He said:

"I hope there is the will here in Brussels to ensure the World Cup is available to all on free to air, universally available television. There is certainly such a will in the British Government."

I reassure the House that there is such a will in the British Government and that there will continue to be so. I hope that that message will be heard loud and clear by the Kirch Group and by FIFA itself.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Seven o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Friday 27 April 2001*

*The House met at half-past Nine o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Point of Order

**Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It has been brought to my attention that there is a an apparent discrepancy in the treatment by the *Official Report* of remarks I made yesterday in the House, and the leniency of the Editor's decision over any changes to them, and the treatment of a junior Minister's reply to a question I asked on 10 April. If Members are concerned that the treatment of Back-Bench Opposition Members of the House is perhaps different in the eyes of the Editor to that of junior Government Front Benchers, what remedy is there for that apparent discrepancy in treatment by the Editor of the *Official Report*?

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman can write to me and I shall look into his complaint.

# Orders of the Day

## High Hedges Bill

*Not amended in the Standing Committee, considered.*

### New Clause 9

ESTABLISHED HEDGES

'. No complaint shall be made under this Act in relation to a high hedge by the owner or occupier of a domestic property if that property was constructed after the hedge was established.'.— *[Mr. Chope.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

9.36 am

**Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Mr. Speaker:** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 3, in clause 2, page 2, line 7, leave out from "means" to first "a" in line 9 and insert—

'a tree, shrub or two or more trees or shrubs forming'.

No. 58, in page 2, line 7, leave out "two" and insert "six".

No. 84, in page 2, line 7, leave out "two" and insert "three".

No. 59, in page 2, line 7, leave out "adjacent" and insert "adjoining".

No. 2, in page 2, line 8, leave out "evergreens" and insert "trees or shrubs".

No. 60, in page 2, line 8, leave out "evergreens" and insert "conifers".

No. 70, in page 2, line 8, leave out "evergreens" and insert—

'plants, bushes, shrubs or trees'.

No. 61, in page 2, line 10, leave out "two metres" and insert "twelve feet".

No. 85, in page 2, line 10, leave out "two metres" and insert "six feet".

No. 62, in page 2, leave out line 12 and insert—

'(a) "conifer" means any tree that bears or is capable of bearing cones.'.

No. 71, in page 2, leave out line 12.

No. 63, in page 2, line 13, leave out "or shrub".

No. 86, in page 2, line 14, leave out from second "gaps" to end of line 15 and insert—

'between the extremities of each of the trees or shrubs do not exceed six feet in width.'.

No. 4, in page 2, line 15, at end insert—

'(c) "ground level" means the height of the land of the complainant.'.

No. 117, in clause 4, page 2, line 29, at end insert—

'(1A) The authority shall dismiss a complaint if the height of the hedge in metres is less than D/2 + 2, where D is the distance in metres between the hedge and the 2 nearest outside window wall of the complainant's property.'.

No. 40, in clause 5, page 4, line 16, leave out "two metres" and insert "twelve feet".

No. 89, in page 4, line 16, leave out "two metres" and insert "six feet".

No. 51, in clause 16, page 11, line 36, after "2(1)", insert "to include deciduous trees".

No. 52, in page 11, line 36, leave out "any provision of".

**Mr. Chope:** I am surprised that the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) declined to move his new clauses, but I wish to speak to new clause 9 and the amendments grouped with it that are in my name. This debate is at the core of the Bill because it is about the definition of hedges that may be subject to complaints.

Some 3,000 members of the Hedgeline pressure group may feel that they are victims of high hedges, but we must also consider the 10 million or more households with gardens who enjoy the amenity, privacy and quality of life afforded by living trees and shrubs. With the increasing urbanisation of England and the Government policy of increasing housing density, a private garden space is an ever more precious asset, not only for humans but for wildlife. Gardening is one of the most popular pastimes in England, and if the gardeners of England woke up to the true threat posed to their privacy, freedom and quality of life by some of the broad and imprecise definitions in the Bill, we would see public opposition on a par with that now so consistently expressed against the European Union.

On issues such as the European Union, Members of Parliament must often wring their hands and say, "Nothing we can do about it, mate", but the form of the Bill is solely our responsibility and we should take it seriously. As legislators, we must ensure that if new restrictions are to be placed on traditional freedoms and

*[Mr. Chope]*

backed by criminal sanctions, as in the Bill, those restrictions must be clear, precise, easily understood and essential, as well as being fair.

The Government have set up what they describe as a better regulation taskforce and laid down a number of tests for good regulation. I submit that if the promoter of the Bill accepted new clause 9 and my other amendments, the Bill would be much improved and accord more precisely with the definitions of good regulation that the Government claim to espouse.

New clause 9 addresses what happens when people find that there are plans for a development at the bottom of their garden. In one month, I have had five times as many complaints from owners of gardens backing on to a proposed backland development in the Jumpers area of Christchurch as I have had in an entire Parliament, right across my constituency, on high hedges.

I expect that many of the residents of Christchurch who are to lose their privacy and be overlooked as a result of the backland development will be considering what they can do. That they do not have a right to a view is well established in English law, but if they choose to plant a fast-growing conifer hedge, why should those who will benefit from the development of the backland be able to curtail the height of the hedge? The new clause would ensure that an established hedge will take precedence over houses that were subsequently constructed.

This is not purely of academic interest: it is a practical issue. Some people in the area have already established conifers at the end of their gardens. They are not causing any problem or loss of light to buildings because there are no buildings on the backland development. Residents would prefer the backland to remain as it is but some development seems inevitable. Thankfully, the local authority has rejected the application for an extremely high density development and discussions are taking place about a development of a slightly lower density.

Why should the developer be able to build new houses very close to the boundary of existing properties and then, under the Bill, be able to say that the tall trees at the boundary mean that the new houses do not enjoy sufficient light and that, effectively, the boundary hedge is a nuisance? It would be unjust and morally indefensible to enact a Bill that enabled those who develop land to force householders to cut down their existing and long-established hedges and trees simply because the developers chose to build houses far too close to the boundary line.

**Maria Eagle** (Liverpool, Garston): I have some sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's constituents and with the new clause, but does he not fear that it would create a loophole in the difficult cases that the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) introduced the Bill to address? It could enable those who have bad faith and are engaged in neighbour disputes to plant fast-growing trees just before the buildings go up and thus escape the provisions of the Bill?

**Mr. Chope:** The hon. Lady describes that as a loophole. If I had been living in a house with my family for 10 or 15 years and found that the person at the end of the garden had sold his land for development so that I faced the prospect of an unsightly development at the end of my garden, my first action would be to plant a fast-growing hedge. That would ensure some protection against the problem of overlooking and intrusion that would inevitably result from such a development. I do not accept what the hon. Lady says. If someone decides to build a house close to someone else's boundary, he should take the consequences if a loss of light results from a hedge that, although not well established, had been planted before the new house was built. That is the burden of my new clause.

9.45 am

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): Already we face the dilemma of the right to reasonable privacy on the one hand and other considerations, such as light, on the other. Surely our obligation is to try and strike a balance and take account of people's proper right to privacy, perhaps through the joys of nature and the growing of trees, hedges and shrubs. This is a difficult issue and we should not gloss over it.

**Mr. Chope:** My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is right. The issue was not glossed over in the Government's discussion document. In referring to situations in which the legislation might not apply, the document dealt with hedges that were already established. Effectively, the document says that if someone already has an established hedge it might be unreasonable to expect it to be cut down. Paragraph 5.43 on page 28 of the "High Hedges: Possible Solutions" consultation paper states:

> "There may be a case for exempting from any system hedges which have previously been accepted as not causing a problem. It would be possible not to allow complaints from neighbours about hedges, unless they were bigger than when they moved into their neighbouring property."

That is exactly my point. I have described a case in which a property has been built after the hedge has already been planted. The document continues:

> "This would prevent new owners from upsetting an arrangement which had previously been acceptable to occupiers on both sides of the hedge."

**Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): My main concern is that the new clause is somewhat prescriptive. I do not wish to stray into discussing later amendments, but has the hon. Gentleman looked at amendment No. 15 in my name and that of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), which deals with this issue in a more discretionary way?

**Mr. Chope:** I have not yet looked at that amendment, but I look forward to the chance to consider the arguments in its favour that the hon. Gentleman and, no doubt, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst will deploy. I decided to concentrate on the new clauses and amendments in my name and to leave it to others with amendments to make their own arguments. The hon. Gentleman says that the new clause is prescriptive. It has the advantage of being clear and transparent. I do not know how it compares with his proposal for addressing the problem.

This issue is comparable to that of rights of light, which have to be established for 20 years. Someone who constructs a building very close to someone else's

boundary wall or building cannot say that their right to light has been removed or interfered with. There is a prescriptive right to light but it must be established over a 20-year period. I am sure that the new clause will appeal to my fair-minded hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor).

**Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas** (Crosby): I would appreciate clarification of the words, "the hedge was established". Does that refer to the size of the hedge when the property or land was purchased? Could individuals make a claim for an onerous hedge if it exceeded the height that it was when the property or land was purchased?

**Mr. Chope:** No. Under my new clause, "established" means that as long as the hedge had been planted before the house was built, the owner of the hedge would have total immunity against any action that might be brought against him under the Bill. That seems a perfectly reasonable approach. Somebody may enjoy what they think is a view over urban wasteland—or a wildlife area or undeveloped land, depending on how one wants to describe it—and suddenly find that an opportunistic planning application has been made because someone else has been able to get access to the backland. Under the rigid planning guidelines imposed by the Government, planning permission will almost inevitably be granted for residential development, because such a site would be described as brown land. What are people to do in such cases? As I pointed out earlier, they should do their best to protect themselves against the loss of amenity that would inevitably result from the construction of the development.

Those people have no right to a view—no one is suggesting that they should—so they have no absolute right to veto such a development, but they can protect their own amenity and privacy, as many people choose to do. Of course, they could plant a yew hedge but that would take so long to grow that by the time it had grown to a sufficient height the houses against which people sought protection might have been there for five, 10 or 15 years. Fortunately, the development of varieties of fast-growing conifer means that it is possible to plant a conifer that will grow so rapidly that it would have almost reached the height of the houses before they were fully constructed. In other circumstances, of course, that might be a nightmare for people and that is why I am not absolutely opposed to the Bill. However, in the circumstances that I describe, it is reasonable that a householder should have protection against the taking down or trimming back of his hedge because a neighbour has chosen to build and occupy a house at the end or side of his garden.

People will say that it is possible that such issues could be taken into account by local authorities when they decide whether it would be reasonable to enforce an action against an occupier of land. However, what is so undesirable about some aspects of the Bill is that there may be more than 10 million people with hedges in excess of 2 m in height—as defined by the Bill—who may be worried out of their minds; they are law-abiding citizens and they will be concerned that their gardens and their aspect could be ruined as a result of the arbitrary actions of an unreasonable local authority, or neighbours who are very much against tree protection. In drafting his Bill, my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull has not taken those worries sufficiently into account.

Last Saturday, I did some market-testing in Christchurch of some of the ideas reflected in the amendments. First, I encountered complete ignorance of the extent of the restrictions on personal freedom contemplated in the Bill. Householders told me that they had no idea that they could be ordered to have the hedge at the end of their garden chopped down to 6 ft or 2 m. I saw cupressus trees that are established parts of the landscape; ironically, the owner of one such tree wants to have it taken down, but because it is more than 18 ft tall, he has to obtain permission from the local authority—for nothing more than a large and well-established macrocarpa. If and when that tree is taken down, the fact that the owner would be unable to replace it with a hedge that could exceed 2 m is anathema to him. I hope, therefore, that the new clause will find favour with hon. Members.

Amendment No. 58 changes the definition of a high hedge so that instead of the present definition of

"two or more adjacent evergreens",

it would be

"six or more adjacent evergreens".

Again, my concern is that the Bill is over the top. In common parlance, a hedge is made up of many more than two shrubs or trees. If one talks about a hedge in the local pub or Conservative club, people do not say, "Oh, you mean any two trees in your garden which happen to be adjacent." The image in their mind is of a specific grouping of trees or shrubs in a line. It is extraordinary that the Bill uses a definition of "hedge" so narrow that it would include almost every evergreen tree or shrub more than 6 ft high.

It is not clear whether the campaign being waged by Hedgeline—an important single-issue pressure group—is against only cupressus and leylandii hedges made up of many individual plants that create an overwhelming threat to light and make people feel closed in. The definition in the Bill is far too wide. I realise that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst has tabled an amendment similar to mine—the numbers involved are slightly different—but to ensure that the Bill accords with common parlance, my amendment would provide that a hedge should be defined as having six or more adjacent evergreens.

**Maria Eagle:** My constituency is somewhat different to that of the hon. Gentleman; it has smaller properties with smaller grounds. Many of the cases brought to my attention by constituents relate to problems caused when two or three trees are planted closely together in a small garden and a nuisance due to lack of light quickly develops. If the amendment were accepted, I am concerned that it could create a loophole and lead to cases such as I described, which are the very ones that the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) is trying to deal with. I understand where the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) is coming from, but is he not concerned that the amendment would render the Bill unable to deal with some of the very cases for which it is designed?

**Mr. Chope:** I hear what the hon. Lady says, but for how many cases is the Bill designed? Later, we shall

*[Mr. Chope]*

discuss enforcement, costs and the number of people who will be adversely affected. In the light of future experience, we might find that some problem hedges are not caught by the current definition, although I have my doubts. Let us deal with the serious problems—

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Chope:** I shall give way in a moment—I am answering the question put by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle).

If one defines almost every evergreen tree of more than 6 ft in height, in any garden in the country, as a potential subject of complaint, one is opening the floodgates to an enormous number of applications to local authorities, an enormous amount of wasted local authority time, and—most important, from my point of view—an enormous amount of unnecessary anxiety for the owners of the trees and shrubs in question.

In amendment No. 58, I am trying to bring us back to reality and say that a hedge is not two trees or shrubs but a minimum of six planted together in a line. I am sorry that the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) does not think that that is a reasonable definition. I know that, in common parlance, a hedge normally comprises trees or shrubs of the same species or variety. I am not limiting the definition to that in my amendment.

It is no surprise that people have not woken up to the threat that they face from the narrow definition of hedge in the Bill. It is not even narrow enough for the drafters of the Bill; they have included the power in clause 16 to define a hedge as a single tree.

10 am

**Mr. Stephen Pound** (Ealing, North): Like many hon. Members, I find myself in an unusual position this morning because the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) represents sweet moderation and the via media between the figures two and six. Does the hon. Gentleman accept from me that two of the trees that we are dealing with could be 6 ft or 12 ft wide? They grow not only high but wide. A hedge could reasonably be described as a barrier of vegetation. Two such trees could form precisely that: they are a barrier. Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that?

**Mr. Chope:** I do not, because we need to incorporate in our legislation terminology that accords with common parlance. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has not had the chance to look at the Royal Horticultural Society's "The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening". On page 515 of volume 2, hedges and hedging are defined. I will not trouble the House with the four or five columns of close print that follow from the definition, but hedges and hedging are defined as

"a continuous row of trees or shrubs, usually low-growing and closely planted to provide a boundary line, screen or ornamental feature in gardens or estates. . . . For hedging purposes generally, the closer the planting station the better, within range limits of 18 in to 35 in . . ."

The Bill refers to two trees planted, to take the extreme, 35 inches apart as amounting to a hedge. That is ludicrous. It does not accord with common parlance and it certainly does not accord with the horticultural dictionary prepared by that most respectable body, the RHS.

**Mr. Forth:** I am beginning to suspect that the problem that we now face, which is fundamental to the purpose of the Bill as I understand it, is that the legislation seems to have arisen from the obsession with complaining and complaints. If we are not careful, if a Bill such as this were allowed to pass unamended, it would be a vehicle for a large volume of complaints based on the loose definition that the Bill offers, which does not sound anything like a hedge to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), to me or to many other people. Does my hon. Friend share my worry that the number of complaints that could arise as a result of the loose drafting of this part of the Bill could be substantial?

**Mr. Chope:** My right hon. Friend is right. That is my big concern. People have not woken up to the implications of the Bill, and when they do, they may well decide, out of spite or for some other reason, to make a complaint against their neighbour. The consequences in terms of administration, worry and all the rest of it would be considerable.

The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) is a distinguished lawyer. He will be aware of the statutory definition in the Highways Act 1959. That legislation refers to "hedge, tree or shrub." That definition implies that there is a difference between the three, yet the definition in the Bill will effectively merge them. That is absurd.

**Mr. Pound:** I am not sure whether this is a point of order or an intervention, but I deny absolutely that I have ever been employed as a lawyer. I always plied an honest trade before I came to the House, and I would never claim any association with the law except occasionally from the perspective of the defendant.

**Mr. Chope:** I apologise unreservedly. I had always associated the hon. Gentleman's wit, articulacy and general ability to hold the attention of the House with the fact that he had a legal training, because those are usually the main characteristics of people who have had a legal training. *[Interruption.]* That may be a slightly controversial remark, but I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull, who is the promoter of the Bill, will agree with me on that, if not with my other remarks.

So the essence of amendment No. 59 is, I hope, apparent. I can pray in aid "The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening" and legal cases in relation to the definition of a hedge.

Amendment No. 59 would insert the word "adjoining" instead of "adjacent". My authority for making the suggestion is the "Dictionary of Legal Words and Phrases". I am keen that the Bill should be as clear and precise as possible. The dictionary defines "adjacent" as follows:

"'Adjacent' is not a word to which a precise and uniform meaning is attached by ordinary usage. It is not confined to places adjoining, and it includes places close to or near. What degree of proximity would justify the application of the word is entirely a question of circumstance."

An example is given of an appeal case in 1904, in which two boroughs in New Zealand six miles apart at their closest were held to be adjacent for the purposes of statutory contributions to the cost of building a bridge. I will not read out all the other references in the dictionary in relation to "adjacent", but the House will be interested in the use of the phrase "adjacent to the common boundary", which was included in a restrictive covenant. That was the subject of litigation in 1968, and the result was a finding that the expression was too vague to be enforceable.

The Town and Country Planning General Development Order 1963 contains a reference to premises adjacent to a quarry. It was decided that a processing site to which china clay was piped three or four miles from the place where it was extracted was not adjacent. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull will accept that it is better to use the expression "adjoining" than the imprecise word "adjacent". The word "adjoining" is a legally recognised term that has a specific meaning. It is included in section 10(3)(b) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, and is held to mean

"the contours of land immediately adjoining the site in question".

The Housing Act 1957 defines adjoining land as

"Any area of land which is continuous and some part of which is contiguous with a clearance area may properly be described as adjoining land within this section. It does not depend upon any accident of ownerships and boundaries."

The issue of adjoining occupiers is also dealt with in the Rent Act 1977. So the expression "adjoining" is very well known and established in legal definitions.

I am afraid that I cannot understand why the Bill's drafters have chosen instead to use such a vague and discredited expression as "adjacent". We know that "adjacent" is the type of word loved by new Labour because it is open to so many different interpretations as to be effectively meaningless, but we in the House should use precise language so that we produce precise legislation that ordinary people can understand.

**Maria Eagle:** The hon. Gentleman has very helpfully cited some definitions, but when he defined the word "adjoining", did I hear him use a definition that included the word "adjoining", as that would not assist us quite so much?

**Mr. Chope:** I am not sure whether I understand what the hon. Lady is seeking to say, but if she likes, I shall ask one of my colleagues to pass behind the Speaker's Chair and give her the extracts from the dictionary, and she will be able to understand my point. I am sure that if she thinks that I have misrepresented the legal position, she will be the first to say so later in the debate. I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst for passing that document to the hon. Lady.

**Mr. Pound:** A PPS at last.

**Mr. Chope:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: I never had a PPS, so this is an historic day.

Amendment No. 60 represents another of my efforts to try to improve the Bill and make it more precise. Under amendment No. 60, the word "evergreens" would be replaced by the word "conifers". Under amendment No. 62, the word "conifer" would be defined as

"any tree that bears or is capable of bearing cones."

Those amendments should find favour with the promoter because, surely, the Bill should attack the mischief that is popularly perceived as the real problem.

Two graceful, mature holm-oaks—50 ft apart, but with their leaves touching—do not form a hedge in my submission. Pittasporum, eucalyptus, holly, ivy, laurel, rhododendron and yew are not the problem trees and shrubs in need of legislation, backed by criminal sanctions. Let us be blunt: the problem is cupressus, especially the cupresso siparius cross, created by crossing cupressus macrocarpa with chamaecyparis neotkatensis to produce cupressocyparis leylandii.

On page 781 of volume I of "The New RHS Dictionary of Gardening", the leyland cypress is defined as

"now by far the commonest conifer in gardens."

It states:

"It is grossly over-planted to the exclusion of many far more attractive conifers, though it is of value as a screen or tall hedge, making a solid green or yellow-green wall to 35 m tall"—

115 ft, in ordinary language—

"and is much used by birds for nesting and roosting. Its dense foliage giving good protection from inclement weather and predators."

That tree is the problem. It is

"fast growing, dense, with impenetrable uniform surface, lacking any seasonable variation or interest in shape and it stays the same throughout its life, except for its enormous increase in size."

I am not the only one who says that cupressus is the problem; that was what the Government found when they consulted on the subject.

10.15 am

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** Would the hon. Gentleman concede that, in fact, he would create another loophole in attempting to remove other evergreens from the list of trees which some hon. Members would like to be eliminated as hedging material? Does he accept that yews can grow to a substantial height and can form a substantial barrier and that they might possibly be an alternative to leylandii if it were banned as a hedging material?

**Mr. Chope:** The hon. Lady has a room very close to mine, and we often exchange pleasantries, but I find her intervention uncharacteristically authoritarian and intolerant in tone, because she seems to have it in for yew hedges. Yew hedges have been part of the English landscape for generations, and she seems to want to have a go at them and to put them in the same category as all the other problem trees.

I shall pray in aid the Government's consultation paper. In discussing leylandii and the other plants, paragraph 5.26, on page 25, states:

"The definition used refers to all woody plants. However, the complaints received by the Department are generally limited to coniferous species, including, but not exclusively, leylandii."

I have not specified leylandii in my amendments, because the problem does not exclusively relate to leylandii, but it is reasonable to concentrate on where the real mischief lies; otherwise everyone who has a yew, laurel or holly hedge that is more than 6 ft tall will be alarmed and fear they will be the victims of this rather intolerant legislation.

I recognise that there is a problem—especially with cupressus and coniferous trees, not exclusively with leylandii—and my amendments would narrow the Bill's

*[Mr. Chope]*

scope so that it would concentrate on the real mischief. By so doing, we would ensure that any complaint made would be much more likely to be relevant and serious, so an enormous amount of local authority time would not be wasted dealing with trivial complaints. We would not alarm many garden owners and plant lovers by threatening them with criminalising their evergreen plants and trees which are not a serious problem.

I hope that the House will accept that my amendments would be in the spirit of the results of the consultation that took place and would accord with the Government's thinking on them. My message is that we must spare the evergreen and focus on a more restricted group of trees—the conifers. I anticipate that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst may find that a problem, because in substituting for the word "evergreens" the expression "conifers", I must concede that six types of conifer are not evergreen—the larix, the pseudolarix, the gingko, the glyptostrobus, the metasequoia and the taxodium. If someone were prepared to argue that it would be wrong to include non-evergreen conifers, I should be prepared to concede that my drafting of amendment No. 60 was too rigorous.

**Mr. Forth:** In fact, my hon. Friend may have noticed that, distressingly, he and I will be at odds on these amendments. I shall seek to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to explain why. My hon. Friend wants to narrow the Bill's scope unnecessarily and I would broaden it under my modest amendment. I do not take issue with him in the precise matter that he raises now, but I give him notice that he and I will, I am afraid, be on different sides of the argument, as he will hear if I succeed in catching Mr. Deputy Speaker's eye later.

**Mr. Chope:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving me notice of the position that he intends to adopt. However, I shall move on from that argument about the amendment, because other Members will have a chance to contribute to the debate on it.

I move on, as quickly as possible, to amendment No. 61, which would replace the words "two metres" with the words "twelve feet" in clause 2. There are two reasons for the amendment. The first is to move away from the ludicrous metric obsession in which I am surprised that my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull—the Bill's promoter—has indulged. Why cannot we use the old imperial measurements that everyone understands?

**Mr. John M. Taylor** (Solihull): I have no personal fixation with metric measurements, but my hon. Friend may be interested to learn that, when I took A-level physics in this country under the Oxford and Cambridge examination board—I regret to say that that was 41 years ago—we used entirely metric measurements then.

**Mr. Chope:** I always knew that there was a good reason why I never studied physics at school; that was obviously it. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for having told me about it.

Most people in this country have not had the benefit of studying physics to the high level that my hon. Friend did. They talk in feet. If one buys a Christmas tree, one is charged for it by the foot and not by the metre. Indeed, although the Government seem obsessed with talking in kilometres in relation to the exclusion zones for foot and mouth, they really mean miles. People understand the term "two miles", but they do not understand its equivalent in kilometres.

**Mr. Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): If only to give the *Hansard* writers a little relief from our digression into "Gardeners' Question Time" and from having to reach for their Latin dictionaries, will my hon. Friend reflect on his mention of Christmas trees? He rightly wants to buy a Christmas tree measured in feet. If he were to do the environmentally friendly thing and, for two consecutive Christmases, he bought trees with roots and planted them in his garden, they might constitute a hedge.

**Mr. Chope:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Because I am an environmentally friendly member of the public, I make it my practice normally to buy Christmas trees with roots, so that I can replant them after Christmas. In my garden, I have two such trees—and one of them still has a bauble on it from last Christmas. If anyone wishes to visit my garden, he will be able to see successfully replanted Christmas trees. As my hon. Friend said, if over a period of two or more Christmases one plants two or more trees in the garden, one may find—before one knows it—that criminal sanctions are threatened because a coniferous or evergreen hedge has been established.

**Mr. Nick St. Aubyn** (Guildford): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. After nearly 50 minutes of my hon. Friend's speech, we have now heard that he had an interest to declare at the outset. Should he not have done that already? Will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, give advice to other Members who wish to take part in the debate?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** I do not think that there has been any breach of order in the House. It struck me that Christmas had come a little early this year, and one or two other events may have to be dealt with before then.

**Mr. Chope:** All I can say is that the way in which some hon. Members wish to curtail our activities means that it will not be long before one has to declare in such a debate that one has a couple of Christmas trees in the garden. The main reason for amendment No. 61 is not that it uses imperial measurements that people understand.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** I rise to give my hon. Friend another opportunity to mock me on the matter of imperial and metric measurements. Although he might be more comfortable if the Bill said that the height of hedges should be limited to 6 ft 6 instead of 2 m, does he not accept that it is consistent with other legislation? He has already quite fairly prayed in aid planning legislation, and town and country planning legislation can direct that one can have a fence of up 2 m in one's rear garden without planning permission. Does he not accept, in his fair-minded way, that it is consistent to say that, if one can have a fence of 2 m, one can have a hedge of 2 m? Is there not a read-across with other legislation?

**Mr. Chope:** I accept that some people could make such a read-across, and my hon. Friend obviously does.

However, I do not think that hedges are equivalent to fences. To return to a point that I made earlier, town and country planning legislation introduced the requirement that one would have to obtain planning permission to put up a fence above a particular height. However, if walls and fences above that height are already established, town and country planning law does not say that, unless one applied for permission for them, one might face sanctions because they were above the height of the fences for which one would have to seek planning permission if one wanted to erect them today.

My concern is that we are talking not just about new hedges, but about established hedges. That is why the need to obtain planning permission to put up a new fence of up to 6 ft 6 is not equivalent to the need to respond to complaints from neighbours if one already has an established hedge that is more than 6 ft 6 inches high.

**Mr. Forth:** Would my hon. Friend not argue—subject to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor)—that a fence is an artificial construct the height of which can be determined from the outset? It can therefore be covered by planning law. Hedges, trees, shrubs and so on are gloriously natural phenomena and restrictions on their height would be an interventionist event in itself. The comparison between hedges and fences is therefore invalid.

**Mr. Chope:** My right hon. Friend makes another excellent point. With perhaps the exception of a yew hedge—it grows slowly, at a rate that is hardly perceptible each year—most of the hedges that we are considering grow significantly each year and need to be pruned and trimmed to keep them at a particular height.

**Mr. Dismore:** The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) said that trees and bushes are natural phenomena. However, the issue here is not the fact that they are natural phenomena but the fact that they are often planted in unnatural places. That is when the problems arise.

**Mr. Chope:** If we are talking about defining what is an unnatural place, we are getting into very dangerous territory. When I represented the constituency of Southampton, Itchen, people complained that their next door neighbours had fridges in their garden. One could argue that to have a fridge in the garden is to have a fridge in an unnatural place even though the people who owned it did not necessarily think that that was so. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that we should bring all the sanctions of the criminal law to bear even in cases such as that? I hope not.

**Mr. Forth:** Following the point of the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), as the Bill does not specify that the plants should be in a straight line or in a particular configuration, is it not entirely possible that nature will, from time to time, place plants, trees, shrubs or whatever in such a way that they meet the Bill's requirements perfectly naturally? They need not necessarily be a deliberate construct, but could perfectly naturally fall within the compass of the Bill as it is broadly drawn at the moment.

**Mr. Chope:** My right hon. Friend is right. That is a much better response to the hon. Member for Hendon.

10.30 am

**Mr. Dismore:** May I hark back to the arguments advanced by the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) on Second Reading? We are dealing with forest trees that are planted in back gardens, which is an unnatural place for them to be growing.

**Mr. Chope:** An enormous number of forest trees are in back gardens in my constituency, and not just conifers or evergreens; many are oaks and pines. The hon. Gentleman is right, but many forest trees grew naturally before land was developed. That is why the councils and councillors in Christchurch and East Dorset local authority areas jealously guard established trees and do not allow them to be cut down.

There is an appeal before the planning inspectorate in respect of a case in Mudeford in which a large oak—a forest tree—had been growing on some land before a house was constructed there. The planning authority said that the tree should not be cut down and the house should be built almost around it. The person who has bought the house finds it impossible to get into the garage because the tree is in the way. He has applied to have it taken down, but the local authority is understandably resisting that because the tree was there before the house was built and adds significantly to the amenity of the area. The hon. Gentleman is in destructive mood if he thinks that the failure to chop down to 6 ft 6 any forest tree growing in an urban area should automatically give rise to criminal sanctions. That is over the top and unreasonable, and I shall continue to think that if the Bill gets on the statute book unamended.

I have chosen 12 ft rather than 2 or 4 m. The Royal Horticultural Society dictionary defines a hedge as being a maximum of 17 ft and a minimum of 2 ft. If it is higher than that, it is normally described as a shelterbelt. I do not know whether my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull would agree with that definition. That gives us a height range for hedges of between 2 ft—more properly described as edging—and 17 ft, at which point they become a shelterbelt. If we are going to attack high hedges, it is reasonable to deal with those in excess of the mean between 2 and 17 ft, which is anything in excess of 9 ft 6 in. I do not want to be too oppressive and have settled on a reasonable compromise of a high hedge being in excess of two thirds of the height range as defined by the RHS, or 12 ft. I stand by that. Indeed, when I discuss amendment No. 117, the House will realise that other independent experts have shown a great deal of support for that interpretation.

**Mr. Forth:** I must confess that I am slightly puzzled by my hon. Friend's approach and ask him to explain it in more detail. The main thrust of the Bill, as made clear by the introductory remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) on Second Reading, is to deal with hedges that deny light to people. Why is it acceptable to apply an arbitrary height to the hedge rather than allowing for light impediment to be the main criterion by which it will be judged? That is in danger of going against the Bill.

**Mr. Chope:** If the House were to accept my amendment No. 117, which I shall discuss in a moment, it would make the arguments about amendment No. 61

*[Mr. Chope]*

fairly redundant. However, I take issue with what my right hon. Friend said about me choosing an arbitrary figure. The RHS dictionary says:

"There is no hard and fast definition of hedges by height, but living barriers more than . . . 17 ft tall are usually referred to as shelterbelts. Continuous plantings less than 20 in. high are usually referred to as edging."

Thus, anything between 20 in, which I rounded up to 2 ft, and 17 ft is a hedge. If the definition of a high hedge is to be meaningful, it needs to be two thirds of that range. "Tall hedge" would be a better expression. We talk about how tall trees and shrubs are in the same way as we talk about how tall humans are. A tall person is someone who is significantly above the mean height. The hon. Member for Garston is looking at me. We can measure ourselves against each other later if she so wishes.

The Bill introduces criminal sanctions that could be used against tens of millions of householders. I am trying to ensure that it is precise and not oppressive, which is why I am suggesting the definition in amendment No. 61.

Amendment No. 63 would remove from the definition of "hedge" anything to do with a shrub, so that we restrict the Bill's effects to the real mischief. The hon. Member for Hendon said that we are dealing with forest trees that are planted in inappropriate places. That does not include forest shrubs, because no such thing exists in that sense. A tree normally has a single leader whereas a shrub is divided into several stems near the ground. Most horticulturists and gardeners understand the distinction between trees and shrubs. The amendment would limit rather than expand the Bill's scope to that which is strictly necessary. However, I do not want to labour the point.

**Maria Eagle:** The hon. Gentleman has the definitions before him. Given his knowledge of horticulture, which is apparent this morning, can he tell me whether some shrubs grow above 6 or 12 ft in height?

**Mr. Chope:** Very few do. Graham Stuart Thomas, a distinguished horticultural writer, published the book "Ornamental Shrubs, Climbers and Bamboos" in 1992. Chapter 2 deals with shrubs in history and says:

"The broad definition of a shrub is a woody plant making several stems from the base. If in general it makes just one or perhaps two stems it is classed as a tree."

Although I have not brought the book with me, I looked at it in preparing for the debate, and discovered that the learned author said that there were some examples of shrubs that would grow up to 18 ft or more, but that they were the exception. An example of an evergreen shrub that might, in particular circumstances, grow above that height, is a drimys. My mother has a drimys in her garden which is substantially in excess of 15 ft, but the height of the shrub will depend on the conditions in which it is growing.

I am concerned about the hon. Lady's desire to go all out for an all-embracing Bill. Why do we not concentrate on the real mischief, which is caused by conifer hedges, such as leylandii, which are fast-growing and cause a genuine problem to neighbours who are adversely affected by the resulting loss of light? I urge the amendment on the House because it would moderate the Bill.

I now come to what I consider to be one of the most important amendments in this group, No. 117. It is designed to introduce precision and to exclude from the scope of the Bill complaints in which

"the height of the hedge in metres is less than D/2 + 2, where D is the distance in metres between the hedge and the nearest outside window wall of the complainant's property."

The hon. Member for Hendon was prominent among those calling, on Second Reading and in Committee, for an objective test to calculate what is an unreasonable obstruction of light caused by a high hedge.

**Maria Eagle:** Given that in speaking to amendment No. 61 the hon. Gentleman was promoting the virtues of imperial measurements, why does he use metres in amendment No. 117?

**Mr. Chope:** The hon. Lady is really on the ball. That is a very pertinent question, to which I will give a direct answer. I was able to table the amendment only after I had tabled the others, because I had tabled a parliamentary question asking whether the Government had yet received a response about the work that they had commissioned to try to find a definition of obstruction of light. I received a parliamentary answer on Monday, but I had tabled most of the other amendments on the Friday before the Easter recess. When I received the answer, I could see that there was a very precise definition in the accompanying document. Although I regret as much as the hon. Lady does the fact that it is expressed in metres, I hoped to draft an amendment that was as uncontroversial as possible, so I adopted the precise definition in the document in the hope that it would find favour with the Government and the House. I am a reasonable person and I try to compromise if I think that doing so will benefit the outcome. I hope that in that spirit the hon. Lady will see the wisdom of my amendment.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** Having introduced some figures to the equation D/2 + 2, I find that if we take D as 2/2 + 2, we have a height of 3 m, which equates to approximately 9 ft 9 in, which is approximately 6 ft 6 inches away from the back window of a property. Would the hon. Gentleman consider it acceptable to have a hedge of 9 ft 9 inches approximately 6 ft from his back door? I will be happy to translate the figures into metres, if the hon. Gentleman feels that it is appropriate.

10.45 am

**Mr. Chope:** In this particular case, I am not exercising my judgment, but relying on that of experts. *[Interruption.]* My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst thinks that it is a bad idea to do that, and perhaps I will come to regret it.

I am prepared to be generous to the Minister and the Government because they commissioned the research to try to find an objective test for working out what is an unreasonable loss of light resulting from a high hedge. I do not know whether the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis–Thomas) has had a chance to look at the document placed in the Library in response to the parliamentary question that I asked, but if she reads it, she will find that it resulted from a commission given, for a fee, by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to the Tree Advice Trust. The project was carried out for the trust with funding from the Department.

The report, Building Research Establishment publication draft No. 203701, was prepared by Dr. Paul Littlefair of the BRE's environmental engineering centre. He pays tribute to a number of people who gave their time to discuss proposals and give advice and information. It is important that the hon. Lady knows that those people are not obsessed with the subject but have a broad range of interests. They include Guy Barter, Colin Crosby and Paul Goacher of the Royal Horticultural Society and Richard Nicholson of East Dorset district council. The council is in my constituency, so I know what a distinguished expert and tree-lover Richard Nicholson is. I am delighted that his expertise was made available to the authors of the report.

Others who contributed, and who may be known to hon. Members, include Clare Hinchliffe and Alan Bridgeman of Hedgeline, the single-issue pressure group that has been articulating the concerns of people throughout the country who are worried about fast-growing, dense conifers; Alistair Redler of Delva Patman Associates and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors; Becky Hesch of the London Tree Officers Association; Chris Colwell of the royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea; and Barbara Milne of the London borough of Bromley. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst knows of Barbara Milne; she may be well one of his constituents. Other contributors were Jim Smith of Islington borough council, which demonstrates that a full range of areas is represented, and David Hall of an organisation called Envirobods Ltd.

**Mr. Forth:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for highlighting the excellence of my constituent, but given the excellence of the list of people whom he has named, does he wonder why none of them appears to have been appointed a people's peer in the list announced yesterday? It strikes me that there has been a significant omission in this regard.

**Mr. Chope:** I agree, but perhaps their time will come. If they, using their expertise, are able to produce a rational, common-sense solution to this problem, which affects a significant minority of houses, they will be worthy of elevation to the other place, so that their expertise can be made more widely available in debates on such subjects in future.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** I have had a further opportunity to look at the equation in amendment No. 117, and I think that it may have been mistakenly written down. It should probably be 2D + 2, rather than D/2 + 2, and I should be grateful for a copy of the development of the equation so that I can study it in depth.

**Mr. Chope:** I am sure that the hon. Lady will have an opportunity to study the document in depth. Unfortunately, I have only one copy with me today and as I am about it to refer it, I do not think that I can offer to surrender it via the PPS

**Mr. Pound:** Or the right hon. PPS—the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth).

**Mr. Chope:** Indeed.

Perhaps I can cite for the hon. Lady the answer that the Minister gave me on 23 April, in which he stated:

"The Building Research Establishment . . . and Tree Advice Trust have been asked to produce guidance on the impact of evergreen hedges on daylight and sunlight to buildings, and loss of sunlight to gardens; and to devise a method for calculating what height a hedge needs to be in order to alleviate any obstruction of light.

Draft guidelines, including the proposed procedure for calculating hedge height, have recently been issued by BRE for limited consultation. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House. These guidelines will be tested against the sample of problem hedges and will be refined—as necessary—in the light of the results of these field tests and the consultation. The final report on this project is due to be submitted to my Department at the end of July 2001."—[*Official Report*, 23 April 2001; Vol. 367, c. 71W.]

**Maria Eagle:** An important point has just occurred to me. The hon. Gentleman is seeking to include the formula in its existing form in the Bill, yet the experts to whom he gives so much credence are prepared to change it at a later date in the light of experience. Would it therefore not be better for the hon. Gentleman to submit a provision allowing for regulations to change the formula which, I am sure he agrees, is far too rigid to include in the Bill?

**Mr. Chope:** I do not agree. The formula may be too precise for the hon. Lady, but my amendment would create a threshold; if that threshold is not satisfied, a complaint cannot be made. The amendment does not state that once the threshold is passed, a complaint will automatically be sustained and it will be possible to get a remedy from the local authority; it creates a minimum threshold at which a complaint can be made.

My hon. Friend the Member for Solihull has said that the matter will be subject to consultation, as the Minister confirmed in his written answer. The crunch issue is how a person living in a house with someone else's cupressus or leylandii hedge at the end of the garden can assess his chances of being able to make a satisfactory complaint if there is no objective measurement. Noise can be metered but, despite efforts, it has not been possible to produce an easily assessable measure of lux coming through windows that would enable the right remedy to be provided.

The BRE, a distinguished body, has therefore produced guidelines resulting from discussions with the people to whom I have referred. The guidelines on daylight to windows of dwellings are based on those in the BRE report issued in 1991, entitled "Site Layout Planning for Daylight and Sunlight: A Guide to Good Practice", except that they propose that angular criteria be replaced by spacing to height ratios for ease of application. The BRE established guidelines for good site layout planning for daylight and sunlight, and there is a read-across to the position in which a hedge at the end of someone's garden may be causing loss of light to his windows. The BRE's conclusion is reasonable.

Paragraph 4 on page 3 of the BRE document is headed, "Loss of light to windows" and states the obvious fact that high hedges can obstruct daylight to windows. It continues:

"Even if a window faces north, significant loss of diffuse sky light can occur. The extent of the loss of light will depend on the distance from the hedge to the window. The guidelines given are intended to be used for the main rooms of a house. These include living rooms, dining rooms, kitchens and bedrooms. Loss of light to toilets, bathrooms, storerooms . . . hall, stairs and landing . . . is deemed less important and such windows need not be analysed.

These guidelines apply to dwellings, and not to outbuildings . . . Where a dwelling has a conservatory the opening between it and the house and not the front or side faces of the conservatory is taken as the window position."

The hon. Member for Crosby expressed great interest in that. The BRE also deals with hedges that are directly opposite a window and states:

"Where the line of the hedge is parallel to the window wall, measure the horizontal distance between the outside window wall and the centre of the hedge, halve it and add two metres."

That is the formula in my amendment. The horizontal distance is divided by two, and 2 m is added to that figure. That gives what the BRE describes as the "action hedge height". If the hedge is 1 m above that height it is likely to cause significant loss of light, but if it is at or below it, it will not.

If my amendment were incorporated in the Bill, people who saw themselves as victims of high, dense hedges would be able to work out easily whether they were likely to get a reasonable result if they complained. It would also be possible to give tremendous security to people who were worried that their hedge might be too high and that they might receive an order from the local authority and be subject to criminal sanctions. Had the BRE's work, which was published only this week, appeared two or three years ago, we probably would not be having this debate, as there probably would not be a need for the legislation before us.

It is because I feel passionately that that solution is right and reasonable that I would like it to be included in the Bill. If it is not, as I have said, millions of households will wonder whether or not they will be adversely affected by the measure. It might be argued that the Government's original agenda envisaged that the BRE report would come out after the election had been called and the Bill was no longer a live issue in the House. However, we should take advantage of the fact that the guidance has appeared, even though it is only in draft and is subject to consultation. Why should we not legislate on the basis of it, rather than go for the much more draconian and wide-ranging solution in the Bill?

To try to keep matters simple, amendment No. 117 is limited to the loss of light to windows directly opposite a hedge. The BRE document includes a series of calculations dealing with side windows and garden light. As hon. Members will know from my subsequent amendments, I am concerned about trying to achieve a remedy for loss of light to the garden, for which the document also has solutions that could be included in the Bill. The most important matter, however, concerns people whose main living room windows are adversely affected by loss of light caused by hedges at the end of their garden, which might be quite close.

As the hon. Member for Crosby has worked out, if the amendment is accepted, most hedges will not be caught by the legislation. It is therefore sensible, as only a small minority of cases which are indeed appalling warrant the intervention of the criminal law. If we do not discuss all the amendments to the Bill, I hope that we will get publicity for the BRE's recommendations.

If constituents tell their Members that there is a problem, Members will be able to say, "These are the figures. How does the hedge measure against the reasonable guidelines advanced by the Building Research Establishment? Do you not think that it would be reasonable to trim it back in line with them?" We are much more likely to arrive at solutions based on consensus and good neighbourliness in what I would describe as the traditional English fashion if we do that rather than using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, with the force of the criminal law and enormous local authority bureaucracy.

11 am

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To take up the hon. Gentleman's reference to a nut, I refer him to the High Hedges Bill research paper 01/20 of 7 March 2001, which refers to the

"the number of complaints . . . received by . . . 30% of local authorities"

as being 5,200. The paper states that

"the DETR estimated the likely number of problem hedges in England and Wales to be 17,000."

In my opinion, that constitutes a significant problem.

**Mr. Chope:** Indeed. I am not trying to belittle the problem. I am saying that we have a potential solution before us. Why do we not take advantage of it? Legislation should be as precise as possible and open to as little interpretation and discretion as possible, especially where the criminal law is involved. I am sure that the hon. Lady would agree with that. People need to know where they stand in relation to the hedge at the end of their garden or somebody else's garden. Given the work that has been done by the BRE, I think that we have the makings of a solution.

It is not only the BRE that has undertaken work in this area. The solution was forecast to an extent in the "High Hedges: Possible Solutions" consultation document. Paragraph 5.39 on height and distance limits, states:

"A simpler way to define problem high hedges might be to rely on easily determined objective measures, based on the main physical features which tend to lead to problems. The obvious factors are the height of the hedge and its proximity to a boundary or a building. A solution which allowed people to complain about hedges over a certain height and within a certain distance of a boundary or building might seem to lack refinement but would probably cover most of the hedges causing most of the problems. It would also have the benefit"—

I emphasise this—

"of simplicity, certainty and of being clearly understood."

Those advantages are overwhelming when dealing with problems that could affect many people.

The document continues:

"There is the tricky question of where the thresholds should be set, above which a complaint might be triggered. A 2 metre height limit would be in line with practice in other countries and the existing planning restrictions on walls and fences in this country, though a higher limit of say 3 or 4 metres might be more suitable for hedges.

A graduated system, so that relatively low hedges near a boundary might be subject to complaint, whereas those further from the boundary would be allowed to grow higher before any regime kicked in, would be more flexible but would also be more complicated. A simple scale might be to allow hedges to reach the same height as their distance from a boundary, above a 2 metre threshold, before a complaint would be valid."

Surprisingly, that solution is similar to that reached by the BRE. That approach would be extremely helpful in dealing with the problem.

**Mr. Forth:** Although I can well appreciate my hon. Friend's desire for certainty in legislation, this rather

formulaic approach seems not to take account of the huge variation in the configuration of houses and gardens in relation to one another, and particularly in relation to boundaries. Does he agree that there must be considerable flexibility and perhaps even subjectivity in trying to take into account enormous variations in, for example, the constituencies of the hon. Members for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) and for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), my constituency and that of my hon. Friend, to mention only a few, to say nothing of your constituency, Mr. Deputy Speaker? There is huge variation in garden and house sizes. Should not the Bill fully allow for that? Is my hon. Friend satisfied that his formulae will allow such flexibility?

**Mr. Chope:** Yes, I am. Having considered the matter with a certain scepticism and having always been keen that we should try to find an objective measurement, I think that the work of the Building Research Establishment has produced a formula that can be applied and calculated easily by ordinary people.

I appreciate that some gardens are much smaller than others. I accept that there will be differences in the distance between a house and the end of the garden. That is taken account of. In my formula, D is the distance between the outside window wall of the complainant's house and the centre of the hedge. If we halve that distance and add 2 m and it is found that the hedge height is greater than that, there is a cause of action and the complaint can be entertained by the local authority. If the hedge height is lower than that measurement, no complaint can be made. What could be clearer than that? Such an approach would save an enormous number of wasted complaints.

I accept that my amendment on its own would not deal with what happens where the hedge is to one side of the window, but a similar formula can be applied in that situation. I shall not deal with the formula that applies to the loss of light to gardens because I have tabled a separate amendment in a different group to deal with that. Paragraph 5 of the BRE report tends to show that that is an extremely difficult matter to assess.

The BRE was able to produce guidelines on site layout planning for daylight and sunlight and a guide to good practice, and similar guidelines can be used to determine the thresholds that, if exceeded, can trigger the remedies set out in the Bill. I understand my right hon. Friend's scepticism but I think that my response answers his point.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** I am attempting to follow what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but would he care to inject a little clarity for me? Is he now in favour of the first formula, which is D/2+2, whereby a distance of 6 ft 6 inches from the house would allow the owner of an adjoining property to have a hedge of 9 ft 9 inches, or is he in favour of the next formula that he puts forward, where there is a proportional relationship between the distance from the back of the window to the centre of the hedge and the height of the hedge, namely a distance of 6 ft equating to a hedge height of 6 ft? I favour neither formula.

**Mr. Chope:** The hon. Lady has confused me because she is dealing with feet rather than metres. I have been trying to simplify these matters. I have used the formula that is set out in the BRE report, with a view to overcoming this very problem. I think that she has misunderstood the issue. I do not know whether she has had the chance to slip out to the Library to obtain a photocopy of the relevant document. If and when she succeeds in doing that and she reads the document, she will find that my amendment is wholly in line with paragraph 4 of the recommendations of the BRE and the advisers. She will understand that it is a reasonable compromise.

The hon. Lady may be surprised that it will result in, for example, a 9 ft hedge being acceptable at the end of somebody's garden. Why should it not be acceptable if it is not causing any loss of light?

There were some asides, both in Committee and on Second Reading, about losses of views. People living many houses away from another house might be able to use the Bill's provisions so as to get trees chopped down that are obscuring their view of the sea, for example.

Highcliffe castle is one of the best tourist attractions in my constituency. If one looks at old pictures of the castle, one sees that there were no trees around it at all, so if the houses that now exist close to the castle had existed then, they would have had uninterrupted sea views—and the wind that would come with them. Generations ago, however, holm-oaks were planted in the area and there are now many green and protected trees, subject to tree preservation orders, around the castle. Are we saying that, other things being equal, people who bought houses close to the castle should be able to have those large evergreen trees taken down so that they can have a view?

We should concentrate on the particular mischief, which is the loss of light. If we extend the argument to rights to views and permission to cut down perfectly good trees because they interfere with somebody's view, we will be in dangerous territory. That is another reason why I oppose the wide drafting in the Bill.

**Mr. Forth:** Perhaps I can help my hon. Friend. His point is probably answered in clause 4(4)(b), under which the local authority will be obliged to take into account

"the extent to which that hedge contributes (or, if reduced in height, would still contribute) to the amenity of the neighbourhood".

That may be a saving provision to protect against the problems that he foresees. These matters are all, of course, highly subjective and we would all be at the mercy of the local authority, but we are anyway, in relation to normal planning matters. The Bill may have anticipated the point, and clause 4(4)(b) may answer it.

**Mr. Chope:** I accept my right hon. Friend's point, but my problem with clause 4(4)(b) is that it leaves a subjective test in the hands of the local authority.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** We all accept that there are difficulties with subjectivity, but as the law stands, the only remedy of a citizen adversely affected is to resort to the law of nuisance, which my hon. Friend, as a distinguished barrister, knows is one of the most convoluted and difficult areas of English law. The merit of my Bill, if I may say so, is to introduce rather more objective tests. Height, after all, can be measured, and light is capable of being measured. My favourite game is cricket. The umpires determine whether play is possible

*[Mr. John M. Taylor]*

by carrying a photographer's light meter. I suggest that there is more objectivity in the Bill than in the English law of nuisance.

**Mr. Chope:** I do not dispute that one iota, but there would be even more objectivity in the Bill if my amendment No. 117 were accepted. My hon. Friend says that it is easy to measure light. Indeed, the BRE was specifically commissioned to establish whether it would be possible to define easily and objectively the loss of light against which a remedy could reasonably be introduced. The BRE came up with the calculation relating to the distance between the hedge and the window affected and the height of the hedge. That formula is objective, not subject to different interpretations. There are problems with measurement by means of a light meter. As a cricketer, my hon. Friend knows that the light varies enormously in English conditions. At what stage is the light to be measured?

I have a constituent who has a house in the green belt, right next to a waste disposal plant. He has been complaining bitterly about the noise generated by the plant. It is impossible, through the Environment Agency, to get an objective noise measurement, because the Environment Agency says that the noise must be measured over a one-hour period. Surprise, surprise, whenever its officials arrive, the people involved in the activity are having a tea break, because the Environment Agency has tipped them off that its officials are coming. That illustrates the difficulties. Where will a light meter be placed? In what circumstances? Will the light be measured on a cloudy day, or in the middle of winter, or in the middle of summer? The answer proposed by the BRE is a sensible solution.

11.15 am

**Mr. Forth:** Before my hon. Friend is too persuaded by my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor), the promoter of the Bill, if he glances again at clause 4, he will see that it refers to a judgment about whether the hedge is capable of affording privacy to an occupier of the neighbouring land, and it then goes on to the matter in subsection (4)(b) to which I referred earlier, concerning amenity. Surely these matters must, by definition, be subjective. Once one moves away from the possibility of the scientific measurement of height, distance, light and so on, the Bill obliges those who are making judgments on these matters to deal with difficult matters such as privacy and amenity. That cannot be precise or objective.

**Mr. Chope:** I accept that, but we can try to have as precise a threshold as possible for entry into the process. That is what my amendment seeks to achieve.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Robert Ainsworth):** The hon. Gentleman seeks to justify his amendment on the grounds that it will increase objectivity through the measures proposed. However, the BRE document, which he has praised, is a draft document intended for consultation and then for use in guidance. He proposes to put formulae from that document into legislation. Does he accept that his amendment would introduce rigidity, not objectivity?

**Mr. Chope:** My amendment would introduce precision. If the Minister is using the word "rigidity" in the sense of creating precision, that is certainly what I seek to do. It is unfortunate that the Bill, which the Government support, has been introduced before consultation on the document has taken place. If I had not tabled a question, I do not know when the document would have been published. It was not volunteered by the Minister or his Department. I tabled a question asking whether it was available, and as a result, on Monday this week, it was placed in the Library. We might have been able to get it much earlier, at the end of March, as the document has a March date.

We are told that the document is out for limited consultation. We know that it is based on precise guidelines set out in 1991 on the siting and layout of buildings, with reference to light. There must be equivalent guidelines applicable to loss of light from a high or thick hedge. The Minister accepts that. I suggest that there should be a minimum threshold which must be satisfied before a complaint can be started.

I am not saying that once the complaint is entertained, it will inevitably be upheld and that enforcement action will follow. That is a legitimate area for subjectivity and discretion, but it is important that people realise as early as possible what they can do to take their hedge outside the control and interference proposed by the Bill. That is all that I am trying to do, and it seems perfectly reasonable.

I accept that because of the late production of the document and the fact that it is still subject to consultation, the Bill may have to be amended, but as clause 16 gives the Government the power to change almost everything, it will always be possible for the Government to amend the arrangement. The Minister shakes his head, but clause 16 is drawn in the widest possible terms and effectively gives the Government power to amend anything in the Bill, including the definition of a high hedge.

I do not accept the argument that because the consultation has not been completed, we should not deal with the matter in the Bill. The Bill gives the Government and local authorities a blank cheque. There is widespread suspicion about local authorities, and I speak as someone who led one.

Before the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull, I was about to tell the House of an example in my constituency. Suffolk avenue in Christchurch is a row of houses and gardens that back on to allotments. A row of established oak trees is situated on the border between the allotments and the houses. The trees are so tall that they hang over the gardens. They do not cause much loss of light in winter, but most people do not enjoy the amenity of their gardens during that part of the year. In the summer, the trees are oppressive in the extreme. Nobody suggests that they should be cut down, but people want the local authority to trim some of the overhanging branches, which are about 30 or 40 ft high and could fairly easily be removed from the allotment land, which is owned by the local authority.

I have corresponded about the matter with Christchurch council on behalf of my constituents. It argues that common law allows people to trim the trees if they want

to do so. Andrew Wall, the parks assistant in Christchurch, wrote on 10 February 2000 to a constituent of mine who expressed concern. The letter stated:

"The Council will only carry out work on the trees if they are dead, dying, diseased, liable to cause damage or a danger to public safety. Any work that you have carried out will be at your own expense."

The letter demonstrates the council's insensitivity to the circumstances of a particular householder. In subsequent correspondence in which the chief executive was involved, a plea was made on the grounds of amenity. The council's attitude will cause much concern and explains why people think that local authorities should be left with as little discretion as possible and want the clear and precise definitions for which the original consultation document argued.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** Will my hon. Friend confirm that my Bill would not deal with those problems? He might be mildly interested to know that my local authority, Solihull borough council, takes precisely the same view of existing trees as his council. It will intervene only if they are dead, dying or dangerous—I think that those are the approximate criteria. As he has digressed and spoken about some oak trees in his constituency—I dare say that it is perfectly fair for him to do so—will he confirm his understanding that my Bill would not grant relief in such a case?

**Mr. Chope:** I understand that the Bill as currently drafted would not grant such relief, but it could be amended using the powers contained in clause 16 to cover deciduous trees, so as to ensure, for example, that a single oak tree is defined as a hedge. My point relates to the issue of amenity and to the subjective judgment of a local authority in that respect. I want to emphasise the importance of ensuring as much objectivity as possible.

**Maria Eagle** *rose—*

**Mr. Chope:** I shall give way to the hon. Lady, but I must bring my remarks to a close soon.

**Maria Eagle:** I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not close his remarks too soon, as I am enjoying his speech.

The hon. Gentleman has done the House a service by illustrating precisely the sort of dispute with which the Bill is designed to deal, although I accept that it does not cover oak trees. It deals with circumstances in which a landowner is being unreasonable and an owner of abutting land is suffering the consequences. Even though the affected person could cut down the overhanging branches, he may not do so, perhaps because the work is too expensive. The Bill provides a possible solution and could assist in disputes that do not seem capable of being resolved without difficult and complex litigation in the civil court.

**Mr. Chope:** I hear what the hon. Lady says, but as recent remarks have shown, the Bill does not deal with disputes involving a large deciduous tree that is causing loss of light during the summer months, when people wish to enjoy the amenity of their houses and gardens. It is no exaggeration for me to say that I have more complaints about light problems in relation to deciduous trees that are protected by tree preservation orders or that are situated on local authority land, but very close to houses, than about so-called high evergreen hedges.

The Bill does not address such problems, but they need to be dealt with at some stage. It seeks perfectly legitimately to deal with a particular area of concern, but it should deal only with that particular mischief. It should not be open to wide interpretation and amendment that could ultimately make it very oppressive. I know that any changes would have to be subject to affirmative resolution, but as we have seen with deferred voting procedures and all the rest of it, that can be nonsense. The other night, the Chamber was filled with hon. Members who were angry about the Government's attitude to number plates, but were not permitted to vote on the basis of the arguments that were advanced. If we had had a chance to do so, I am sure that hon. Members on this side of the Chamber would have won. However, the decision was deferred until Wednesday, when the Government's large majority stomped through the Lobby—many people did not even know what they voting on—to ensure that our prayer against the measure was defeated. Thus, the affirmative resolution procedure does not provide a sufficient safeguard.

**Mr. Pound:** Like many hon. Members, I am anxious to hear the hon. Gentleman continue to speak for some time, although I fear that he might risk being accused of having delighted us for too long.

If the hon. Gentleman is anxious to extend the scope of the Bill, may I draw his attention to amendment No. 2, which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore)? The amendment includes virtually everything and anything that has ever existed on God's green earth. If he has any worries about oak trees, I suggest that he supports that amendment, which will ensure that he and his constituents are satisfied.

**Mr. Chope:** I shall consider doing so after we have had the opportunity to hear the remarks of the hon. Member for Hendon.

I tabled three further amendments in the group. Amendment No. 40, which is a consequential amendment, involves similar reasoning to that of amendment No. 61. It would restrict the remedial reduction of the hedge's height to 12 ft. Amendments Nos. 51 and 52 would limit the scope of clause 16. They would ensure that the Secretary of State cannot amend the definition of the term "high hedge" willy-nilly. For example, they would not allow him to amend it to cover a single tree, but they would specifically allow him to extend it to cover deciduous trees, which are a big problem.

I should like to refer to one more constituency case, involving a lady whom I visited last Saturday and whose neighbour has a high leylandii hedge on one side of the garden. The loss of light that the hedge causes is nothing compared with that caused by the oak tree that stands a few feet away from her house in a neighbour's garden. The tree is listed, and from 11 o'clock onwards, its leaves mean that her garden is in almost complete darkness. The remaining light is excluded by a silver birch that is protected by a tree preservation order. In my view, such a tree is not a significant forest tree that is worthy of being subject to such an order. My constituent has no light in her garden because of the tree preservation orders that

*[Mr. Chope]*

protect those large deciduous trees. Of course, the local authority and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions are responsible for the orders. There is a significant problem in trying to balance the importance of large trees in terms of amenity and residents' need for a reasonable amount of light in their homes and gardens. The Bill does not currently deal with that problem, which is as great as or greater than that caused by leylandii.

The amendments that I have tabled all argue for a better application of the principles of good regulation. They guard against the unintended consequences of good intentions and they lift the hidden burden of the measure: worry about implications and application. That burden is not apparent in the Bill. In accordance with the principles of good governance, the amendments would also introduce certainty and predictability. I commend them to the House.

11.30 am

**Mr. Dismore:** I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on his speech. It probably holds the record in this Parliament for a Friday speech. He finished in a little under two hours, which is probably the parliamentary equivalent of being out for 199. That is quite an achievement.

I have considerable anxiety about the hon. Gentleman's comments, however, especially his opening remarks when he spoke of the threat to gardeners. As has been said, we are considering the interests not only of those who own the hedges—the hon. Gentleman's position—but of the victims. There are 17,000 about whom we know. The threat to gardeners is a double-edged sword—or scythe. I am worried about the threat to gardeners who suffer from the shade created by high hedges—for example, those who have to replace their sun-loving plants with hostas and ferns. The hon. Gentleman has indulged in a great deal of scaremongering, which will create misplaced anxiety. A good neighbour has nothing to fear from the Bill.

The measure would be used way down the track, when all other methods of resolving a dispute had failed. The Bill makes it clear that parties should try to resolve the dispute amicably. On Second Reading, we heard much about the need for mediation. The Bill will apply to a minority of cases, when one or both sides are intransigent. The local authority's function will be mainly arbitration.

**Mr. Forth:** I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's analysis. He began by saying that the problem was widespread and significant and affected a large number of people. He then claimed that he expects most disputes to be resolved amicably, that the Bill is almost otiose and that it will be used rarely. The hon. Gentleman cannot credibly maintain both positions. If there are many complaints, which will all be tackled amicably, is there any need for the Bill?

**Mr. Dismore:** The answer to the right hon. Gentleman's question is straightforward. There is currently no framework or legislative background against which disputes can be tested and resolved. The Bill provides a framework, which enables people to know where they stand and provides another option for the person who is suffering if the dispute cannot be resolved amicably. The only current option is to go to law so that the learned friends of the hon. Member for Christchurch can resolve the matter. Without such a framework, we leave 17,000 people to suffer. The Bill is therefore necessary; I hope that it will be used in relatively few cases.

I shall briefly presage the arguments that I want to advance on another group of amendments. It will help people to resolve their differences if we set out the criteria whereby local authorities judge disputes, because that will enable them to know what they should take into account.

In an earlier intervention, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) made the important point that if we are too prescriptive, we run the risk of creating a formula that does not reflect the different sorts of gardens and properties in this country. The gardens in my constituency are larger than those in central London, but I suspect that, on average, they are significantly smaller than those in Christchurch. More stringent requirements should apply to smaller gardens. Amendment No. 11, which I hope to move later, deals with that point by providing for taking account of the location of the hedge in a rural, urban or suburban environment.

When we discuss hedges, we are considering barriers, especially to light. Basing our discussion on the word "hedge" means that we have somewhat lost the plot.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** Will my hon. Friend cover the vexatious issue of the formula D/2 + 2, as opposed to D being proportional to the distance from the back of the window to the centre of the hedge? That is important, given that so much of the new clause depends on the equation.

**Mr. Dismore:** The formula is nonsensical because it does not take account of the diverse circumstances that a local authority can face. I have set out criteria in a sequence of amendments. Some of them have been endorsed by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, who has also devised some criteria. They would provide a better method of testing whether a hedge should face the chop.

New clause 9 does not tackle the evil that the hon. Member for Christchurch is trying to address. I have great sympathy with his point, which is: who comes first—the hedge or the affected landowner? However, simply limiting the criteria to the construction of new property after the hedge was planted is the wrong approach. Later, I shall move amendment No. 15, which deals with the matter more constructively. It takes into account not only when the buildings were constructed but whether the complainant arrived in the property after the hedge was established. That does not necessarily mean that the person who is affected by the hedge has no rights, but that the local authority should take account of whether the hedge was there first. That constitutes a more flexible approach than new clause 9.

I shall consider my amendments that would broaden the Bill's scope. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst spoke of definitions that were too wide or too narrow and got lost in the middle of his contentions. I believe that the Bill's definition of a hedge that forms a

barrier does not go far enough. Amendment No. 3 deals with the meat of those anxieties. I do not believe that it is appropriate to limit the definition of barrier to a line of trees or shrubs. One tree can form a barrier. We must not limit our consideration to evergreen trees, for the reasons that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst advocated when he seemed to speak against his own views. He was right to say that deciduous trees can form a significant barrier, especially in the summer, when most gardeners are worried about the matter. In winter, shade is less of a problem.

I want the Bill to contain a broader definition, which encompasses a single tree. I do not suggest that because of the lovely woodland oak that one sees here and there. I want the Bill to cover single trees that have been trained to form a hedge against a fence and perhaps above it. A single tree can grow upwards, sideways or both. If it is trained to grow sideways, it can form as much of a barrier as a whole line of leylandii. Limiting the definition to two or more trees is therefore the wrong approach.

**Maria Eagle:** I have every sympathy with the fact that the proper purpose of the Bill is to deal with the problems caused by nuisance neighbours deliberately planting these trees and shrubs, including leylandii, to create barriers. To that extent, I am sympathetic to broadening the scope of the Bill. However, I am concerned that, whenever we legislate in this place, it is perfectly possible, if we are not careful and very tight with our definitions, to create unintended consequences, in such a way that those whom the Bill does not aim to assist could very cleverly, with the aid of their lawyers, nevertheless manage to use its provisions. Is my hon. Friend convinced that amendment No. 3, in widening the scope of the Bill, does not go too far? Is he convinced that it will keep the Bill relatively narrow in scope, in the sense that it will deal with the problem with which the Bill aims to deal?

**Mr. Dismore:** The answer to my hon. Friend's question is yes, particularly when considered with other amendments that I hope to speak to later, which set out a list of criteria that local authorities should take into account. Obviously, I do not wish to stray into that territory now, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If we set out a list of the issues that have to be considered, it will provide sufficient safeguards against that problem.

That is why it is important to consider single trees in this context. We also need to get away from the question of definitions of evergreens and conifers. There will always be arguments about whether an evergreen is an evergreen. I explored that on Second Reading when I gave examples of semi-evergreen trees. Are they caught by the Bill or not? We have heard today about the problems of deciduous trees. If we simply talked about trees forming a barrier that prevents light getting through, we would not have to worry about whether they were evergreens or not, or about calling horticultural experts to give evidence to local authorities about whether a tree was deciduous, evergreen or whatever.

Similarly, we can get over the argument about whether a shrub is a tree or a tree is a shrub. We have heard several definitions of a shrub. A good example of a shrub that can be used to form a hedge is the laurel. It is a shrub, it can significantly block the light, and it can grow extremely high. I am concerned as to whether the definition in the Bill would include a laurel shrub. I think that it might, because the laurel is an evergreen, and a shrub.

We must not however create loopholes by which unscrupulous gardeners could try to find a way round the strict definitions by finding some exotic plant or tree, perhaps one that they could import from overseas, to thwart the intentions of Parliament. Simply by using the terms "trees" and "shrubs", in whatever number, we can get over the problem of definition and concentrate on what is or is not a barrier to light. That is what the Bill is really concerned about.

I am concerned also by the suggestion that six bushes should be the minimum requirement for a hedge. My London flat has a small front yard with what I consider to be a hedge along the front. That hedge comprises three small bushes. I do not think that they are trees; they are probably shrubs. They quite adequately form a hedge, albeit a rather short one, and one that certainly does not block anyone else's light. Nevertheless, it would not be considered a hedge under that definition, although everyone in the area would consider it to be one. Similarly, and for the same reasons, I am concerned about the suggestion by the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst that three bushes would be sufficient.

The hon. Member for Christchurch went on to talk about the difference between "adjacent" and "adjoining". I have had the opportunity to study his notes, which were passed to me behind the Speaker's Chair by the hon. Gentleman's "Parliamentary Private Secretary", the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst. I do not think that any difference is generated by the two terms. The words in the hon. Gentleman's notes are these:

"'Adjoining land' (Town and Country Planning Act 1947 (c. 53) s.10(3)(b) was held to mean the contours of land immediately adjoining the site in question."

11.45 am

I do not think that the question of whether we are talking about "adjoining" or "adjacent" adds a jot to the argument. I am quite happy to stick with the definition that the hon. Gentleman read out. I suppose that we are straying into the realms of that well-known panel game, "Just a Minute", in trying to avoid hesitation, deviation and repetition. By saying that "adjoining land" means "adjoining land", I shall probably get the buzzer sounded on me straight away.

We then come to the argument about metres and feet. Frankly, I am not particularly bothered about metres and feet. If one of these disputes arises and the person from the local authority gets their tape measure out, it does not really matter which unit of measurement is used. In the end, metres are probably better.

I see that, later on, we may discuss a Bill to consider the implications of withdrawal from Europe. I know that Conservative Members get very excited about Europe. In fact, the whole issue of metres goes back hundreds of years, to Napoleon Bonaparte. I think that he first introduced the metric system. I vaguely recall reading that we first considered going metric in the 1850s, when there was a report from a Select Committee suggesting that that was the way forward. The decision to go metric long pre-dates our decision to join the European Union. If Conservative Members are somehow exercised that they are giving ground to the bureaucrats of Brussels by talking

*[Mr. Dismore]*

about metres in the Bill, as opposed to feet, that is nonsense. If we are talking about imperial measures, there was no greater imperialist than Napoleon Bonaparte.

A further amendment that I have tabled, which has the endorsement of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, covers the point at which the height of the land should be measured. That is especially important in a city environment, because one often finds that the back yards and back gardens of adjacent premises are at different levels. I gave the example on Second Reading of my London flat, where our back garden is about four feet lower than the back garden opposite us. We must be clear what we mean when we talk about the height of the land. I hope that my amendment will address that by referring to the height of the land of the complainant. If my other amendments are accepted, that will simply be a starting point, because all the other criteria will come into play. However, I hope that that one will provide a degree of certainty.

I referred briefly earlier to the formula proposed by the hon. Member for Christchurch—my hon. Friend the Minister also dealt with it—being simply an issue for consultation. I believe that the hon. Gentleman is making a grave mistake by trying to incorporate it in the Bill. We have heard today a degree of analysis and questioning of how the formula would operate, and what it would mean in practice. That is the sort of argument that should take place outside the Chamber. We should ask people who could test the formula to test it, perhaps to destruction, to see whether it worked, or whether a better one could be found. I suspect that a formula will not work in the end.

The promoter of the Bill mentioned the light meters used by cricket umpires, and perhaps that would be a better way objectively to approach the matter. This formula is not the way forward. If a formula were to be the solution, the way to achieve that might be to create a regulation-making power in the Bill, so that if and when a formula—or a series of formulae, dealing with the urban, rural and suburban environments—could be found to satisfy the criteria, the matter could be dealt with more easily by a statutory instrument. That could be amended if it needed tweaking later, in a way that primary legislation cannot.

Genuine gardeners and good neighbours have nothing to fear from the Bill. The only people who should be concerned are those who are intransigent, who are not prepared to listen to their neighbours, or who are not prepared to be good gardeners or good friends to the people who live round them. The Bill provides an excellent formula for dealing with these disputes. Some of the later amendments might improve it, but the hon. Member for Christchurch has engaged in incredibly mischievous scaremongering and his amendments simply do not hold up.

**Mr. Forth:** It is already obvious that the Bill, although it appears to have modest aspirations, has a wide reach indeed, and could touch the lives of many people in many different ways. The scope of the amendments in this group alone—I tabled amendments Nos. 84, 70, 85, 71, 86, 4 and 89—illustrates the fact that the Bill contains some surprisingly controversial elements. Among other matters, the amendments address the definition of flora, the configuration of houses and gardens and the often conflicting criteria of privacy, access to light, quality of life and environmental considerations.

New clause 9, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), raises some important issues, with which all Members of Parliament will be familiar. Those include the relative rights of those who are already established and those who arrive on an adjacent—or adjoining, if one prefers—property. I favour new clause 9 for the simple reason that it would be odd if someone who sought to develop a property next to a long-established property which already had high hedges—as defined in the Bill—became exercised about their existence and sought to invoke the mechanisms in the Bill. That would be improper and unreasonable. It is a different matter if someone sets out to grow a high hedge, but the Bill should not provide a mechanism for people who knowingly develop a property near an already substantial growth of vegetation which then becomes a nuisance or blocks off light. For that reason, I hope that the promoter of the Bill will accept new clause 9.

I doubt whether the Bill is the correct way to deal with what is an undoubted problem. Too many hon. Members who have been made aware of a problem by constituents feel that they must support a Bill if it has a title that claims to deal with it. I dispute that logic, because we are here to judge whether a Bill is an appropriate, proper and acceptable mechanism for dealing with a problem. I doubt whether this Bill is the right way to deal with the problem of high hedges, although that opinion is of course subject to the debates that we will have on other amendments and to Third Reading, which will be an important occasion on which we can all summarise our feelings about the Bill.

When we consider some of the more detailed provisions of the Bill, it becomes immediately obvious—as the excellent, forensic analysis by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch illustrated—that they will require close attention. For example, clause 2, which is key to the Bill, sets out to define what is a high hedge. On that point, I am at odds with my hon. Friend. If one accepted the objects of the Bill and that it should be enacted to allow people to deal with the problems of the denial of light that my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) so eloquently set out in his speech on Second Reading, it would be unnecessarily restrictive to limit the definition of a high hedge to evergreens. The definition should be much wider, to enable people to make proper use of the mechanism in circumstances that justify it.

My amendments seek to remove the restrictive definition of evergreen and add a much wider definition that would allow the Bill to be used in wider circumstances. That may seem paradoxical, because I have already cast doubt on whether the Bill is appropriate, but it is proper for hon. Members to try to amend a Bill so that it reaches the statute book in a form with which they are comfortable. If the Bill were to succeed, I would prefer it to have a wider scope.

I listened carefully to the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and he appeared to wish to make this a Bill for the elimination of leylandii, if I may put it so crudely and inelegantly. I well understand that, but if we accept that the problem is potentially much wider—as my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull argued

on Second Reading—it is logical that the Bill should cover the widest possible scope. My amendments therefore seek to widen the scope of the Bill.

12 noon

I am happy to say that I do not disagree further with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and I am much more in tune with his reasoning on the other amendments. It strikes me that the definition of a hedge as

"two or more adjacent evergreens"

is ludicrous and, as my hon. Friend said, flies in the face of all understanding and logic. I am sure that if we knocked on 100 doors in our constituencies and asked people what they thought a hedge was, the last thing that they would do would be to point to something that met the definition in clause 2. That simply is not what most people think of as a hedge. If we are really talking about barriers, not hedges, the Bill's aims, aspirations and description could be highly misleading.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there are people, unfortunately, who would take advantage of the Bill if the definition of a hedge were extended to six trees? I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) that one tree can constitute a significant barrier. There are some who would not use one tree as a significant barrier, but we all deal with cases in which people use two trees—or even one, in some cases—to cause significant annoyance and nuisance to an immediate neighbour whose only crime has been to live next door, quite peaceably, and get on with their own affairs.

**Mr. Forth:** That may happen in some extreme cases. The hon. Lady raises an important question on which I should like to touch, although it is not entirely appropriate at this stage of the debate. Do we use a Bill such as this to deal with that restricted, limited and unfortunate set of circumstances? This is a problem of our times. Because we are developing a blame culture and a complainant culture, Members of Parliament often feel obliged or persuaded to use statute to meet the complaints of an ever-narrowing number of people, and I am not sure that that is right.

I do not see it as my job here to assist in the making of law to deal with an ever-diminishing range and focus of complaints. I am not saying that if the Bill does not deal with every conceivable set of complaints it is defective. We must at some point accept that there must be limitations on the aspiration, effect and scope of legislation. It is not necessary to deal with everything. I argued a moment ago for widening the scope of the Bill in what I believe to be a reasonable way. However, it does not have to meet every criterion. If this were intended to be the high hedges and single intrusive trees Bill, we should have called it that—then we would all know what we were talking about. What worries me is the danger of inadvertently providing a mechanism to engender and encourage a huge number of activities.

The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) said that he believed that the majority of the problems arising in this area would be dealt with by amicable discussion and mediation, and that we would be left with a hard core of cases. However, every time we extend the scope of this, based on the definitions in clause 2, we are in danger of going against that and providing people with more and more mechanisms under which they can resort to the provisions. When we say "hedge" we should mean "hedge".

I have been very modest in suggesting that the definition should be three or more adjacent evergreens. One is in danger of getting into a very narrow debate. I simply wanted to make a point, and if I had to make the choice, I might even prefer to go along with my hon. Friend's proposal rather than my own.

**Mr. Christopher Gill** (Ludlow): My right hon. Friend has been somewhat critical of the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). Perhaps he would be interested in the contents of a letter that I received only this morning from a Mrs. Porter of The Wheatlands, Bridgnorth. She writes concerning high hedge abuse. There is no question but that high hedges cause enormous difficulties between neighbours. She says:

"I see dozens of Bridgnorth people suffering under a dark, heavy cloud of leylandii."

She continues that they can

"grow up to 100 ft high blocking out light/views and imprison dwellers in their own homes."

From my experience, leylandii are the cause of the greatest difficulty in this respect.

**Mr. Forth:** Of course I accept what my hon. Friend says. I am pretty sure that almost every Member of the House—were they to take the trouble of attending on these occasions—could produce a letter from a constituent of the kind produced by my hon. Friend. We have to judge whether we think that the Bill is an appropriate response to the emotional cases raised with us by constituents. We have to make a judgment about the number and seriousness of such cases and whether the Bill offers a proportionate response to them. That is what we are here to do.

My concern, which I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch, is that in many respects the Bill is disproportionate and would be an over-reaction; in its details lie the seeds of misunderstandings that could lead us into difficult circumstances.

**Mr. Pound:** The right hon. Gentleman raises a most important point which in many ways cuts to the heart of our debate. He will be aware of biblical references to the upas tree which poisons all that come close to it. I am sure that he must be aware that, in many cases, disputes between neighbours are conducted by arboricultural proxy—that is a severe problem. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept the point made so well and so eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) that, far from increasing the scope for litigation—moving into those murky waters of compensation and blame and all the other things that the right hon. Gentleman rightly condemns—the measure removes the thrust from the civil courts and places it in a more detailed, defined, narrowed locus? In fact—and this is a remarkable and extraordinary thought—it may actually reduce the amount of civil legislation and dispute.

**Mr. Forth:** Almost by definition, the measure would have that effect. However, it would plunge us into the

*[Mr. Forth]*

even murkier waters of local authorities and Secretaries of State. Currently, local authorities and Secretaries of State are much murkier than our judiciary. The hon. Gentleman's suggestion will not lead us on to a higher, more brightly lit land where we can all mediate together and deal with our problems amicably. Of course, I accept that much of what we are talking about can be vexatious—one person could use trees, shrubs, hedges or whatever against another; that is simply part of human nature. Much of our work in this place tries to deal with the more negative aspects of human nature. All of that, I accept. However, we are discussing whether we should be driven by the type of definition in clause 2 into the arms of the local authority and on through inspectors, appeals, complaints, Secretaries of State, fines and so on. We are discussing whether that panoply—set out in the Bill—is appropriate.

The definition of "hedge" in the Bill is inappropriate and could be misleading. In another of my amendments, I propose to broaden the definition—away from "evergreen"—for the reasons that I gave earlier. Amendment No. 85, in which I propose to substitute "six feet" for "two metres", has already been well rehearsed. I merely place myself in the camp of those wrinklies and crumblies who feel much more comfortable with feet and inches than with centimetres and metres. I make no apology for that.

I shall not dwell on the matter, but in the context of a Bill such as this, it is perfectly appropriate for us to make the point that we should have feet instead of metres. Perhaps we should have both—I would accept that; younger generations—my children's generation—are on the other side of that particular fence, but I do not want to labour the point.

However, I do want to discuss briefly amendment No. 86. The Bill needs provisions to deal with the distance between the trees, shrubs, bushes or whatever we end up including in the definition. That point has a direct bearing on the matter of light. Self-evidently, if such flora overlap or abut one another, they will obstruct the light. If, however, there are distances between them, they will not obstruct the light—or will do so to a much lesser extent. There is a lacuna in the Bill—certainly in clause 2—in that no reference is made to that.

The Bill includes the words "form a barrier", but contains no remotely adequate definition of a barrier. It deals with height—something dealt with by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch in the now rather controversial formula that has already, properly, absorbed some of our time this morning. It refers in clause 2(2)(b) to

"a line of trees or shrubs . . . regarded as forming a barrier, despite the existence of any gaps, if the gaps do not significantly affect its overall effect as a barrier."

Those words are entirely inadequate. They serially give rise to the prospect of endless debates as to just what they mean. I seek in amendment No. 86 to give some precision or definition to the point. It follows the thrust of what my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch was saying. I am seeking to amend the Bill in a different way, but the same context.

Whether in amicable discussions and mediation, in making submissions to the local authority or in the appeals process and whether eventually the majesty of the Secretary of State is brought to bear, it defeats me how on earth we can pick our way through clause 2(2)(b), which says:

"a line of trees or shrubs is to be regarded as forming a barrier, despite the existence of any gaps, if the gaps do not significantly affect its overall effect as a barrier."

That is pushing the language beyond its limits. I might even go so far as to say that it is gobbledegook. It does not mean anything. Those words will not take us any measurable way in the direction of resolving the often fraught and emotional disputes between neighbours.

My hon. Friend the Member for Solihull is an eminent and experienced law practitioner, and he perhaps thinks that he understands the words of his Bill. I am sure that he does, because otherwise he would not have brought it before the House, but I defy him to say that the average neighbour, even in Solihull, where all the residents are people of extreme discretion—otherwise they would not have elected my hon. Friend—could pick his way through clause 2(2)(b) and come out feeling that he knew what on earth a high hedge or a barrier was or what constituted a gap.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** I wish to correct my right hon. Friend on only one point. I am not a legal practitioner. I went straight many years ago. I have not held a practising certificate since 1988. I require that to be on the record lest anyone think that I ought to declare an interest.

**Mr. Forth:** I apologise to my hon. Friend. I was aware that he was not a practising lawyer. It was my slackness of language that gave rise to the possibility of misunderstanding. I am grateful to him, and I will try not to repeat the offence. I paid a sort of compliment when I said that he was an experienced law man, but I should have said that it was only until 1988.

**Mr. Taylor:** I am entirely satisfied with my right hon. Friend's explanation, and I take his words kindly.

**Mr. Forth:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

The problem with clause 2 is clear. In the attempt that has properly been made in the Bill to define "high hedge", we end up in more difficulty than we started with. Most people in our constituencies thumbing through the statute book, as I suppose that they must regularly do to look for some redress against the obnoxious hedges growing along their property, would look at clause 2, if it becomes law, and say that "hedge" seemed to mean only two or more evergreens. We have an immediate problem in terms of number and the restriction to evergreens. Then we get into the difficulty of what is or is not a barrier.

I admit that the Bill is explicit in the sense that it says that a hedge exceeds 2 m, but perhaps people of my generation are not certain what 2 m is. Who knows? Certainly, when they come to clause 2(2)(b), they will be completely mystified.

**Maria Eagle:** I know that the right hon. Gentleman is not a legal man—or a law man, as he quaintly put it—although I sometimes think that he operates like one in this place. Is he not aware that a court of law will take the ordinary English sensible meaning of phrases such as "high hedge" in statutory interpretation?

**Mr. Forth:** I would hope that that was the case, but I defy even this country's law courts to arrive at a

satisfactory conclusion given the wording of clause 2(2)(b). Even the hon. Lady, with her experience of the law—I shall be no more explicit than that in case I get into even more trouble—might struggle a bit.

12.15 pm

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** Surely that last exchange is a complete diversion—the whole purpose of the Bill is to help people stay out of the law courts.

**Mr. Forth:** In that case, let us substitute for the law courts the infinite wisdom of our local authorities and of their planning departments and the inspectors who, apparently, will be appointed by the Secretary of State to deal with the appeals, and I would argue in the exactly the same way.

**Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): We are in danger of making a mountain out of a molehill. Even if we consider local authorities, the thrust of the Bill is about conciliation and common sense, and the right hon. Gentleman knows that.

**Mr. Forth:** The difficulty is that, sitting here in the House, we may genuinely think that we are providing a mechanism of last resort, but my argument is that the folk outside will not believe that, nor will they see the mechanism in that light. These are highly disputatious and emotional matters in which people invest much of their personal, family, emotional and, often, financial capital, but it is suggested that the legislation will not have to be used because most things will be settled. However, it is also argued that the Bill is needed because they are not easily settled, so a large number of people will invoke the mechanism. It is like those ghastly advertisements that we now see on television, saying, "Where there's a blame, there's a claim." The Bill is almost in the same category, saying, "Come on, folks, here's a mechanism—get stuck into it."

**Mr. Cunningham:** I have experience in local government and I know how it operates. Conciliation takes place nine times out of 10, but there are extreme cases. Not too long ago, an individual took a shotgun to his neighbour, and we must deal with those situations.

**Mr. Forth:** In this case, we may end up taking a shotgun to the Secretary of State, which may or may not be bad thing, because we could simply shift the dispute from one between one neighbour and another to one with the local authority and, eventually, the Secretary of State. That is all we are doing. Of course I cannot claim anything like the hon. Gentleman's distinguished record in local government.

In fact, looking around the Chamber, several hon. Members have distinguished local government experience. I am afraid that I was only a modest elected councillor between 1968 and 1972—which only reinforces how old I am. I served only as a member and a vice-chairman of a couple of committees, but I have a view about how wise it is to import into such matters the local authority.

I do not regard local authorities as representing necessarily the most reliable way to resolve disputes. I have worries, which will be reflected in later debates on other groups of amendments, about the cost burden that the Bill could place on local authorities, but we can only use our judgment now. My judgment is that the mechanism would represent an incitement and there would be an incentive to people to invoke them. The hon. Gentleman's view, which I respect, but disagree with, is that the mechanism would be used only as a last resort and thus would be rarely used. I think that we have to let the matter rest there and let other hon. Members judge for themselves.

To finish my remarks on clause 2, I suggest that beyond any doubt, the current wording is entirely unsatisfactory and faulty, and it will need to be changed. I have suggested some changes, but I would not want to die in the last ditch about what I am saying. In fact, I am rather attracted to one or two of the amendments tabled by hon. *Friend the Member for Christchurch, but we should not* agree to clause 2 without any change and without making it much more explicit.

I was happy to attach my name to amendment No. 4 which was tabled by the hon. Member for Hendon. I was persuaded when, on Second Reading, he pointed out that circumstances—mainly but not exclusively in an urban context—can be different. He said:

"I have a small garden at the back of my Westminster flat."

He is very fortunate to have that; he is obviously a man of some substance. He added:

"Behind my garden is a neighbouring garden, where the level of the ground is nearly 4 ft"—

I am glad that he used measures that I can understand—

"higher than that in my garden."

Slipping effortlessly between imperial and metric measures in the impressive fashion that we would expect of him, he asked:

"Is the 2 m measured from the level of my garden or from the level of the other person's garden, because a tree may be only 1 m high in my neighbour's garden, but it will be far more than 2 m high on my side of the fence?"—[*Official Report*, 9 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 561-2.]

That is a perfectly reasonable question.

The thrust of our amendment is to seek to clarify the matter. In doing so, it illustrates a point that has become very clear in the debate. In so many different ways—such as the measure of light to which my hon. Friends have referred, the subjectivity of privacy or amenity and the difference between densely packed urban development and the sprawling acres of Solihull and Christchurch, which will be the subject of another amendment—we must hesitate before we seek to apply exactly the same criteria in every circumstance.

The example of the hon. Member for Hendon is interesting. In the debate on whether the formula should be D divided or multiplied by 2 and whether 2 m should or should not be added to it, we heard some interesting exchanges. The formula relates to the distance between someone's window sill and boundary on the one hand and to the height of the shrubs on the other. The exchanges illustrated, as well as one could expect, the huge difference that there inevitably must be between the hon. Gentleman's Westminster flat and garden and the acreage that exists in the constituencies of many other hon. Members present. We must be careful about trying to apply a one size fits all approach to widely differing circumstances.

*[Mr. Forth]*

The issues of light, privacy and amenity are completely different in an inner-city urban context from the reality and the perception of those criteria in areas such as mine, which is often called a leafy suburb—and I am happy to say that it is just that. However, even Bromley and Chislehurst has a large number of modest terraced dwellings with very small gardens in an urban context. The amendment would apply to them, and that is why I was happy to put my name to it. We must be careful about the extent to which we expect one provision in a Bill to deal with every possible variation.

**Mr. Chope:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that this issue is addressed on page 5 of the BRE's publication "Hedge Height and Light Loss"? That deals with the special case of land sloping from window wall to hedge and suggests that the hedge height must take account of that. It defines how that should be done, so will he accept that the issue has been considered by the experts? They have found a way of incorporating such cases in the formula.

**Mr. Forth:** I am not sure about that. My hon. Friend should not provoke me by continuing to use the word "experts". If there is one thing that is guaranteed to put me off almost anything, it is associating it with the word "experts". I believe in the gifted amateur approach to life and I always feel much more comfortable with people who approach a subject with an attitude of common sense. As soon as anyone gets out a slide rule, I become suspicious. I am not as convinced on that as my hon. Friend would like.

The difficulty of considering such definitions simply on the basis of what is in a Bill is that that can be a purely academic exercise, but we are dealing with extremely personal matters that directly affect people's lives. That is the Bill's objective. Given that that is the case, we are obliged to satisfy ourselves that what is proposed is appropriate and will not be counterproductive.

My fear is that as the Bill does not provide adequate definitions, especially in clause 2, we might be in danger of raising expectations unrealistically and unnecessarily—as Parliaments so often do—and creating a great deal of disappointment. People who expect a ready solution to their problem are likely to be extremely disappointed when they consider the number of stages through which the process might be forced to go, never mind the necessary balancing of the interests of the person complaining and the person complained against. We shall deal with that in subsequent amendments and, possibly, on Third Reading.

Whether or not one agrees with the main thrust of the Bill, it cannot be allowed to progress without being amended. Clause 2 is a good example of something that needs to be changed. I hope that when my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull and the Minister respond, they will deal in detail with the points that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and I have made. Unless someone does that, I will be reluctant to support the Bill. It will not advance us in its present form. In fact, it could make matters worse.

Regrettably, the Bill is a good example of well-intentioned legislation that does not meet the requirements that we have in mind. I hope that we will be able to improve it so that on Third Reading, sceptics like me will be persuaded to support it. I do not feel inclined to do that now, but there is a little way to go before we see it in its final form. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull will recommend to the House that some amendments—I like to call them improvements—that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and I have suggested can be incorporated.

12.30 pm

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) tabled amendments to change the word "evergreens" to "trees and shrubs" and he gave good reasons for that. However, the Bill deals with an issue that has been widely discussed for some time, and the consultations on it have been made known to the House. He is well aware of the dangers of drafting legislation too widely so that its scope unintentionally covers things that are not a problem.

During the consultation, it was made very clear to us that almost the entire problem relates to evergreen plants. There is a temptation on the one hand to narrow the definition to coniferous trees, but laurels are a problem, and on the other to widen it to include deciduous plants; but we have attempted to acquire knowledge of the problems that exist and found that deciduous plants are not the cause. I ask my hon. Friend to accept that although regulation will provide us with the opportunity to change the definition if it proves necessary to do so, this is the broad proposal on which we consulted, it has widespread support and it is believed that it will solve the overwhelming majority of the problems.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) referred to people's inability to understand clause 2, and he wants to amend it so that simple folk or amateurs like him can understand it. However, those amendments would bring within the scope of the Bill situations in which three shrubs were planted almost 6 ft apart. He complains that the definition of a hedge may not be appropriate. Well, it certainly would not be appropriate if we accepted those amendments. We would lose a lot of the support that we have for the Bill if we included cases of complaints about individual trees or lines of trees, rather than a hedge that is a significant barrier to light.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) wants to increase from two to six the number of plants in the definition of a hedge. He does not think seriously enough about the size of the plants in relation to small gardens. If we amended the definition to include a greater number of plants, we would exclude from the Bill's protection many people with small gardens, in which the effect of inappropriate hedges can powerfully affect people's lives and their enjoyment of their property.

**Mr. Chope:** Does the Minister accept that there is understandable concern that one very large evergreen tree, or for that matter a deciduous tree, can cause just as much of a problem as a hedge? Why are the Government supporting the concept of a Bill that deals with hedges, rather than coming clean and dealing with trees that block a lot of light, which would clarify the matter for everybody?

**Mr. Ainsworth:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. There are people with complaints against their

neighbours who believe that the Bill as it stands will solve problems that it will not solve. We receive many complaints about problems concerning individual trees in all sorts of circumstances. If we considerably widen the scope of the Bill to individual trees, we would lose much of the support that we have from local authorities. We must always strike a balance. We know that the problem is fairly widespread and we believe that the Bill will deal with the overwhelming majority of cases. If it does not, the House can, using the affirmative resolution procedure, make regulations to change the definition. We have defined a hedge as two or more trees because we do not want to rule out small urban properties that would have a problem with a greater number. That number may apply, in many circumstances, to properties in the constituency of the hon. Member for Christchurch, but it would not necessarily apply to smaller gardens and enclosed spaces in urban environments.

I shall talk briefly about new clause 9, in which the hon. Member for Christchurch proposes that a complaint cannot be made by people occupying a property built after a hedge has been established. He did not point out to the House that that would remove from the protection of the Bill someone who bought a property constructed when the adjacent hedge was a reasonable size and did not create any problems but which was subsequently allowed to reach greater dimensions. I commend the hon. Gentleman for studying the draft BRE document, which he praised. He therefore knows that there is an intention to consult further and that there is provision for the fact that a hedge was already in existence to be taken into account in any ruling. He is moving from covering that situation in guidance to including a rigid provision on it in the Bill. Irrespective of changing circumstances after the establishment of a hedge, he is arguing that its existence prior to the construction of the complainant's property means that no complaint can be considered and no protection given.

I urge the hon. Gentleman to think seriously about exploring that other route so that the point can be covered. I accept that people who move next door to a nuisance are not automatically entitled to demand its removal. Such considerations should be taken into account, but if the hon. Gentleman's proposal were included in the Bill, he would remove protection from people in difficult circumstances.

The hon. Gentleman also attempted to include the formula in the BRE document in the Bill. As I tried to tell him in an intervention, that document is in draft and further consultation is proposed. If the formula is shown to be workable and has support from local authorities that responded to the original consultation and from others who have been heavily involved in the problem, it can be incorporated in guidance and there is no necessity to include it in the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman's new clause and amendment demonstrate clearly the schizophrenic attitude that Conservative Members still have to local government. The hon. Gentleman's colleagues on the Front Bench are attempting to make noises and to smile at local government, suggesting that all the sins committed in their years of power are past and they have become the friends of local government; they have confidence in it and are trying to rebuild some kind of relationship with it. However, whenever the rottweilers on the Back Benches get to open their mouths, they display an utter lack of confidence in any local authority to act according to guidance, even in areas such as the one we are discussing.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said that we were transferring responsibilities from the courts to the murky waters of local government, to which his colleague on the Front Bench, the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton), said, "Hear, hear." There is therefore schizophrenia on the Opposition Front Bench too. There is not always such a division between the Back and Front Benches; the Front Bench, too, thinks that local government is so murky that it cannot be trusted to act according to guidance. It believes that rigid regulations have to be introduced and amendments and new clauses tabled because local government cannot be trusted at all.

**Mr. Loughton:** In fact, the Minister was not listening quite so closely to me. I think that he has mistimed any comments that I made from a sedentary position.

Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that it is clearly the policy of the Conservative Opposition—it will be a Conservative party manifesto commitment—to devolve greater powers to local government, starting with giving it a fourth option, so that local people through local authorities can decide how they want to be run? That option has been taken away from them by the Government.

Secondly, we propose to give far greater planning control to local people rather than have it imposed on them centrally—a concept that the Government have unashamedly promoted.

**Mr. Ainsworth** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Our attention should be focused clearly on hedges this morning.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** I will accept your stricture, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I do not know whether *Hansard* picked up the "Hear, hear," but I am pretty sure that I know where it was said from and what was being said at the time.

I do not believe that the new clause and the amendments are necessary or would improve the Bill. I suggest that the House think seriously before supporting any of them.

**Mr. Chope:** I do not wish to speak further, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I hope that we can push the new clause to a vote.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** The citizens for whom I seek relief do not need legal dictionaries, mathematical formulae or horticulture encyclopaedias to define their misery. I reject the new clause and all the amendments. I urge right hon. and hon. Members to withdraw the motion, failing which I urge the House to vote no.

*Question put,* That the clause be read a Second time:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 1, Noes 35.

**Division No. 198]** **[12.42 pm**

**AYES**

| | |
|---|---|
| Swayne, Desmond | **Tellers for the Ayes:** |
| | **Mr. Andrew Dismore and** |
| | **Mr. Jim Cunningham.** |

**NOES**

| | |
|---|---|
| Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)* | Luff, Peter |
| Boateng, Rt Hon Paul | McCabe, Steve |
| Brady, Graham | Mackinlay, Andrew |
| Brooke, Rt Hon Peter | Olner, Bill |
| Browne, Desmond | Pearson, Ian |
| Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)* | Pound, Stephen |
| Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)* | Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)* |
| Cox, Tom | St Aubyn, Nick |
| Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire | Skinner, Dennis |
| Dowd, Jim | Soley, Clive |
| Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)* | Steen, Anthony |
| Efford, Clive | Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)* |
| Foster, Don *(Bath)* | Temple–Morris, Peter |
| Gapes, Mike | Whitehead, Dr Alan |
| Harris, Dr Evan | Wilson, Brian |
| Hurst, Alan | |
| Joyce, Eric | |
| King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)* | **Tellers for the Noes:** |
| Lilley, Rt Hon Peter | **Mr. John M. Taylor and** |
| Loughton, Tim | **Mr. Christopher Gill.** |

*Question accordingly negatived.*

## New Clause 10

COMPLAINT WHERE RELEVANT AUTHORITY IS OWNER OR OCCUPIER OF LAND

'. If a complaint under this Act is brought in respect of land of which a "relevant authority" within the meaning of section 1 is the owner or occupier it shall be referred forthwith by that authority to the Local Government Association which shall nominate another local authority to consider the complaint.'.—*[Mr. Chope.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mr. Chope:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

New clause 10 was originally grouped for consideration with new clauses 7 and 8, which were tabled by the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore). For reasons that I have not yet understood, the hon. Gentleman decided not to move new clause 7, but we can debate the issues to which his proposals relate now, as new clause 10 deals with similar matters. That is no doubt why the grouping was so decided.

The new clause addresses an issue that was debated on Second Reading, when the hon. Member for Hendon expressed particular concern about local authorities being judges in their own cause and about fundamental breaches of natural justice and human rights. The Bill ensures that if a local authority is the owner or occupier of land on which there is a hedge that is causing loss of light to an occupier of adjoining land, the decision on whether a complaint should be entertained and on remediation rests with that authority, which will be the relevant authority under the Bill. That means that the local authority will be judge in its own cause. However enthusiastic people are about the Bill, they should not be enthusiastic about such a fundamental breach of natural justice. Even if justice is done in such cases, it is hard for it to be seen to be done.

The hon. Member for Hendon argued that on Second Reading. The hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) suggested that the explanatory notes dealt well with the matter. The hon. Member for Hendon said that he was not satisfied by that. I, too, am not satisfied that the Bill tackles the problem. The explanatory notes simply state that there is a right of appeal. That is different from dealing with a complaint fairly in the first place.

My solution is slightly different from that of the hon. Member for Hendon. A case in which it was obvious that the local authority would be judge in its own cause should be referred to the Local Government Association, which should nominate another local authority—probably an adjoining local authority—to deal with it. That is a reasonable solution. Rights of appeal would remain, but the new clause would give complainants more confidence that they would get a fair trial if they were complaining about the local authority.

**Mr. Forth:** I defer to my hon. Friend's greater knowledge of such matters, but is he satisfied that the Local Government Association has the competence to determine such matters? Is he equally satisfied that another local authority would have the local knowledge to deal with the matter adequately? The possession of local knowledge is the point of the complaints procedure. I hope that my hon. Friend will explain the reasons for his confidence in the Local Government Association and the nominated authority.

**Mr. Chope:** Since my right hon. Friend was an elected member of a local authority, all the local authority associations have combined to form the Local Government Association. All local authorities belong to that association, to which they pay a subscription. The Local Government Association says that it supports the Bill, and I hope that I can tease out of the promoter whether the support is predicated on local authorities' being allowed to be judges in their own cause if they are the owners of the land on which an offending tree is situated.

**Mr. Gill:** In Bridgnorth district council, which is one of my local authorities, debates have raged about whether to renew the subscription to the Local Government Association. I do not yet know the outcome, but if it does not continue its membership, would it be ultra vires in referring such matters to the Local Government Association?

**Mr. Chope:** No. A local authority does not have to be a member of the Local Government Association to refer an issue to it if such referral is required by statute. The new clause would require a local authority that would otherwise be judge in its own cause to refer the matter to the Local Government Association as an independent adjudicator. If Bridgnorth district council was not a member of the Local Government Association and there was a complaint about a tree on its land, it would refer the matter to the association. Obviously, as all other local authorities would be members of the association, it would nominate another authority. In practice, the Local Government Association would always nominate an authority that was a member to adjudicate on these matters.

1 pm

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst asks how we could be sure that such local authorities would have sufficient knowledge and expertise of the locality to be able to deal with the issue. The answer is that we could not, but that we would at least be in a better position than we shall be under the terms of the Bill as drafted, which would make the local authority judge in its own cause. If the complainant were suspicious of, and dissatisfied by, the outcome, they could appeal, but the appellate authority—the planning inspectorate—would probably have even less knowledge, on a subjective basis, of the circumstances than the neighbouring local authority which would probably be nominated by the Local Government Association. I agree with my right hon. Friend that this is not perfect, but, in my submission, it is a heck of a sight better than what is contained in the present proposals.

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The hon. Gentleman said in response to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst that we could not be sure that the knowledge and expertise would exist. I think that we can be pretty sure that the structures and resources to implement his proposal do not exist at the moment and would have to be created. Unlike the proposal in the Bill, which allows for such complaints to be dealt with through the normal planning inspectorate appeals mechanism, is not the hon. Gentleman's proposal bound to entail additional costs?

**Mr. Chope:** Additional costs are bound to be created by the Bill, both for the Government and for local authorities. In the original consultation paper, it was envisaged that every local authority involved with this legislation would have to take on an extra officer to deal with it. The Government have slightly modified their view on that since the consultation paper, no doubt as a result of Treasury pressure, but even in the initial stages, there will be an enormous amount of work to be done by local authorities. That is going to cost money.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** Surely the hon. Gentleman's proposal would involve the setting up of a structure that does not exist. The costs would be bound to be greater than if the complaints were dealt with through the planning inspectorate and the normal appeals procedures that already exist.

**Mr. Chope:** I think that the Minister misunderstands the purpose and, indeed, the wording of new clause 10. In the very special situation in which the landowner being complained against was the local authority—the relevant authority under the terms of the legislation—the matter would be referred to another local authority nominated by the LGA instead of that local authority deciding the case itself. Another local authority, which would also be dealing with its own cases, would take on in addition a case from a neighbouring authority, if that neighbouring authority was the subject of a complaint.

This is not just an academic argument. One of my constituents is concerned about some high conifers in the Friars Cliff area of Christchurch, which adjoin a public car park in the ownership of the borough council. The trees are situated between the edge of the car park and the highway. People are concerned because the trees are already of a significant height, which is likely to increase dramatically over the coming years. Those people want the trees to be properly maintained by the local authority. It may be that the local authority will find the money to enable that to happen, but there is concern about that because the local authority has already admitted that it cannot afford to maintain its deciduous trees, except where they are dangerous. I have already referred to the case in Suffolk avenue in my constituency. How can we be sure that the local authority will be able to maintain those existing conifers? If somebody complains, the issue should be dealt with by a neighbouring local authority rather than the local authority that is itself the subject of the complaint. A basic principle of natural justice is involved.

I agree that new clause 10 does not cover the situation in which the local authority is the complainant. Under the present terms of the Bill, it is impossible to envisage a situation in which that would happen—certainly in my constituency, where the local authority no longer owns any housing—but if the Bill were to be amended to include non-domestic property, as contemplated in clause 16, a chief executive or members of a local authority might claim that they suffered a nuisance in their offices from a tree growing in a nearby garden which was spoiling their view of Christchurch, or wherever it might be. Those people could then effectively be required to be judge in their own cause and order that the tree or hedge should be cut down accordingly. That would be unconscionable in the view of any fair-minded person and such cases should also be referred to a neighbouring authority for adjudication.

I am disappointed that no amendment was tabled by the promoter of the Bill to rectify the problem I have discussed, especially following the concerns that were expressed on Second Reading.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** I can tell my hon. Friend that I am disposed to accept new clause 10.

**Mr. Chope:** If that is the will of the House, I am delighted that my hon. Friend is demonstrating more flexibility on that point than in the previous debate.

**Mr. Forth:** I am not happy about the new clause. I can understand the motivation of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch in tabling it, and for a moment he almost persuaded me, but the Minister's intervention placed some severe doubts in my mind on the basis of the additional cost. In fact, I am surprised that my hon. Friend has not been similarly persuaded by that factor. Of course his logic is impeccable and if local authorities—which are suggested in the Bill to be great repositories of quasi-judicial wisdom—are the owners of the land in question, that would cast doubt on the validity of the mechanism. I do not wish to get involved in a discussion of the concept of natural justice, which is something about which I have always had the gravest doubts—like social justice, I do not think it exists—but my hon. Friend is obviously wedded to the concept and has used it as the basis of his argument.

I can accept the common-sense approach that it would be a matter for concern if the person complained against were also to be—at least initially—the judge of the matter, and if the mechanism in the Bill were to be the sole method of resolving the issue. However, that is the

*[Mr. Forth]*

point at which I become less happy with the new clause. For one thing, I wonder whether the Local Government Association, in all its majesty, has an appropriate mechanism to deal with the suggested responsibilities. Would the matter be dealt with at officer level, or would elected members be involved in making the decision about the nomination of another local authority? I can envisage circumstances in which that decision could be controversial.

My hon. Friend mentioned that a neighbouring authority could become involved, and the strength of that argument is that only a neighbouring authority would be likely to have the understanding and empathy for the local environment and amenities that would allow it to judge the matter properly. Let us take the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) as an example. His neighbouring authorities are both highly urban and rural. In which direction would one look for nomination to find an authority with an understanding of the circumstances? These very real questions might require difficult decisions.

Whether officers or elected members of the Local Government Association would deal with such cases is an interesting point. I assume that one could conceive of a mechanism to give the responsibility to one or the other. My hon. Friend was not able to spell out in the new clause which mechanism he would prefer—at least, he chose not to—so an element of doubt remains.

The way in which the nominated authority would seek to deal with these matters presents considerable difficulties. Let us set aside the question of whether authorities have the expertise. It goes without saying that the original authority would have had the expertise and we can assume that, in terms of planning and inspections, the nominated authority would also have that expertise. What degree of priority would the nominated authority give this matter? In involving the mechanism in new clause 10, would the subjects of the complaint, who were anxiously waiting for a decision, be satisfied that a nominated authority that had nothing to do with the issue and whose money was, as ever, somewhat scarce, would give it any priority? Would any regard be paid to time scales, for example? Would the whole process be put in jeopardy by the fact that the unfortunate nominated authority, having had the matter dumped unceremoniously in its lap, would have to make difficult decisions about whether to give it priority?

The point that the Minister made so trenchantly in his intervention changed my mind on this matter. What about the money? We must never forget about that. I have reservations about the financial implications of the Bill and its mechanism, but my hon. Friend seems to be importing into the mechanism yet another element of potential cost which has not hitherto been envisaged. As the Minister rightly pointed out, whereas it is arguable that the sort of normal, straightforward case that the Bill envisages would be dealt with seamlessly and effortlessly by existing staff, the new clause raises the awful prospect of finding additional staff to deal with the additional cases that it imports into the Bill. The Minister was right to point that out.

The Bill's promoter says that he is willing to accept the new clause, but is the Minister? The hon. Gentleman said in his intervention on my hon. Friend that he believed that it would lead to extra costs. I do not know whether the Minister has checked with the Treasury or the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, but if the Government are suggesting that we accept the new clause, they need to give a pledge that the money required will be found. It is one thing for the Bill's promoter to say that he will accept the new clause, and for my hon. Friend to introduce the new clause in good faith and support it with powerful arguments. It is a very different thing for a Minister of the Crown to say—if he is going to—that the Government will accept the new clause and that he will pledge the additional money that will be required for its implementation. That has interesting ramifications for the Bill and shows the great value of debates on Report; surprising developments occur. The combination of the comments of the Bill's promoter in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch and the Minister's intervention leads us to a new set of questions that have suddenly arisen and to which we need some answers.

1.15 pm

I am not at all persuaded that the House should accept the new clause. It carries serious financial ramifications, so we await the Minister's comments with interest. He cannot leave us in a position—can he?—where the Government will allow the incorporation of the new clause without giving a guarantee that whatever money is necessary to support the provision and its effectiveness will be found. If that were not so, we should be tragically misleading all those people who we are told are waiting breathlessly for the passage of the legislation; there would be a serious question mark against the whole thing.

This is an interesting little development; I look forward with great interest to the Minister's comments. We shall then be able to judge the viability of the Bill were the new clause incorporated against the Minister's comments and against what he is prepared to guarantee.

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** It is good of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) to listen so carefully to what I say and to try to interpret my words as having such import. When I ask a question of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and the right hon. Gentleman interprets it as some type of definitive statement, that departs a little from the facts. I participated in the debate, asked the hon. Member for Christchurch a question and I am fairly satisfied that we are not talking about considerable additional moneys, so I have no intention of opposing new clause 10.

**Mr. Chope:** The Minister's comments show how worth while the debate has been. My only regret is that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) did not intimate to me earlier that the new clause would be accepted; we should not then have had to spend so much time debating it but could have dealt with other amendments.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** In the context of amendments and with regard to the possibility of meeting the points of view and considerations expressed by other hon. Members, will my hon. Friend say how many times he approached me to see whether I would find his line of thinking amenable?

**Mr. Chope:** I do not know whether that question is in order. It would probably come into the category of what

we in the legal profession call "without prejudice discussions". I certainly do not want to embarrass my hon. Friend by referring to any discussions that we may have held outside the Chamber—that could get both of us into trouble.

**Mr. Taylor:** My hon. Friend will, I think, accept that there were none.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord):** Order. I think that it would probably be advisable if we returned to the content of the new clause.

**Mr. Chope:** I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker; you have prevented me and my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull from having an open disagreement on the matter.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend and the Government accept the provision. That shows the importance of holding such debates. I hope that it will not be necessary to divide the House, because I trust that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) will agree that although the new clause may not be perfect, it is certainly an improvement to the Bill. There are costs, but they are insignificant when—

**Mr. Forth:** What?

**Mr. Chope:** The costs are insignificant compared with the additional costs that would be incurred by local authorities if they had to go through the appeal process.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** Does my hon. Friend agree that a greater difficulty for my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is the unavailability of a second teller?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Again, it would not be a good idea to respond to that intervention.

**Mr. Chope:** We have not got as far as that yet. I am sure that, as on many issues, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst will consider the situation. I know that he is as anxious as me to get on and discuss some of the other amendments, in the hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull and the Minister will accept further improvements. I am grateful for small mercies and to have on the record an acceptance of one of my suggestions.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.*

### New Clause 11

OFFENCES COMMITTED BY BODIES CORPORATE

'.—Where an offence under this Act committed by a body corporate is proved to have been committed with the consent or connivance of, or to be attributable to any neglect on the part of any person who was purporting to act in the capacity of a director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of the body corporate without the knowledge of the body corporate, that person shall be guilty of that offence and shall be liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.'.—*[Mr. Forth.]*

*Brought up, and read the First time.*

**Mr. Forth:** I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 32, in clause 10, page 8, line 19, leave out "3" and insert "5".

No. 101, in page 8, line 19, leave out "3" and insert "4".

No. 33, in page 8, line 20, leave out subsection (2).

No. 75, in page 8, line 29, after "owner", insert "or occupier".

No. 102, in page 8, line 29, at end insert—

'or—

(c) he was absent at the time of the service of the notice, and during some or all of the compliance period.'.

No. 103, in page 8, line 45, leave out "3" and insert "4".

No. 34, in page 9, line 2, leave out "one–twentieth" and insert "one–tenth".

No. 105, in page 9, line 2, leave out "one–twentieth" and insert "one–thirtieth".

No. 49, in page 9, line 3, at end insert—

'(6) No person shall be convicted of an offence under this section unless the relevant authority has first exercised its power under section 11 to take remedial action.'.

No. 76, in clause 11, page 9, line 7, leave out "7" and insert "28".

No. 106, in page 9, line 7, leave out "7" and insert "14".

No. 35, in page 9, line 22, leave out "3" and insert "5".

No. 108, in page 9, line 22, leave out "3" and insert "4".

No. 110, in clause 12, page 9, line 23, leave out clause 12.

No. 36, in clause 12, page 9, line 24, leave out from "committed" to end of line 25.

No. 109, in page 9, line 27, leave out from "corporate" to end of line 28.

No. 37, in page 9, line 28, leave out from "capacity" to "shall" in line 29.

**Mr. Forth:** Clause 12 gave me some little puzzlement when I first looked at it. It is entitled:

"Offences committed by bodies corporate."

It sets out properly to deal with offences committed by such bodies. It says that where an offence is:

"proved to have been committed with the consent or connivance of, or to be attributable to any neglect on the part of—

(a) any director, manager, secretary or other similar officer of the body corporate,"—

that much is common ground—

"or

(b) any person who was purporting to act in any such capacity,"—

what worries me is what follows—

"he, as well as the body corporate, shall be guilty of that offence and be liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly."

It strikes me as peculiar that where a person purporting to act in such a capacity has done something without, by implication, the knowledge of the body corporate, the body will nevertheless be deemed guilty of an offence. That flies in the face of all reasonableness.

*[Mr. Forth]*

The aim of new clause 11 is to eliminate what I regard as an error. I have no difficulty with offences committed by a body corporate leading to appropriate punishment. That is the thrust of my new clause, but the original wording seems peculiar. It introduces the odd new concept that a person who is purporting to act can involve the body corporate, even if by definition the action has been taken without its knowledge or approval. The original clause goes on and rather prejudges the issue by saying that the body corporate shall be deemed guilty of the offence and liable to be proceeded against. It is unsatisfactory. My objective is to eliminate that difficulty and correct the error. I hope that that much is uncontroversial.

Other amendments in the group relate to the important provisions in clause 8 on the appeals procedure. I suppose that it is inevitable and, as everyone would agree, desirable that such Bills must contain a mechanism to provide an appeals procedure. That much is beyond controversy, but in amendment No. 102, which refers to subsection (2)(c), I have sought to deal with the regulations that may be made by the Secretary of State to make provision for a variety of aspects of the appeals procedure.

Subsection (2)(c) will require

"persons making such appeals to send copies of such documents as may be prescribed to such persons as may be prescribed."

Again, that is unarguable, but we need much greater clarification of how such matters will be dealt with in detail under clause 10.

I am seeking to add to clause 10 what, for the purposes of this debate, I shall call a saving clause. I want to ensure that if someone can demonstrate that he or she was simply not at home when a remedial notice was served, especially during the compliance period, that must be a reasonable explanation for them to give. One of the things that bothers me throughout the Bill is that with such a complex procedure, which deals with someone who has made a complaint, someone who is complained against and a local authority—inevitably, bureaucracy will surround the process—enforcement notices of different kinds must be served at different times. That problem occurs over and again.

Considerable problems will arise throughout the process. Given that, by definition, we are talking about the owners and occupiers of buildings and about the serving of notices, and so on, I can well imagine that such circumstances will arise—for example, perhaps when a house is someone's second home. Indeed, that could even apply to hon. Members in certain circumstances. I am thinking of people who are absent from the country for long periods—perhaps they live, part-time, in another country, or are involved in extensive business travel.

There are a variety of reasons why a person who perhaps lives alone or a family may simply not be on the premises when a notice is served. When a complaint is made, there is another complication, with which we shall deal in a different context. Such people must be given an opportunity to reply. If I initiate a complaint against my neighbour, who is not present for legitimate reasons, I can envisage all sorts of difficulties in giving the neighbour an opportunity to respond and in his not being able to deal with the various notices that are served on him. He may then fail to meet the requirements of any enforcement notice that may be made, and then we get into all sorts of difficulties.

We must try to make whatever reasonable provisions we can to provide a reasonable defence, which allows people to say that they were unaware of the process, that they were not present at the appropriate time and, therefore, that they were unable properly to respond either to the complaint or to the notice. That is an important provision, which we must make. If we do not do so, there is a danger of many cases of people being complained against unjustly being dealt with in the harsh way suggested in the Bill.

1.30 pm

Clause 10(5)(b) contains the intriguing provision that

"if the offence is continued after conviction, he shall be guilty of a further offence and so liable to a fine not exceeding one-twentieth of that level for each day on which the offence is so continued."

Amendment No. 105 is a probing amendment, because I want to find out on what basis the fraction of one twentieth has been arrived at. I have suggested that the figure could be one thirtieth, because that figure would be more in line with the period of a month. However, I admit that my suggestion is every bit as arbitrary as the one in the Bill. I am left wondering why the figure should be one twentieth and not a different one.

More than that, the provision could create difficulties because it is possible that someone may genuinely be unable to remedy the offence after conviction. One can imagine all sorts of family or business circumstances that might render the individual who has been found guilty unable to respond. To be fined one twentieth for each day that passes may turn out to be unreasonable because someone could be away for a considerable length of time and may be unable to respond to the notice. We should pay considerable attention to that point.

I suppose that it is inevitable, but clause 11, which deals with remedial action, also contains some rather arbitrary figures that require explanation. Subsection (1) states:

"Where, at any time after the end of the compliance period, any action required by a remedial notice to be taken has not been taken, the relevant authority—

(a) may, after giving not less than 7 days' notice of their intention to do so, enter the neighbouring land and take the action so required".

**Mr. Chope:** My right hon. Friend is making several points seeking elucidation from, I imagine, my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor). Is my right hon. Friend aware that his points are not being picked up by our hon. Friend because he is not in the Chamber? [HON. MEMBERS: "He is."] My hon. Friend is in the Chamber, but he is not listening; he is talking to the Minister. Is my right hon. Friend sure that our hon. Friend is taking these points on board?

**Mr. Forth:** I have great faith in the ability of all my colleagues and Ministers to do many things at the same time. I am sure that my argument has been followed—as ever they are, I trust—very closely and with great attention.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** I am glad to have the opportunity to apologise to my right hon. Friend the Member for

Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) if, for a moment, my attention was diverted elsewhere. It is hard to concentrate hard non-stop for five hours, but I am doing my best.

**Mr. Forth:** Those of us who have taken the trouble to be here are all doing our best. It was heartening that, out of almost 660 Members of Parliament, 40 were prepared to be here to show interest in my hon. Friend's Bill. [HON. MEMBERS: "Forty-one."] I am corrected, but the number probably fairly reflects the support that the Bill has in the House and the interest that Members are prepared to show in it. The 41 of us who were here for the Division, the eight to 10 of us who are present in the Chamber and the handful of us who have been here since 9.30 this morning have been present because we all believe that the Bill is important and requires our detailed attention. We believe that it—and not least clause 11—could have considerable effects on our constituents.

Clause 11(1)(a) refers to powers of entry to private property by the authorities. That should alarm us all considerably. I regret to say that powers of entry appear in more and more Bills, and this clause contains the Bill's cutting edge. After only seven days' notice, at the end of the compliance period, local authority employees will enter private property without the owner's permission and lay waste to his trees, shrubs and bushes.

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that those powers exist in other circumstances? For example, public health legislation allows that to happen if a landlord fails to carry out basic repairs to a property that might affect safety.

**Mr. Forth:** Yes, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue in that context. Although I err on the side of caution in such matters, I accept that entry might be justified on health and safety grounds, but what is at risk—the amount of light coming in, privacy, amenity? Those do not come into the category of health and safety.

**Mr. Cunningham:** Let me expand the concept. It is feasible that a tree's roots under a property might render it dangerous. Surely the right hon. Gentleman concedes that.

**Mr. Forth:** I am not sure that that is part of the Bill's objective or one of the criteria that would be applied. If we were discussing the hedges endangering the foundations of houses Bill, the hon. Gentleman might be right, but I am not aware that that possibility has been considered.

The problem is that the Bill provides explicit powers of entry by an authority to private property. Amendment No. 106 suggests that instead of giving seven days' notice, authorities should give 14. I think that I am being too reasonable. On reflection, I should probably have gone further, but I wanted to use the amendment to make an important point that relates to what I said earlier. It is always possible that, for legitimate reasons, the occupier will not be at the property or aware that the compliance period has ended. There are many reasons why that might be the case. He may be indisposed or away dealing with a family or business crisis. Seven days' notice before the heavy boots of the authority come marching on to private property strikes me as utterly inadequate, and the amendment is designed to deal with that eventuality.

It is worth pausing to consider penalties. The seriousness of infringements and what penalties should be imposed are always disputed. Amendment No. 108 is a probing amendment to discover what was in the mind of my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull when he settled on a level 3 penalty for someone wilfully obstructing a person exercising his powers under clause 11(1). There is a serious possibility that when the authorities arrive, the citizen will not understand what is happening or will be angry and frustrated and will try to obstruct those ghastly people with their ghastly mechanisms so that they cannot cut down the offending hedge. What is a reasonable penalty for obstructing a person acting in the exercise of his powers to enter a private property? The Bill might at first glance appear to be worthy and well intentioned, but it contains difficult provisions.

Amendment No. 75 deals with the distinction—if it is valid—between the owner and occupier of a property, a distinction to which subsequent amendments also relate. At the very beginning of our consideration of the Bill, I, as a non-lawyer, became worried about whether in allocating the responsibility that the Bill places on different people we are making sufficient distinction between the owner and the temporary occupier of a property. What are their relative responsibilities when it comes to making a complaint or being complained against? It strikes me that there are significant differentiations to be made.

I can well imagine circumstances in which someone who was looking after a house on behalf of the owner or who was a paying tenant made a complaint about another householder or, conversely, received a complaint. How do we start properly to distinguish between the powers and responsibilities of owners and occupiers under the Bill? I believe that we should do so because if we do not get this right, someone who is the occupant rather than the owner of the property could make or receive a complaint but might not be in a position properly to discharge their responsibilities following the mechanisms outlined in the Bill.

I raise this matter in speaking to amendment No. 75, Mr. Deputy Speaker, although I believe that we will return to it in more detail when we discuss a subsequent group of amendments. We must pay close attention to the matter because if there is confusion about the Bill, it will affect many different cases, and we could get ourselves and, more importantly, the people involved into great difficulty.

The new clause and the amendments grouped with it demonstrate that a measure that seems fairly innocuous involves a wide range of responsibilities and a rather alarming set of powers that are being given to the responsible authorities, not least the power to enter a private property and, presumably, to start cutting down the offending hedge to the appropriate dimensions. Given that the people involved may be legitimately absent during crucial parts of the process and could not reasonably be held responsible at the material time, I hope that the Bill's promoter will be prepared to reconsider my proposals to see whether they have merit and should be included in the Bill.

**Mr. Dismore:** The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) made important points about new clause 11 which I was, less elegantly, trying to address in amendments Nos. 36 and 37. The wording in the new clause is perhaps rather better.

It is important that the House look behind the corporate veil at those who are responsible for the actions that are carried out in the name of a company. Often those individuals, as the right hon. Gentleman said, fail to keep the company and its members informed of what they are doing. If we can start to examine the people involved, not only in this but in other areas of the law, it would be a great advantage and would significantly aid enforcement of the law.

I turn now to the points that the right hon. Gentleman made about penalties. He is going somewhat soft on crime, if I may say so. By the time the penalties come into play, the offending person will have had many opportunities to put things right, whether through simple discussion with a neighbour, mediation, the intervention of the local authority, or a notice requiring compliance. If he ignores all those options, it would be wrong to require him only to pay a pittance for every day of non-compliance. We either respect the law or we do not, and I think that someone who has shown such a flagrant disregard not only for the law and but for the interests of his neighbours should be subject to more severe penalties.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** Should we not remind ourselves that when an offender is convicted, the Bill states that he should be subject

"to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale"?

The matter is at the discretion of the magistrates who, of course, are responsible for the dispensing of 94 per cent. of criminal justice in this country and do a magnificent job.

1.45 pm

**Mr. Dismore:** I certainly join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to the magistrates, but we need to strengthen their hand in extending available powers.

Amendment No. 33, which would delete clause 10(2), is primarily a probing amendment. I am not sure what people could do to show what they had done to ensure compliance with the notice, bearing in mind all the previous stages involved. If I am satisfied that there is a valid defence, I will listen to the arguments; but I am not sure that that is the case. I do not accept what the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst said in support of amendment No. 102, which would drive a coach and horses through the enforcement provisions. In fact, its wording does not tally with clause 10(3), the inference of which is that the individual was not sent a copy of the notice in the first place. The right hon. Gentleman wishes to tack his additional defence on to that.

Suppose that someone is away when the notice is served, but comes back the next day. Suddenly finding a notice requiring compliance, he decides to go away for three months so that he is absent for the compliance period. Under the right hon. Gentleman's proposal, he would have a double defence; he was not present when the notice was served—even though he was at home the next day—and, having had notice of the notice, he could provide a defence by absenting himself for all or part of the compliance period. Even if he went to Paris for a day on the shuttle, he would have a defence under the right hon. Gentleman's formulation. I understand what the right hon. Gentleman is getting at in his amendment, but his wording drives a coach and horses through the legislation. By the time a notice is served, people will be looking for every possible loophole. The hardest nut to crack will be someone who has flagrantly disregarded the law and his neighbours' interests all the way through.

May I briefly make the same point in relation to powers of entry in the notice period? By that stage, the offender has had every opportunity to comply with the law and reach agreement with his neighbours through mediation, yet he is still flagrantly disregarding the law. In those circumstances, a seven-day notice is reasonable. The offender can expect a notice as he knows what the provisions are. All he has to do to avoid powers of entry is comply with the legal order to lower the hedge.

**Mr. Forth:** What if the person is genuinely unable to do so? What if he is indisposed and what happens if a problem arises that takes him away or makes him unable to cut the hedge? What happens if he is financially unable to cut it? You will know more about this than anyone else present, Mr. Deputy Speaker; what if the hedge or tree is extremely tall and contractors need to be brought in to ensure compliance, but the person simply does not have the money to pay them? I can imagine a number of circumstances in which it would be difficult to comply, even at that stage.

**Mr. Dismore:** By that stage, non-compliance will have lasted many months. The Bill provides a certain period for mediation, negotiation, discussion and compliance. As that process lasts for many months, the right hon. Gentleman's point is not valid. In any event, clause 11(1)(a) provides for

"not less than 7 days' notice",

not seven days' notice. It is therefore open to the local authority to be a little more flexible if there is a genuine reason why it should be, along the lines suggested by the right hon. Gentleman. With those remarks, I conclude my comments on this group of amendments.

**Mr. Chope:** Amendment No. 49 is prompted by my concerns about the interaction of clauses 10 and 11. I know that certain Government Members want, with tremendous enthusiasm, to criminalise as much human behaviour as possible.

Clause 11 sets out some perfectly reasonable things that the local authority should do if, at the end of the compliance period, there has not been compliance with the remedial notice. It gives powers to local authorities to intervene in quite a drastic way, but in my view in quite a reasonable way if they have been faced with the contempt that would have been displayed by the owner of the offending hedge in refusing to do anything at an earlier stage of the proceedings.

I am concerned that clause 11 takes second place to clause 10. In practice, it is unlikely that local authorities will wish to become involved in taking remedial action. Unless authorities ensure enforcement and eliminate the mischief, there will not be the relief for the aggrieved occupier or tenant that the Bill is designed to deliver.

Prosecuting under clause 10 will not achieve anything, and might create high-hedge martyrs, in the same way as we have seen metric martyrs, created directly as a result of the insensitive exercise of local authority discretion in relation to prosecutions.

It is much better that the local authority should resort to the powers that are provided in clause 11 before any prosecution is sought under clause 10. If that course is taken, any costs incurred or any apology that may have been given by the person who had been at fault under the provisions in clause 11 could be taken into account under clause 10 in any argument about mitigation of penalty.

I fear that we shall find in practice that local authorities will be reluctant to exercise their powers under clause 11 and will go for the more draconian route of prosecuting under clause 10. Prosecuting for criminal offences arising out of civil problems should be a last resort. The Bill does not make that clear. That is why the amendment would add a new subsection to clause 10, which would state:

"No person shall be convicted of an offence under this section unless the relevant authority has first exercised its power under section 11 to take remedial action."

It is a way of safeguarding the interests of those who complain about high hedges and of ensuring that the local authority acts as quickly as possible to deliver a remedy, leaving as a secondary consideration the issue of whether the authority wishes to obtain a criminal penalty against the offending landowner under clause 10.

It is a simple and straightforward point and I have been able to explain it in a relatively few minutes. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor) will be as flexible in responding to the amendment as he was in responding to my new clause 10, which I am delighted to know is now incorporated in the Bill.

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** My hon. Friend has discovered that I am a flexible man. I have tried to be as flexible as I possibly can be in considering the new clause and the amendments. However, I think that they are horrible, and I shall resist them with all my power.

In addition to being an extremely flexible man, I am also prescient. I have powers of seeing into the future. I am aware that in resisting the new clause and the amendments, I am effectively bringing these proceedings to a close. I hope, therefore, that it is not too self-indulgent if I thank, in no particular order, the Minister, Clare Hinchliffe of Hedgeline, the hon. Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham), who has been consistently helpful to me throughout the proceedings, and—if it is not completely out of order to say such things—the officials at the Department, who have been unfailingly helpful and courteous to me.

The experience has been interesting. I have enjoyed the jousts with my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). It was always clear that I would not secure the Bill today. May I say, in a spirit of fair play, that I understand the motivations of my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend, who have provided many amendments and—I hope that they will not mind my saying so—much resistance. I understand that their opposition is principled. They will understand that I have not much enjoyed it; I would like to have got the measure to the statute book.

I hope that there is a wider audience. Perhaps there are those who are putting the finishing touches to manifestos who will identify with my aims. Even though my right hon. and hon. Friends found fault with certain passages in the Bill, there is a principle to be addressed. There are people out there whose lives are being made a misery by the inconsiderate behaviour of their neighbours who let hedges run riot, severely diminishing their amenity and turning their lives, it would not be too strong to say, into a miserable experience.

There must be some remedy. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst drew attention to the fact that I am a lawyer. Once a lawyer, always a lawyer, I suppose. I am confident that the English law of nuisance or any extension of that law is not the right remedy. It is a morass and it is hideously expensive. I have a constituent who sought to litigate, and it cost him £24,000 of his own money against a legally aided opponent. That may not be directly relevant to the present debate, but it is nevertheless a significant problem.

The measurable, objective concepts of height and light are the correct criteria to be applied. It may be that others who come later—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord):** Order. I have allowed the hon. Gentleman a fair amount of latitude because I am aware of the position in which he finds himself, but he is somewhat anticipating events. He should address his remarks to the new clause before the House.

**Mr. Taylor:** Very good, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You are right to discern that I was moving into the sunset. If the House wishes, there is half an hour for me to do so. Let me try.

The amendments deal with offences under the Bill. Amendments Nos. 33, 75 and 102 relate to defences against conviction. Amendment No. 33 would remove from the Bill the general defence that a person had done everything that could be expected of him. That defence provides an important safeguard—for example, in cases where someone is prevented from complying because of the terms of his tenancy or lease—and it should stay.

2 pm

I do not favour amendment No. 102, which would provide a defence against conviction for people who have been away for only one day during the period that is set for compliance with the remedial notice, provided that they can show that they were unaware of the notice and were not sent a copy of it by the local authority. In my experience, local authorities will not generally rush into enforcement action. They will usually investigate the matter first and will often give people additional time to comply if the circumstances justify it.

The penalties in the Bill for failure to comply with the remedial notice, which were mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, strike the correct balance. They have the potential to hit the most recalcitrant hedge owner hard in the pocket with daily fines until the hedge is cut, and they are tough enough to persuade such a person that the best course is to cut back the hedge; but they do not go over the top. Conversely, amendments Nos. 32, 34, 35, 101, 103, 105 and 108, which seek to increase the fines, appear disproportionate to the crime and would be unlikely to provide a more effective deterrent.

I am sure that the Government will keep the legislation under review and that they will consider strengthening the penalties if experience shows that they are insufficient to

*[Mr. Taylor]*

encourage compliance. I believe that most of the people involved will be law abiding and will readily comply with the legal order of their local councils, so I am confident that there will be no need for us to return to the matter in future.

We would have to return to the question of enforcement if we agreed to amendment No. 49, however, which was tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch. The amendment would require a local authority to exercise its powers under clause 11 to carry out the required work itself before someone could be convicted of failing to comply with a remedial notice. That arrangement would neuter the criminal penalties for failure to comply with the notice. The local authority would have done the work required by the notice, so neither of the offences in subsections (1) or (5) of clause 10 would apply. The amendment would, therefore, allow a hedge owner to abdicate responsibility for the hedge and pass the burden on to the local authority, which would have used its good offices to help to resolve a private dispute. Such provision is not fair and would not encourage compliance.

**Mr. Chope:** Surely, clause 11 ensures that it will be open to local authorities to recover their costs and to be indemnified against them. Are we not in the business of trying to get the offending hedge cut rather than of trying to make criminals out of people?

**Mr. Taylor:** I understand my hon. Friend's point. I am prepared to undertake to review the matter, and I may have made some alterations to the Bill by the time it returns to the House to be finished off on Third Reading.

The new clause and amendments Nos. 36, 37 and 110 seem to be intended to ensure that enforcement action for failure to comply with a remedial notice could be taken only against the individual officers of a body corporate who had committed the offence and not against the body corporate itself. The option should be available to prosecute the corporate body, its officers or people who are purporting to be its officers when they are at fault, as it ensures that those who bear most responsibility for the offence can be held liable.

I hope that the hon. Members concerned will not press the new clause or amendments, but I ask the House to resist the motion if they will not reconsider their position. Of course, that is their prerogative. I hope that, if my prescience was correct—I claim a tiny bit more of your indulgence, Mr. Deputy Speaker—the grievance that underlies today's debate will resonate and cause action; and that, if it does not do so today, it will do so very soon.

**Mr. Forth:** We appreciate the background to the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor). His forecast that the Bill may not make sufficient progress today to reach the statute book is probably right. However, as he knows, this Parliament has a year to run, and many more Fridays stretch ahead of us for considering private Members' Bills. If the Bill does not complete its stages today, he can look forward to its consideration on a subsequent Friday unless some event intervenes to prevent that. In that case, we would know who to blame.

My hon. Friend was kind enough to reply to the debate on new clause 11. The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) was kind enough to say that he perceived some merit in it. I believe that it makes an important point, and corrects an error in the Bill. Despite my hon. Friend's comments, I want to press it.

*Question put*, That the clause be read a Second time:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 1, Noes 26.

**Division No. 199]** **[2.5 pm**

**AYES**

Dismore, Andrew

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Eric Forth and**
**Mr. Christopher Chope.**

**NOES**

Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Darvill, Keith
Dowd, Jim
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Harris, Dr Evan
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McCabe, Steve
Mackinlay, Andrew
Oiner, Bill
Pearson, Ian
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Soley, Clive
Swayne, Desmond
Wilson, Brian

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. John M. Taylor and**
**Mr. Jim Cunningham.**

*It appearing on the report of the Division that 40 Members were not present,* Mr. Deputy Speaker *declared that the Question was not decided, and the business under consideration stood over until the next Sitting of the House.*

# Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Deceased Fathers) Bill

*As amended in the Committee, considered.*

## Clause 1

CERTAIN DECEASED MEN TO BE REGISTERED AS FATHERS

2.17 pm

**Dr. Evan Harris** (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I beg to move amendment No. 18, in page 1, line 28, at end insert—

', and provided that the obtaining of the sperm was lawful, and that the storage, if any, and treatment were lawful under this Act.'.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord):** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 19, in page 2, line 25, at end insert—

', and provided that the obtaining of the sperm was lawful, and that the storage, if any, and treatment were lawful under this Act.'.

No. 20, in page 2, line 46, at end insert—

', and provided that the obtaining of the sperm was lawful, and that the storage, if any, and treatment were lawful under this Act.'.

No. 21, in page 3, line 18, at end insert—

', and provided that the obtaining of the sperm was lawful, and that the storage, if any, and treatment were lawful under this Act.'.

No. 17, in page 4, line 13, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

'(2) This Act shall apply to any case where the sperm or embryo is stored or used on or after the coming into force of this Act.

(2A) This Act shall apply to any case where the sperm of a man, or any embryo the creation of which was brought about with the sperm of a man, was stored or used on or after 1st August 1991 and before the coming into force of this Act.

(2B) In those circumstances where section 2(2A) of this Act applies, the provisions relating to the obtaining and saving of the sperm in section 28(5A), section 28(5B), section 28(5C) and section 28(5D) of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 shall not apply.'.

No. 22, in page 4, line 13, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

'(2) This Act shall apply to any case where the sperm or embryo is used on or after the coming into force of this Act.

(2A) This Act shall apply to any case where the sperm of a man, or any embryo the creation of which was brought about with the sperm of a man, was used on or after 1st August 1991 and before the coming into force of this Act.

(2B) In those circumstances where section 2(2A) of this Act applies, the provisions relating to the obtaining and saving of the sperm in section 28(5A), section 28(5B), section 28(5C) and section 28(5D) of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 shall not apply.'.

**Dr. Harris:** I am delighted to speak briefly on the amendments and to pay tribute to the tenacity of the hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) in bringing the Bill to this stage. I support the Bill, with some limited concerns, and I hope that we can make some progress. If we are successful in doing so this afternoon, I wish him well with its passage in the other place.

The amendments seek to clarify the provisions regarding the use of sperm or an embryo in the future, as opposed to in the past when the need for consent was not as clear. I accept that the amendments are probably not in the necessary form to achieve my aims, and they may need further consideration in the other place. Amendment No. 18 seeks to ensure that the Bill will enable children who are the product of sperm from a deceased father and the mother's gametes to have symbolic recognition of paternity generally in circumstances in which the storage and use of the sperm were lawful under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 as it would be amended by the Bill. That is important because of the signals that we wish to send about not providing a benefit following actions that are now known, in the wake of legal action, to be unlawful if appropriate consent has not been obtained, although that is not the only basis on which such actions may be unlawful.

The other amendments in the group, specifically amendment No. 22, would ensure that where the law has not been clear on the need for consent in obtaining sperm, the provisions that would be inserted by amendment No. 18 will not apply. However, from the moment of the Bill's enactment, we are in new territory and, subject to such a provision being consistent with European convention law on discrimination and United Nations convention law on the rights of the child, we can be clear that such consent is needed.

I look forward to hearing the response of the Bill's promoter to the thrust of my remarks in the hope that some agreement can be reached on a way forward.

**Mr. Tony Clarke** (Northampton, South): I am grateful for the comments of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris). He has been fair in seeking to clarify only that point, considering that he has concerns on many others.

Perhaps the Bill has progressed so speedily so far because it is intended to have a very narrow scope. Despite the amendments before us, the Bill does not necessarily deal with issues relating to human fertilisation and embryology but simply addresses the discrimination felt by those mothers and their children who are unable to register the name of the deceased father on the birth certificate.

I fully understand the concerns expressed by the hon. Gentleman and the issues that he seeks to address. Consent is an important issue; we wish to ensure that the Bill in no way detracts from the existing strict provision in the 1990 Act—clause 3 of which deals extensively with consent provisions—nor do we want to disturb the established common law rules on the subject.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the European convention on human rights and the UN convention on the rights of the child, article 2.1. Therefore, taking his comments into account, I would be more than happy to have further discussions with him to resolve any remaining concerns that he may have. However, I do not believe that it would be right for a vote to be called on the amendment at this stage.

I repeat that the intention of the Bill is not to extend the scope of the 1990 Act. Instead, it would give those 30 women and their children the right to have the father's name recorded on the birth certificate. I hope that that is helpful to the hon. Gentleman, and I look forward to his response.

**Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): It is not clear to me whether the hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) is saying that he accepts the amendment because he accepts the reasoning behind it. It is perfectly open to him to do so.

**Mr. Clarke:** I am not saying that I accept the amendment in full at this stage. I accept that the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon has a point, and offer him the opportunity to discuss the matter at further length. The Bill would need to go through further stages before going on the statute book.

**Mr. Chope:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying that point, but I find his response disappointing. I listened to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) move his amendment, which seemed persuasive. The hon. Member for Northampton, South seems almost persuaded by it, but perhaps he lacks the self-confidence or the authority from someone else to accept it. Surely it would facilitate the Bill's progress if he accepted the amendment. Otherwise, for all he knows, it may be pushed to a vote.

**Dr. Harris:** I accept that the wording of the amendments is flawed. Amendment. No. 18, which refers to the lawfulness of obtaining sperm, would bring into statute law something that has not previously been covered by statute law, and there is a better wording that will achieve what I seek to do. My understanding from talking to the hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) on several occasions is that the valid point made by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) will be taken on board because the current wording is unsatisfactory. I do not ask any hon. Member to accept an unsatisfactorily worded amendment. There will be later stages in the Bill's proceedings and as all Members are indeed honourable, I certainly accept the assurances of the hon. Member for Northampton, South as a response to my amendments.

**Mr. Chope:** I am grateful for that clarification. I have sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's amendment and I am grateful that we seem to have an assurance from the promoter of the Bill that the problem will be sorted out at a later stage. On that basis, I shall sit down and say no more on the amendment.

**Dr. Harris:** I have dealt with my response to the hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) in addressing the constructive comments of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). I am grateful to the hon. Member for Northampton, South and for the advice that I received from the Government on these points. I hope that we can find some way of ensuring that, while properly putting right an omission in the original Act that affects about 30 women—to whom we extend our sympathy and concern—we do not leave the law in an unsatisfactory state, based on advice received by the Government on the importance of stressing the need for consent and compliance with the law for downstream activities such as symbolic recognition of paternity.

On that basis, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

*Order for Third Reading read.*

2.26 pm

**Mr. Tony Clarke:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Given the restrictions of time, I shall confine my speech to a few remarks. It is indeed an unexpected honour to be able to bring the Bill to a Third Reading; although its passage has not been uncomplicated, it has been complex inasmuch as the issues discussed, in many ways, fell outside the original intentions of the measure.

As I pointed out earlier, the intent is clear, simple and to the point—to ensure that those children born after their father has died still have the right to have his name placed on their birth certificate. With us in the House today, as on Second Reading, is Mrs. Diane Blood. People will be aware of the case of Diane, whose husband Stephen contracted meningitis—

**Mr. Chope:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for an hon. Member to refer to an outsider as being in the House today?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I did not catch precisely what the hon. Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) said, but I think perhaps that it was not in order.

**Mr. Clarke:** If it is helpful to the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I correct my remarks and refer to Mrs. Diane Blood with whom I held discussions this morning within the facility of the House.

For those people who may wonder why we are all in the Chamber merely discussing the question of a name, I draw the attention of the House to a recent newspaper article in which Mrs. Blood stated her hope that the law would be passed before Liam is old enough to ask why his birth certificate shows his father as unknown. She said that at present he points to a photograph of Stephen and says, "That's daddy, that's my father," but seems to have only a vague idea of what a father is.

Recently, Mrs. Blood applied for a passport for Liam and had to fill in the father's details before she could send off the form, which had to be accompanied by a birth certificate. She had to state on the form that on the birth certificate the father's name was given as "unknown". She was asked to lie. It is that untruth that we seek to redress.

I commend the Bill to the House.

2.29 pm

**Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): Although I speak from the Opposition Front Bench, I point out to my colleagues that the Bill involves a conscience issue and, that as hon. Members might anticipate on an aspect of fertilisation, it is subject to a free vote.

Although we have great sympathy with the rationale behind the Bill and with the difficult case to which it refers, there are wider reservations—

*It being half-past Two o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.*

*Debate to be resumed on Friday 11 May.*

## Remaining Private Members' Bills

### EUROPEAN UNION (IMPLICATIONS OF WITHDRAWAL) (No. 2) BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*To be read a Second time on Friday 11 May.*

### REGISTER OF DRUG TRAFFICKING OFFENDERS BILL

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [23 March],* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Debate to be resumed on Friday 11 May.*

### ADOPTION OF SEWERS BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*To be read a Second time on Friday 18 May.*

### STANDARDS AND PRIVILEGES (INDEPENDENT APPEALS BODY) BILL

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord):** Not moved.

### SITING OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS MASTS BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*To be read a Second time on Friday 11 May.*

### DIVORCE (RELIGIOUS MARRIAGES) BILL

*Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [2 February],* That the Bill be now read a Second time.

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*Debate to be resumed on Friday 11 May.*

### ELECTRICITY ACT 1989 (AMENDMENT) BILL

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

### RAIL PASSENGER SERVICES BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*To be read a Second time on Friday 11 May.*

### CLIMATE CHANGE BILL

*Order for Second Reading read.*

**Hon. Members:** Object.

*To be read a Second time on Friday 11 May.*

### CROWN EMPLOYMENT (NATIONALITY) BILL

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Not moved.

# Pupil Exclusions

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

2.32 pm

**Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): Those of us who are parents will probably all agree that it can be a tough job. Children can be challenging at the best of times. If anyone has the perfect way to get the very best out of their children, I am sure that we would welcome their advice. That said, we expect teachers to deal with our children. I believe that teaching is still a vocation. I am sure that all hon. Members will join me in paying tribute to the professionalism of women and men throughout the United Kingdom who give their lives to looking after our children.

Teaching seems to me to be a pretty tough job. When I was at school there were classes of 50 and I do not know how on the earth the teachers stood in front of us and managed to control us and get the best out of us. Perhaps I am reminiscing about good old times that never were, but the teachers seemed to do their job extremely well.

Nowadays, children are different. Their childhood seems to be taken away from them in many respects, and they are expected to grow up very quickly indeed. I do not blame the Government or political parties, but I share teachers' despair at the situation in which they sometimes find themselves. Children are physically getting bigger, and when a child challenges a teacher with the rest of the class looking on, there are not too many ready alternatives on which the teacher can draw to make the child behave.

I was here when we voted against corporal punishment. Everything has changed, and teachers have limited means of controlling children. I know that none of this is original and that the Under-Secretary has heard it all before, but I believe that Government circular 10/99 is not making the job of the teaching profession terribly easy. I have tried to understand the reasons behind the Government's targets for exclusions, but they are not making teachers' jobs easy. I am delighted to hear that the Minister is to meet Mr. David Hart to discuss that circular on 10 May, and perhaps we might be able to take the matter forward after this debate.

The Library has provided me with some wonderful information: the number of permanent exclusions has decreased by almost 6 per cent. in the five years since 1994-95. The number of permanent exclusions from primary schools has remained virtually unchanged, but more than 500 fewer pupils have been excluded from secondary schools. We all rejoice in that, but what does it mean for the teachers? It means that they have to deal with those children, and they do not necessarily have the adequate tools to do so.

The Minister will perhaps tell us about all the different projects that exist—and I am pretty well briefed on them. Obviously, during Adjournment debates, Members say that things are not happening in their constituencies, and I am afraid that I am going to say that they are not happening in mine.

The law on exclusions is contained in sections 64 to 68 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. Perhaps I am as guilty as other hon. Members in that I should have paid more attention to that Act at the time, but I did not expect that we could end up in a mess—without a pun on my name—such as we have in a certain school in my constituency.

I want to share some facts with the Minister. Our education committee has an excellent chairman, Mrs. Sally Carr, who has some very good ideas on how to deal with excluded pupils. She and the officers are developing a programme, and we are looking for a centre at the moment. If the Government could provide any resources when we have put the package together, we should be very grateful indeed. I do not say that this is a magic panacea, but Mrs. Carr would like the Government and their advisers to think of a way to bring back respect for teachers in the classroom.

We all condemn those parents who expect schools to bring up their children for them. That is simply not on. When the schools make tough decisions, we expect the teachers to be supported by parents. So now that punishment is not so readily available, perhaps the Government could think of a way to end the problem of little Johnny saying, "If you say anything or lay a finger on me, I'm gonna get my mum and dad down to school" and, "You can't do this and you can't do that." The weight has slightly gone the other way, and teachers need more support than they are getting at the moment.

Mrs. Sally Carr feels that early intervention is best, so that children can be put in a more appropriate place. When children start misbehaving, it is often because something is happening at home—perhaps their family life has become unbalanced. It would help tremendously if they could be moved to a different environment for a while so that they could be given the love and affection that they do not necessarily get when they live in disruptive households. When we complain about a child who has been expelled from school and the police end up visiting the parents, we often find that a parent who is battling valiantly on his or her own to look after the child shrugs and tells the policeman, "I can't control my own child. I want help." I do not criticise the Government; we have all had a go, but perhaps the Minister will share some pearls of wisdom about any new idea that the Government may have.

Essex county council's education committee has an excellent chairman, Mrs. Iris Pummell. The Ofsted inspection report on its service for dealing with excluded children was absolutely glowing. Schools who take students are given a one-term dowry of £2,000, and there are many new pilot approaches, but Mrs. Pummell feels that, as yet, no guidance has been given on how to deal with "medics and phobics". She feels very strongly that giving rewards such as CDs and trainers only rewards bad behaviour. Presumably, that has happened in Essex, although I am not entirely aware of it.

I have spoken to many teachers locally about the matter, and the deputy head of a school which I will not name has occasionally met one of the Education Ministers. That teacher feels that children with emotional and behavioural difficulties are the most vulnerable groups in mainstream schools. To highlight their levels of need, it is often necessary for schools to go through a series of short-term exclusions, but she feels that such exclusions are damaging to the child's self-esteem and to home-school partnerships and serve no useful educational purpose. Once a child has been identified as having emotional and behavioural difficulties, adequate and appropriate support should be put in place immediately.

That teacher feels that, after a child has been permanently excluded from one school, he or she should not be slipped into another without adequate information and support. She also thinks that children are constantly being set up to fail so as to save resources. That teacher is a staunch supporter of the Labour party, but that is her commentary on the current state of education. I would be the grateful if the Minister would reflect on those comments.

In case the Government do not have any immediate solutions to the problem of exclusions, I want to share with the Minister information about the Ezeview project in my constituency. The organisation believes that home learning is now possible, using the latest in internet technology. It is practical for children to supplement their educational experience by having access to virtual schools and such facilities as knowledge libraries, test papers, revision and homework tasks and projects.

Such a service is about to be launched next month in my constituency at one of our local grammar schools, the Southend high school for boys. The school is partnered with the company Ezeview, which has developed a unique approach to the delivery of home learning. That is achieved by providing virtual schools online. I will be writing to the Minister about the project, but I want to point out to her that, on the issue of excluded pupils, the organisation thinks that, try as you might, some children cannot be taught. They do not like the formal setting of the school and the organisation thinks that the internet approach could be a way of dealing with those disenfranchised children who—whether through their own actions or those of the education authorities—are unable to attend school in the traditional manner. I hope that the Minister will have time to examine the papers that I shall send her on that.

I know that the Government have a strategy to deal with exclusion but, in spite of that, too many children are escaping from being educated. They drift on until they are 16, and that is the end of it. That is a tragedy that we need to tackle. Although I do not want to have a dig at the Government, home tuition is very expensive and we do not have adequate resources

Finally, I wish to make some remarks about Government circular 10/99, which has triggered this debate. A superb school in my constituency, the St. Thomas More school for boys, has faced an awful problem. In a letter to me, the chairman of its governing body wrote that a pupil

"was found in possession of Cannabis Resin. Another pupil had also been involved when he was asked to 'hold' the drugs until sometime later in the day. At the point of passing back the drugs, a piece of resin came into possession of the second pupil. After due consideration, both boys were permanently excluded in line with our policy on drugs in the school."

The schools drugs policy had been revised recently in the light of a previous drugs incident and all boys had been made aware of the fact that they would be expelled if they brought drugs into the school, and its written policies were in the process of being updated.

The letter continued:

"Circular 10/99 is very broad in terms of what should and should not constitute reasons for exclusion."

The Minister will say that the circular has been revised twice and she is going to discuss it further with the unions. I think that paragraph 6.9 deals with that.

The letter of the chairman of the governing body refers to correspondence that was sent on 21 January, which stated:

"'A decision to exclude a child should be taken only: In response to serious breaches of the school's discipline policy; and if allowing the pupil to remain in school would seriously harm the education or welfare of the pupil or others in the school.'"

She thinks that the circular fails to give guidance on what is a serious breach of school policy or what constitutes serious harm to the education or welfare of other pupils. In the absence of that clarification, the school decided to expel the two pupils.

The Minister heard what happened yesterday. One parent accepted the ruling. The parties involved discussed whether the children should be expelled and decided that that would be in the best interests of the school and the two pupils. They thought that because the children would be known as possible suppliers of drugs, they might be exposed to adverse pressure to do just that. We all know of the pressure that children put on each other. It was decided that a fresh start and clean slate would provide the pupils with a better chance of breaking out from the culture of their networks. Obviously, the school also had the health and safety of other pupils to consider.

On appeal, the child who was mainly responsible for the incident was reinstated. The Minister knows only too well what effect that would have. Only one person thinks that we are being hard by excluding the children; everyone else is overwhelmingly disappointed by the outcome of the appeal. She knows that the debate centres on the fact that appeal panels comprise lay people, not governors. The chairman of the governing body believes that the head teacher and the pupil discipline committee acted properly, with the best interests of the excluded pupils and the school's reputation in mind.

We cannot prevent such matters from receiving publicity, and the incident received widespread adverse publicity locally. Children now say, "What tools can a school use because all we have to do is appeal and that is the end of it?". No doubt the Minister will accept that that has unfortunately done great damage to the school. I do not understand the targets. Either we follow the criteria for excluding a child, or we do not. How is it right that we exclude 99 pupils, but not 100? What makes that one pupil different? The hon. Lady knows that heads are upset about the money involved, which can be £3,000 to £6,000 when an appeal is upheld, and no doubt will say that the schools are given a grant from which they can pay the fine. However, the grant to many schools is less than the fine in respect of one pupil, never mind two or three.

I have shared with the Minister what Ezeview could do to help. No political party has a ready-made panacea for dealing with difficult children and I hope that we can be united in agreeing that there is a real problem. I plead with the Government to reconsider the practical effects of the circular in my constituency. Perhaps they will also reconsider the criteria for the exclusion targets.

2.49 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Jacqui Smith):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) on securing the debate. I agree that it is essential that we enable teachers to teach and children to learn in our classrooms without being disrupted by other children.

*[Jacqui Smith]*

I am afraid that I come to the Dispatch Box without any hints for bringing up children, so I will disappoint the hon. Gentleman on that score, but I hope that I can reassure him about the Government's action on exclusion.

When we came to office, permanent exclusions were at a peak of 12,700. There had been a threefold increase between the early and mid-1990s. Most young people excluded from school were offered little teaching—as little as two or three hours a week. The unacceptably high rate had to come down, because exclusion affects not only those children involved but the wider community. It may be an acceptable solution to a problem in an individual school, but often moves the problem to the streets, other schools or the local community, because excluded young people are more likely to get involved in crime. Nearly two thirds of young offenders of school age who are sentenced in court have been excluded from school or truant significantly. We should not forget that young people out of school wandering the streets are easy prey for those who would do them harm.

That is the context in which we set national targets to reduce exclusions by a third by 2002. We have also set a target that all excluded pupils should have a full-time education from 2002. Targets are important in focusing attention on the issue, but on their own are insufficient. That is why the Government have made available significant funding to support action on exclusion. Permanent exclusions have fallen by 18 per cent. from their peak in 1996-97, and we expect further reductions. There is no evidence that that has been at the expense of other children's learning. The local education authorities with the biggest drops in avoidable exclusions are showing the largest gains in pupil attainment.

We are investing record sums. In 2001-02, we are making available £174 million, 10 times the amount available in 1996-97, to help schools and LEAs to tackle poor behaviour and provide education outside school for excluded pupils. I heard what the hon. Gentleman said about the efforts of his local education authority to educate excluded pupils. I am sure that he is pleased that the authority received a 28 per cent. increase on last year's funding.

The funding is backed up by detailed guidance and advice, such as circular 10/99, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. The guidance covers pupil behaviour, attendance, the use of exclusion and reintegration. It emphasises, as the hon. Gentleman did, the importance of early intervention and prevention, and offers examples of best practice, setting out preventive strategies that work.

One of those is learning support units, which are on-site units that enable heads and teachers to remove pupils quickly when they are disrupting classrooms. The hon. Gentleman referred to a constituent who suggested that a series of exclusions is not the best way to deal with children who have emotional and behavioural difficulties. Learning support units enable children with difficulties to be taken out of the classroom without being excluded, so that their particular needs can be met but they do not disrupt other children's learning.

Learning support units are proving very popular with schools, which is why we already have 1,000 serving about 10,000 pupils at any one time. That network has been delivered a year ahead of the original target date of 2002. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will welcome the fact that we will be making available funding for at least another 190 units.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the type of education that excluded pupils receive. The Government are transforming the quality and quantity of that education. By contrast with the position that I outlined at the beginning of my speech, in which many excluded pupils received very little education, by September two thirds of authorities will be offering over 20 hours' education for excluded secondary pupils.

By 2002, all excluded children must receive a full-time education. That is being delivered; there are now over 1,000 additional places and nearly 600 more teachers and support staff in pupil referral units than in 1997. Ofsted has shown that the quality of those units has improved significantly. I certainly commend the hon. Gentleman's own local education authority on working to develop that sort of provision for excluded children in his area. I was interested in what he said about the use of information technology links for educating excluded pupils, and I look forward to more details about the project that he outlined. He may be interested to know that the Department is already sponsoring a project that uses IT to help children who are out of school for a range of reasons to engage in education.

The hon. Gentleman rightly highlighted the key role of teachers who, with head teachers, are to be commended for the reduction in exclusion figures. We recognise that classroom disruptions make huge demands on teachers, who need skills to be able to handle challenging behaviour. We have therefore asked the Teacher Training Agency to strengthen the initial training of new teachers in behaviour management.

We also want to generalise the experience of the best learning support unit managers to teachers who want help in handling disruptive behaviour. We have therefore introduced a pilot programme of training to offer senior managers and teachers in the most difficult schools access to the expertise of those managers. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced £500,000 of funding for that initiative on 23 March. Learning mentors, who play an increasing role in the excellence in cities initiative, and higher numbers of support staff in schools are important in helping to give teachers the classroom support that they need to be able to teach.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke about the importance of parents, and I agree that they play a key role. We should not forget that parents should take responsibility for the behaviour of their children. We want to look at how we can be tougher on parents who fail to take responsibility for the behaviour of their children or who themselves are abusive or violent in schools. I know that such parents are in a small minority, but they make the lives of heads and teachers a daily misery. We therefore plan to consult on extending the use of parenting orders, which have been used effectively to combat crime outside the school, to similar circumstances within the school walls.

The hon. Gentleman talked about exclusion appeals and the guidance that the Government have issued. I reiterate that we do not expect teachers to keep troublemakers in the classroom at any cost. The Government have invested in preventative strategies that should help to reduce exclusions, but we recognise and have made it clear that heads can permanently exclude pupils whose behaviour is violent or very disruptive. Recognising the need to be clearer about exclusion appeal panels, we issued new guidance last August which makes it clear that the head's decision to exclude should not normally be overridden in a range of circumstances, including violence or a threat of violence against a member of staff or another pupil; sexual abuse; presenting a significant risk to the health and safety of other pupils by selling illegal drugs; and persistent or malicious disruption.

The hon. Gentleman raised a difficult case. I understand that there is uncertainty about whether it concerns possession or selling of illegal drugs, so I do not want to comment on it further. However, our guidance makes clear our view about the selling of illegal drugs in schools.

Some in the Conservative party have made the accusation recently—I do not think that the hon. Gentleman made it—that exclusion appeal panels are ignoring the guidance and are reinstating pupils left, right and centre. That is not the case. Of the 10,400 pupils permanently excluded in 1998–99, appeals were heard in relation to only 960. Of these, 220 pupils were reinstated—slightly more than 2 per cent. Local education authorities are telling us that even fewer are being reinstated since our new guidance was issued.

Without wanting to make a party political point, I think we should remember that the independent appeal panels procedure is not new or an arbitrary part of the system. It was rightly introduced by the previous Conservative Government in 1987.

As I have already made clear in correspondence with the hon. Gentleman, where an appeal panel reinstates a pupil, Ministers have no power to quash its decision: only the courts can do that, the panels being independent in law. However, we are ensuring that panel members receive training to ensure that they know how properly to fulfil their responsibilities and duties. That, along with our guidance, should help to reduce the scope for perverse decisions.

We need to put the issues of exclusion and discipline in context. We are talking about the behaviour of a few pupils. The vast majority of children go about their school day in a normal, well-adjusted manner. Of course, we must not be complacent. Parents and teachers have the right to expect that the actions of disruptive pupils are controlled. We believe that, for the majority of these children, the problem should be dealt with before it gets to the critical stage. The policies that we have in place, backed by record levels of funding, are allowing us to do that. I congratulate the teachers and head teachers who are—

*The motion having been made after half-past Two o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour,* MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

*Adjourned at two minutes past Three o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Monday 30 April 2001*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

*The Secretary of State was asked*

### Foot and Mouth

1. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): What further assessment he has made of the effects of the foot and mouth outbreak on tourism. [158136]

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith):** Our best estimate on the basis of information so far obtained is that loss of revenue by the English tourism industry will average about £140 million a week. The eventual total economic impact of foot and mouth will obviously depend on the final extent and spread of the disease, as well as its duration and the effectiveness of the measures that we are taking to encourage tourism to Britain in general and to the countryside in particular.

**Mr. Robathan:** We all know that the statement that the Secretary of State has just made is extremely sad. Apart from the dire consequences for all rural communities, including the rural people whom I represent, foot and mouth is having dire consequences for tourism. The Secretary of State will know that businesses and hotels are being put up for sale all the time. What further steps can the Government take to assist the tourism industry, including hotels and other businesses in the countryside? Will the right hon. Gentleman now consider taking on board the Conservative scheme for interest-free loans to rural businesses?

**Mr. Smith:** I certainly share the hon. Gentleman's dismay at the way in which foot and mouth has affected the tourism industry in many parts of the country. We have already put in place substantial measures to provide immediate relief to affected businesses, including additional rate relief for business premises, deferment of tax and value added tax payments and access to the small firms loan guarantee scheme. We have also put in place additional resources for the English Tourism Council and the British Tourist Authority to carry out immediate work to promote tourism and encourage visitors back to Britain and the countryside.

**Mr. Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter): While welcoming what the Government have already done, may I tell my right hon. Friend that it is still woefully inadequate? When he next speaks to his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer, will he tell him that many good businesses in places like Dartmoor will go out of business in the next few months unless he comes up with interest-free loans now?

**Mr. Smith:** I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor will have heard what my hon. Friend said. Of course we recognise that, in the coming months, further promotion work will be needed, particularly in relation to the promotion of tourism in this country. I hope that we will be in a position to make additional announcements on that shortly.

**Mr. Robert Maclennan** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): Why is it taking the Government so long to meet the express requests of the BTA for its budget to be substantially increased now to enable it to promote effectively visits to this country, particularly in the United States?

**Mr. Smith:** We are considering carefully the cogent case that the BTA has put to us for additional promotion work that can and should be undertaken. Of course there is a sensible judgment to be made on when the best push on further tourism promotion should be made, which we wish to leave to the experts at the BTA to decide. Does that push come now, in the lead-up to the immediate summer booking period, or does it come when we can safely and finally say that the disease has been eradicated? It is probably the case that both strategies need to be followed; the judgment on the precise balance between them is best made by the BTA itself.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): There has been some welcome tourism assistance, such as rate reduction provisions, in various areas of the country. However, is there a continuing review to determine the boundaries of the areas to be covered? Ashover in my constituency, although far from any foot and mouth outbreak, has problems because of that outbreak and would like to be benefit from provisions available elsewhere in the country. Problems have also arisen because of the disposal of cattle in landfill sites which are too close to communities. That disposal has created such obnoxious smells that one cannot imagine any tourist ever going to places such as Poolsbrook, near Chesterfield.

**Mr. Smith:** My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Those matters are under continuing review by the rural taskforce, which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment. The impact on tourism has been adverse not just in areas of the countryside affected by foot and mouth, but in towns and cities completely unaffected by the disease, because overseas visitors are simply not making bookings. The problem that we face is not confined to rural areas; the lack of forward tourism bookings is a problem for the economy throughout the country.

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): In answer to his hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), the right hon. Gentleman seemed to suggest that he acknowledges the extent of the problem, although his response to his hon. Friend the Member for Exeter

(Mr. Bradshaw) was not strong enough. Does he accept that the compensation on offer is not adequate? Does he also accept that, not only does a lost hotel bed result in lost tourism revenue, but that that lost booking has other economic repercussions? Will he therefore urgently address the issue and come up with a package that gives greater recognition to the terrible calamity facing the industry than has been made so far?

**Mr. Smith:** The hon. Gentleman knows that a substantial package of measures is already in place. The best service that we can do for people in the tourism industry who run hotels and guest houses, or in the service industries that serve the hotels and guest houses, is to get visitors coming back. That is where we must put the major emphasis over the coming weeks.

**Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): Are not rambling, hiking and walking in the countryside the British national sport? I cannot imagine the Austrians, French or Swiss closing down the Alps if there was some wretched agricultural disease there, yet all over the country, there are "Footpath closed" signs put up by private landowners and members of the National Farmers Union, not by local authorities. There has been no case of ramblers transmitting the wretched disease. Could my right hon. Friend make it clear to local authorities and to private landowners that our footpaths can safely be open, and that they must be open to allow the British people to enjoy their countryside again?

**Mr. Smith:** There is no reason at all why a footpath which goes nowhere near livestock, does not go over grazing land, does not go near a farmyard and has never gone anywhere near livestock cannot be safely and legitimately opened up for public access. I am pleased to say that there are many county councils across the country that are now realising that and are re-opening footpaths for public access. I fear that there are some county councils that are not.

**Mr. MacShane:** Name and shame them.

**Mr. Smith:** For example, I hope that the leadership of Buckinghamshire county council will have heard what my hon. Friend said.

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth** (East Surrey): Is it not the case that the Government's handling of the crisis in tourism has been complacent and shambolic since the outset? According to the British Tourist Authority, up to £5 billion in revenue and 300,000 jobs are at risk. What has the industry got from the Government, other than the usual depressing cocktail of spin, dither, delay and confusion? Does the right hon. Gentleman think that a business with no income will leap at the chance to take out an emergency loan at 8½ per cent.? When will he stop ducking and answer the questions that have been put to him this afternoon? When will the Government introduce a proper interest-free loan scheme of the type that we recommended five weeks ago?

**Mr. Smith:** On spin, I am astonished that on 24 April, when we had the then unconfirmed case of the slaughterman who was suspected of having foot and mouth disease, which has now been shown to have been a false alarm, the hon. Gentleman, describing the case, told the world that it was

"a massive setback to the recovery of British tourism".

What sort of message did that send to people thinking of coming to Britain from abroad?

**Mr. Ainsworth:** It didn't take long, did it? If in doubt, blame the Tories. *[Interruption.]* That is a pathetic response. When all the other answers fail and the Government run out of excuses, they blame someone else. We have seen it before and we are seeing it again this afternoon. Who does the Secretary of State think the industry blames for the mishandling of the crisis since it began? Who does he think the industry blames for the paltry £2 million offered to promote Britain around the world at this time of crisis? When the president of the American Society of Travel Agents writes in a letter to the chairman of the British Hospitality Association:

"Britain must be seen to participate with great vigor and visibility in efforts to help itself",

what does the right hon. Gentleman think he means—another photo call in the rain? He means that the Government must get behind the industry and offer the practical help for which the industry has been asking for so long. When will the Government provide the funds that are necessary to support the marketing of Britain abroad at this time of crisis in tourism?

**Mr. Smith:** The Government are behind the British tourism industry. We have offered help and will be offering further help. I say to the hon. Gentleman that, if it is right and sensible to blame the Tories, then we will, of course, blame them.

## Performing Arts

2. **Mr. Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton, North): If he will make a statement on the implications of the Budget for performing arts industries. [158137]

**The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Alan Howarth):** It is anticipated that the Government's plans, which were announced as part of the Budget, to replace income-spreading rules with a simpler profits averaging system for creative artists will be of assistance to more people in the performing arts.

**Mr. Hopkins:** I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I want to draw his attention to jazz. He will know that the jazz audience is similar in size to that of opera, but that arts funding for jazz is a small fraction of opera funding. Britain is arguably the second greatest jazz nation in the world after the United States, but jazz receives a tiny proportion of funding. Arts Council allocations have improved, but will he use his influence to ensure that jazz funding at all levels, including schools, will increase substantially to ensure that jazz receives its fair share of the arts budget?

**Mr. Howarth:** Jazz musicians will benefit from the new tax provisions to which I referred. On my hon. Friend's comments about Arts Council support, he himself is a notable performer not only at Question Time, but as a saxophonist and as leader of the all-party

parliamentary jazz appreciation group, where he is a dynamic force. I, too, am a member of that group, so I hope that he will share my pleasure in the fact that the Arts Council has just announced a 27.5 per cent. uplift for the national youth jazz orchestra in the current year. That will rise to 135 per cent. above the present level by 2002–03, and there will be a 49 per cent. increase for the Jazz Development Trust by 2002–03. The trust is a new beneficiary, which will receive £40,000 in 2002–03. The Arts Council's national touring programme has greatly increased, and there is every reason to hope that jazz will benefit. Jazz is a very important musical tradition. I am delighted that, under this Government, the Arts Council has chosen to increase significantly its support for jazz, and I shall encourage it to continue to do so.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): Will the Minister confirm that, between 1997 and 2000, payments by the lottery to the Arts Council of England were reduced by £97 million because of the siphoning off of moneys into health and education? What does he say to that?

**Mr. Howarth:** We said that lottery funds would total £8 billion, but it will be very much more.

**Mr. Tony McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead): Does my right hon. Friend accept that an integral part of the Budget was continuing pressure on local authorities, which, even though they have had a small real increase in funding, have a large number of duties to perform to match it? Particular difficulties have been created for those who want to keep regional and local theatres and concert halls open. Will he ensure that, for the next Budget, Ministers with responsibility for local government are made aware of the importance for the arts of the local government budget?

**Mr. Howarth:** It is important that we have a partnership in funding and that local authorities give the support to the arts that they wish to give. We have asked all local authorities to develop a local authority cultural strategy by the end of next year. The signs from the pilot authorities that have been engaged in the project suggest that it has focused their minds and that other local authority departments, apart from leisure departments, have increasingly recognised how much the arts can contribute to an authority's wider objectives. I hope that the trend that we have seen for far too many years of real-terms decline in local authority support for the arts will be reversed.

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough): One of our most successful industries is our popular music industry, which receives not a penny in public support. Will the Minister please resist the siren voices and claptrap coming from the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) and others on public subsidy for jazz? I have a photograph in my office of the no-turning back team of rowers. The right hon. Gentleman stands proudly with me, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth), Michael Forsyth—now Lord Forsyth—and my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope). In those days, he banged the drum for free enterprise. He should return to his roots and say no to such suggestions.

**Mr. Howarth:** I continue to bang the drum for free enterprise, but I am very glad to be a member of a Government who take an intelligent and responsible view of their scope to support private enterprise, so that we can create conditions in which private enterprise can truly flourish. From that point of view, none of my views has changed. I am glad to associate myself with my old and hon. Friend on the Conservative Benches.

## Tourism

3. **Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): What steps he has taken to improve facilities for tourists in the UK. [158138]

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith):** The English Tourism Council, which is responsible for tourism in England, has been very active in promoting quality standards schemes for tourist accommodation. We now have in place a standard grading scheme for hotels and guest houses in England, agreed between the ETC, the AA and the RAC. Improvements in the quality of service and accommodation, coupled with a well-motivated and properly remunerated staff, are the best way forward.

**Dr. Iddon:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that tourism and its related sectors support 20,000 jobs in Bolton—20 per cent. of our total work force—and that we have 1 million staying visitors each year? Is not that a good illustration of why the Government and others should support urban tourism?

**Mr. Smith:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Across the country 1.8 million people are employed in tourism-related activities. The industry contributes some £64 billion a year to our national economy. It is an enormously important industry, and it is equally important that the standard, quality and renumeration of staff within the industry are right.

**Mr. Jonathan Sayeed** (Mid-Bedfordshire): How will it encourage tourists to attractions such as Whipsnade or Woburn to see lorry loads of carcases being transported into a disease-free area of mid-Bedfordshire and dumped in pits at Stewartby or Brogborough, with the ensuing stink and the danger of leaching into the ground water?

**Mr. Smith:** The best possible answer to foot and mouth, for both the agricultural industry and tourism, is to eradicate the disease. That is the end to which all the Government's efforts are being put. I am very sad that the hon. Gentleman makes statements that are not guaranteed to present a good picture of Britain to overseas visitors.

**Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Inverclyde): May I remind my right hon. Friend that quite a large number of tourists visit the United Kingdom out of an abiding interest in the history of naval architecture? With that in mind, may I put in a plea for heritage lottery funding for the restoration of the Carrick-City of Adelaide—a famous 19th century Scottish vessel—and the steam ship Shieldhall, both of which definitely need that money? The Carrick is managed by the Scottish maritime museum and the Sheildhall by Solent Steam

Packet Ltd. Given the sparseness of funds for ship preservation projects, is it not time that those two ships were preserved?

**Mr. Smith:** I am pleased that the heritage lottery fund has at least done some extremely valuable work over recent years in helping to preserve our maritime heritage. However, decisions on individual schemes are entirely a matter for the board of the heritage lottery fund; I am sure that it will have heard my hon. Friend's eloquent representation.

**Mr. Tom King** (Bridgwater): The question is about improving facilities for tourism. I think that the right hon. Gentleman realises that the real question at the moment is how far we are able to sustain the present facilities for tourism, given the critical situation that they face. I agree with the hon. Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw): the present package simply will not be good enough. It is vital that some of those businesses know, and know very quickly, that interest-free loans will be available, otherwise a number of facilities will be lost and the employment figures that the right hon. Gentleman has just quoted for tourism will no longer be relevant because of significant job losses.

**Mr. Smith:** The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that aid measures are already in place, including access to the small firms loan guarantee scheme. I repeat to him what I said to his hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) earlier: the best possible way to help tourism businesses to recover from the present crisis is to get visitors coming back. That is the end to which all our efforts must be put, and that is what the Government have assiduously been doing. I hope that the Opposition will wake up to doing it as well.

**Mrs. Ann Cryer** (Keighley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that facilities for tourists in the United Kingdom would be more than adequate if we were able to spread the tourism trade around a bit more? Perhaps we could attract tourists from hot spots such as York, which is a lovely city but which gets overcrowded in the summer, to—dare I say it?—west Yorkshire, which has the armouries museum in Leeds, which is not attracting too many visitors, and the national museum of photography, film and television in Bradford. There are also three splendid tourist attractions in my constituency: the Worth Valley railway, East Riddlesden hall and the Brontë parsonage museum. If we could encourage tourists to spread out a bit more, it would be better for them and it would certainly be better for the economy of west Yorkshire.

**Mr. Smith:** My hon. Friend is a powerful advocate for the attractions of her constituency and those of west Yorkshire. I was particularly pleased to hear her mention the national museum of photography, film and television in Bradford, which last year welcomed a million visitors for the first time in its history. My hon. Friend's basic point is right. We need to ensure that the information services and—particularly in an era of new technology—the website technology are in place to ensure that information about attractions outside the traditional honeypots is made available to visitors, because there are an enormous number of such attractions which are waiting and hoping to welcome visitors.

**Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): Is it Government policy that the English Tourism Council should have a marketing role?

**Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): No.

**Sir Sydney Chapman:** Well, should it not be, given that the Secretary of State has already correctly identified that the foot and mouth epidemic has had an appalling consequence for tourism not only in the countryside but in our towns and cities?

**Mr. Smith:** The primary marketing role in England must rest with the regional tourist boards, because, inevitably and rightly, they are the greatest focus of promotion work, advertising and the means of attracting visitors. The English Tourism Council primarily has a role in relation to research, the upholding of standards and improving information across the country. Of course, given the current difficulties because of foot and mouth, the English Tourism Council is already taking on additional responsibilities and will do so for the foreseeable future. That is only right and proper given the immediate tasks that face us, but the proper split of responsibilities must be between promotion work at regional level, and work on research, standards and quality at the English level.

### Foot and Mouth

4. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): If he will make a statement on the impact of foot and mouth disease on the number of visitors to the south-west over the Easter period. [158139]

**The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Janet Anderson):** Early indications show that visitor numbers to the south-west over the Easter period were some 90 per cent. of what they were in 2000.

**Mr. Heath:** Whatever improvement there may have been in some resorts and main attractions, there certainly has not been a similar improvement in the rural areas. Since Easter, people have not been making the lengthier stays that we would wish, and there has been no improvement for the many farm businesses that have diversified to provide overnight accommodation. The Minister has already heard calls from Members in all parts of the House for an immediate package of interest-free loans and a proper promotion budget. That is what we in the west country want as a matter of urgency. When are the Government going to overcome the scruples of the Treasury and provide them?

**Janet Anderson:** The hon. Gentleman is quite right. Can I reassure the House that the Government in no way underestimate the difficulties facing farm businesses in particular, as well as everyone else in rural areas? The hon. Gentleman is also correct that the impact of foot and mouth disease on visitor numbers at Easter appears to have been twofold. First, visitors made later bookings and took shorter breaks, and, secondly, there was a disparity

in the areas visited. For example, compared to last year, visits to cities, towns and resorts were up by between 5 and 10 per cent., while visitor numbers in deeply rural areas were down by about one third.

The hon. Gentleman knows that the Government have already introduced a wide range of measures to assist affected businesses in these difficult times. The rural taskforce, which the Prime Minister set up under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, will continue to monitor the circumstances and ascertain whether enough is being done. However, all the current evidence suggests that deferments of statutory payments are being taken up and that the industry welcomes that.

## Millennium Dome

5. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): If he will make a statement on the preservation of the millennium dome. [158140]

**The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Janet Anderson):** Like many others, including the London borough of Greenwich, the Government are committed to the dome staying in Greenwich. It is an important landmark on the London skyline and has made a major contribution to the regeneration of the Greenwich peninsula. *[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members do not believe me, perhaps they would like to go and see for themselves.

The dome has also added to the quality and variety of the world-famous structures that were already so prominent in the area. Providing a successful future for the dome will build on that, ensure continued recognition worldwide and maintain the regeneration momentum that has been established.

**Dr. Lewis:** Given that the dome has cost the country more than £1 million a month since it closed, will the Minister try to prevail on the Prime Minister to reinstate his idea of referring to it in the first line of his general election manifesto? Is not the dome the perfect metaphor for the new Labour Government: flashy on the outside, hollow on the inside and costing the country a fortune long after it has ceased to serve any useful purpose?

**Janet Anderson:** I have no knowledge of the contents of the manifesto, but we shall be able to stand on our record better than Conservative Members could after their last term of office.

It is nonsense to claim that the dome costs £1 million a month to maintain, as press reports and Conservative Members have suggested. The cost of care and maintenance for the site and structures is approximately £600,000 and decreasing.

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth** (East Surrey): Only £600,000 a month—that's okay then. The Minister claimed, as she has done on previous occasions, that the dome somehow contributes to regeneration in Greenwich. When will the Government realise that it is part of the problem, not the solution? When will they face the fact that it is an obstacle to the important task of creating jobs, prosperity and economic vitality in Greenwich?

Having failed to sell it twice, the Government hope that everyone will forget it. People will not forget. The dome was supposed to be good for tourism, but when thousands of small businesses face ruin, is not it obscene that it sits there, closed but costing millions of pounds to the public purse? Is not that the price of new Labour's vanity?

**Janet Anderson:** The hon. Gentleman says that the dome was "supposed to be good" for tourism; I stress that it was. More than 6.5 million people visited the dome, which was the most popular pay-to-visit attraction in the United Kingdom in 2000. He is wrong to describe it as a lost cause. It has been a major catalyst for regeneration on the peninsula, which, less than a decade ago, was one of the most derelict sites in England. The benefits include new roads and other services on a grand scale, major retail outlets, a 162-bed hotel, a state of the art cinema complex, which is now open, and Greenwich millennium village. I advise Conservative Members to visit Greenwich and see how the area is being regenerated.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): Will my hon. Friend remind hon. Members of the Conservative party's role, especially that of the right hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), in creating the dome?

**Janet Anderson:** My hon. Friend is right. It is appropriate to remind hon. Members that the decision to build the dome at Greenwich was made under the previous Conservative Government and that the original chairman and chief executive of the dome company were appointed by them. They also determined the corporate structure, the use of lottery money to support the project and the role of the shareholder.

## Tourism

6. **Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): What representations he has made to the Exchequer in respect of financial support for small businesses involved in tourism which have been affected by the foot and mouth outbreak. [158141]

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith):** As members of the rural taskforce, we have been actively proposing measures to help small tourism businesses. A package of financial measures to help tourist businesses affected by foot and mouth was announced by the chairman of the taskforce on 20 March. As I said earlier, we have also announced an immediate package of help for the promotion of tourism to both the domestic and the international markets.

**Mr. Evans:** Tourism is vital to the north-west. It has a turnover of £1.5 billion, and supports 7 per cent. of the work force. I have received a letter from the chairman of the North West tourist board, Anthony Goldstone, who writes:

"The leadership and personal support of the Prime Minister and other Ministers in reassuring the tourism industry and encouraging the consumer, has been big on words, but short on practical substance."

Support to date has been pretty useless. The letter makes some suggestions: at the top of the list are interest-free loans. Has the Secretary of State asked the

Chancellor of the Exchequer to offer interest-free loans to industries involved in tourism? If so, has the Chancellor said no?

**Mr. Smith:** As I said earlier, what is essential is to bring visitors back to tourism businesses. We have already introduced measures to ensure that that can happen, but we are going further. I hope that later today we shall hear the announcement of a new initiative, involving a partnership between the Football Association Premier League and the British Tourist Authority, to provide a major boost for British tourism promotion abroad. I am delighted that the premier league is proposing to fly the flag for Britain overseas; it is a pity that the Opposition are not.

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the Inland Revenue in the north-west is doing a sterling job in helping all small businesses that require assistance with their considerable loans, and is producing very positive results? Some farm shops in exclusion areas, however, are suffering very badly. Although both the civil service and the Inland Revenue are trying hard, it would be helpful if we could convey further information to those who are particularly affected.

**Mr. Smith:** My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the assistance that is already available. I am pleased to tell her that today my Department's website will have full details for all affected businesses in tourism and connected with tourism about how to gain access to the various elements of help available to them.

**Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): I welcome the impact on small businesses of the lifting of the quarantine on the royal parks, particularly Home park and Bushy park in my constituency; but is the Secretary of State aware of continued concern about the safety of the deer? Supposedly the infection has now entered the wild deer herd. Has the right hon. Gentleman any plans to vaccinate deer? If not, why not?

**Mr. Smith:** According to the best scientific advice that we have had so far, there is no evidence that foot and mouth has entered the wild deer herd, and certainly no evidence of any impact on the deer in the royal parks.

We have issued clear advisory and precautionary warnings to people entering the royal parks, and have specifically asked those who come from directly affected sources of foot and mouth to stay away. All the evidence suggests that people are heeding that advice responsibly.

**Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): We are delighted to learn that the premier league in football is pulling its weight, but the question for the House is, what are the Government doing?

Earlier, the Secretary of State spoke of the importance of the regional tourist boards and their primary marketing role. Does he not recognise the growing funding crisis that is affecting our regional tourist boards? Does he not realise that small tourism businesses have no money with which to pay their contributions for marketing? Is he aware that the Government's failure to provide those adequate resources—described as "outrageous" by the chairman of the North West tourist board, who was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans)—was condemned by the Yorkshire tourist board only last week as

"another devastating blow for rural tourism businesses in Yorkshire",

and that lack of funds will mean the closure of the visitor information hotline?

It is no use simply saying that tourism businesses need customers and then denying the industry a budget for proper marketing. When will the Government grasp the seriousness of the situation and provide the resources needed to sustain that vital industry on which so many rural jobs depend?

**Mr. Smith:** The Government are, indeed, well aware of the needs for promotion and marketing in tourism. That is why we have already put in place some immediate measures to help, and it is also precisely why we have helped to foster the agreement between the British Tourist Authority and the premier league to which I have just referred. However, it is not only a matter of what the Government are doing, but a matter of what the Opposition are doing. When I read on the Opposition's internet site this very day that it is "not surprising" that holidaymakers

"have decided to play it safe and stay at home, or go abroad",

I have to say that that is a fine message to overseas visitors to this country.

## Museum and Gallery Visits

7. **Maria Eagle** (Liverpool, Garston): What the impact has been of the abolition of museum charges on the number of pensioners and children visiting national museums and galleries; and if he will make a statement. [158142]

**The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Alan Howarth):** Since free admission at Department for Culture, Media and Sport-sponsored national museums and galleries was extended for children, on 1 April 1999, and for the over-60s, on 1 April 2000, there have been more than half a million additional visits by children and more than 400,000 additional visits by the over-60s. Within those figures, at the museums and galleries that previously charged, there have been almost 435,000 additional visits by children and more than 127,000 additional visits by the over-60s. Those figures are most encouraging.

**Maria Eagle:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that one fact highlighted by the figures is that compulsory charges act as a disincentive for people to make such visits? Does he also accept that there are still families in the United Kingdom who cannot afford to go to their museums and galleries because of the adult entry free? When might we expect to have universal access to museums and galleries without any charges at all?

**Mr. Howarth:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that it is of basic importance to ensure that children are able to visit museums and galleries without there being the type of insurmountable obstacles that there have been for all too many of them. She is also quite right that it will be an enormous advantage when we are able to advance to universal free entry, so that parents will not have to

pay and more of them will take their children—or their children will take them—to museums and galleries. We have provided the resources to enable that to happen, on 1 December 2001, and we are very hopeful that all the institutions that we sponsor will respond to that opportunity.

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): Under the partial free access policy, how, when and to what extent does the right hon. Gentleman expect admission revenues forgone to be offset? In the context of the increased visitor numbers to which he has just referred, has he made any assessment of the proportion of that increase that is accounted for by tourists visiting from overseas?

**Mr. Howarth:** We are compensating the institutions to enable them to be able to introduce free entry without financial penalty to them. The figures for tourism of course vary enormously, and I think that it would be very rash of me to attempt to make an assessment here and now. We have spent much of this Question Time discussing problems about the numbers of tourists visiting Britain at the moment.

## Lottery Funding

8. **Mr. Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): What steps he will take to reduce the variations between *(a)* sales of national lottery tickets and *(b)* average expenditure of the National Lottery Charities Board in parliamentary constituencies. [158143]

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith):** It is important to bear in mind that 28p of each lottery pound goes to the good causes overall. It is also difficult to seek a direct correlation between ticket sales and the value of lottery awards, as all parts of the country should have access to lottery funding according to need. However, our commitment to ensuring that lottery funding is fairly distributed both geographically and across all groups of society is reflected in the changes made to lottery distribution through the National Lottery Act 1998 and the revised policy directions issued to distributors in summer 1998.

**Mr. Gapes:** Is my right hon. Friend aware that my constituents in Ilford, South are very generous towards the national lottery? The most recent figures that I have, compiled at the end of 1999, showed that £759 per adult was spent on the lottery, which put us 68th highest constituency in the country. However, we received back only 4p in the pound for projects in my constituency. Will my right hon. Friend have urgent discussions with the London board of the community fund about the disparities in payment between London boroughs and the fact that some constituencies and boroughs, including my own, are not getting their fair share of payments?

**Mr. Smith:** I am pleased to tell my hon. Friend that the picture is now a little better than the one that he described. His constituency has received overall from the national lottery so far £3.9 million and 77 lottery awards. However, he is right to draw attention to the fact that that is somewhat below the average for the country as a whole. Among the changes introduced by the National Lottery Act 1998 were a greater emphasis on small-scale schemes at local community level to enable a much better spread across the country as a whole, a move away from an emphasis on buildings—bricks and mortar—to support for people and activities, and an attempt to ensure that areas of social deprivation can be particularly helped by the lottery distributors.

Those changes are already beginning to have an impact. For example, during the past year, the number of small grants made by the lottery distributors has trebled. I am delighted by the progress that is already being made; I hope that it will continue and that it will benefit Ilford, South as well as other parts of the country.

**Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Secretary of State has just made it clear that one of his criteria for fairness in allocating lottery resources is redistribution of wealth from better off areas to less well off areas. That may be a legitimate thing to do, but I do not think that many people who buy lottery tickets are aware of that. Will the Secretary of State publish the criteria that are used to decide where the money goes so that the process is open and transparent and people cannot accuse the Government or the National Lottery Charities Board of wrongly distributing funds?

**Mr. Smith:** The directions to which I referred were placed in both Libraries of both Houses some two years ago. If the hon. Gentleman has not seen them yet, he has not been doing his homework.

## Sport

9. **Angela Smith** (Basildon): What recent advice he has received on the importance of sport for the health of young people. [158145]

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith):** A number of reports have drawn attention to the importance of sport and physical activity for the health of young people, most recently the National Audit Office's report entitled "Tackling Obesity in England". The Government fully accept that physical activity and sport have a range of benefits, including better health, and our plan for sport spells out our policies and strategy for increasing participation among all sections of the community, particularly young people.

**Angela Smith:** I welcome my right hon. Friend's response. It is clear that he is committed to encouraging young people to be active in sport. May I therefore ask for his help in removing two barriers to participation for young people that have been drawn to my attention by Amy Cox, who is the Youth Parliament member for Thurrock, and a constituent of mine? The first is the cost of participation for young people using facilities—what may be a relatively small sum for adults is expensive to someone who is 13 or 14 years old. The second problem is the cost of transport for young people, as many 14-year-olds have to pay full fare on buses to get to these facilities. Will my right hon. Friend put it to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions that there should be a bus pass for young people on the same basis as bus passes for pensioners?

**Mr. Smith:** My hon. Friend makes a number of important points. I was pleased to hear of the interest

taken by the Youth Parliament in the importance of sport for young people. We are bearing in mind the cost of participation and of transport to sporting facilities as we develop the programme of the appointment of school sport co-ordinators and the replacement of playing fields—many of which were sold off under the previous Government—and ensure that inter-school league competitions, which fell so drastically and severely during the 1980s, are put back in place.

**Mr. Bob Russell** (Colchester): Does the Secretary of State agree that, in the fourth year of a Labour Government, 75 per cent. of our young people are still not getting the minimum two hours of physical education a week? What discussions has he had with the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to put that right?

**Mr. Smith:** I am pleased to say that we have had substantial discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, and that is why we have indicated that over the course of the next three years we want to put in place—for every pupil who wishes to claim it—an entitlement to two hours of sporting or physical recreation activity during the course of the school week.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The Second Church Estates Commissioner was asked—*

### Church Commission Rents

27. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey of 26 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 486W, on Church Commission rents, what further representations the Church Commission has received on behalf of the residents of the Octavia Hill Estates. [158166]

**Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners):** A delegation representing residents of the Waterloo and Walworth housing estates met commissioners' staff at Elizabeth house on 9 April and presented a petition setting out their views. The hon. Gentleman was, I believe, present on that occasion and has met subsequently with the commissioners.

**Mr. Hughes:** Do the Church Commissioners realise that what they do with the rents and lettings policy for the 1,500 homes on those estates in London will be perceived by the residents, as well as a much wider community inside and outside the Church as a real test of the ethical investment policy of the Church of England?

I wish to ask the hon. Gentleman specifically whether he will seek an agreement from his fellow commissioners, and do all he can personally, to ensure that all papers prepared as part of the consultation process, including legal advice given to the commissioners, are made public in good time before the decision is made, and that no decision is made without the agreement of the residents, the clergy of the relevant parishes and the local, democratically elected representatives.

**Mr. Bell:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who made that point when he met the commissioners with the Minister for Sport, my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey), and the commissioners said that they would consider it with great care.

**Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): Will the hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to explain the long-term policy of the Church Commissioners on all the property of which the Church owns the freehold?

**Mr. Bell:** The long-term policy of the commissioners is in line with their statutory duties—to maximise investment returns in line with the mission to provide sustainable support for the nationwide ministry of the Church of England.

### Hagg Wood

28. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If he will make a statement concerning Forest Enterprise's interest in acquiring the freehold of Hagg wood, near Dunnington, from the Church Commissioners. [158167]

**Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners):** Forest Enterprise has expressed an interest in acquiring the freehold of Hagg wood from the commissioners but no firm proposal has, as yet, been put forward.

**Mr. Grogan:** Given the considerable local support for the acquisition of the freehold of Hagg wood by Forest Enterprise so as to make it into a community woodland, can my hon. Friend assure me that he will consider carefully, on the advice of the land agents for the commissioners, the land swap proposals that I understand have been made today by Forest Enterprise? Those proposals would involve exchanging several woods in North Yorkshire, which Forest Enterprise currently owns, for Hagg wood and Bishops wood.

**Mr. Bell:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has indicated to me that an offer has been made today. That is interesting news for the commissioners and I assure my hon. Friend that it will be given careful consideration.

### Churchwardens Measure

29. **Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): For what reasons he has brought forward the Churchwardens Measure. [158168]

**Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners):** Following synodical approval and the report of the Ecclesiastical Committee, the Churchwardens Measure was passed by this House on 20 March this year, was found acceptable in the other place, and received the Royal Assent on 10 April.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that answer. He will be aware that

clause 9 of that Church Measure gives the bishops the powers to remove a churchwarden without any right of appeal. He will also be aware that it is a fundamental tenet of British law that someone is innocent until proven guilty. I have recently had a constituency case in which a headteacher was accused of sexual harassment by a young child. He went through many months of absolute torment, including seeing his picture on the front page of many newspapers and having his reputation completely ruined. Will the hon. Gentleman make representations to the Church Commissioners, and thence to the bishops, to use the power to remove only in exceptional circumstances?

**Mr. Bell:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. If I may remind the House, the Measure provides a comprehensive set of rules about the appointment of churchwardens and their tenure of office, building on previous legislation. Most of the Measure has caused no controversy and the draft provisions about which the Ecclesiastical Committee expressed concern related to the possible suspension of a churchwarden from exercising his or her duties. They were deleted by the General Synod and form no part of the Measure, which has become law.

In respect of the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers, the Ecclesiastical Committee expressed severe concern along such lines. It is to be hoped that any innocent person who stands accused might not be covered by the Measure.

**Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): Is not it a fact that that issue was debated in the Chamber, as my hon. Friend said, and that very few Members chose to take part? The Measure was agreed to without a Division although, as he rightly pointed out, that particular provision was of concern to the Ecclesiastical Committee. However, it was quite properly withdrawn by the Synod after representations were made by the Committee and after all the normal procedures had been followed during consideration of the Measure.

**Mr. Bell:** My hon. Friend is a member of the Ecclesiastical Committee and he played a full part in those discussions during which Members of the House, in the interests of their constituents, and of the other place expressed valid views that were considered by the Synod and accepted.

## Church Land (Rents)

31. **Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What variations have recently been made in rents of church lands. [158170]

**Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners):** Recent farm rent reviews on the Commissioners' agricultural estates have resulted in reductions in the order of 12 per cent., while the average reduction in rents during 2000 was 15 per cent.

**Mr. Flynn:** The Church Commissioners are to be congratulated on being fair and generous to their tenants who are in farming. It seems likely that many tenants will leave farming at the end of the foot and mouth outbreak. Do the commissioners have a policy to encourage the use of their land for non-farming or non-traditional farming purposes such as growing products for fuel, coppicing and so on, which would be better for the environment and, as such usage would be more profitable, better for the Church Commissioners?

**Mr. Bell:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I remind the House that he asked me the opening question at my first Church Commissioners Question Time four years ago and, if we have any luck, he might have asked the last in this Parliament.

The commissioners are fully alert to the crisis in farming, especially the problems caused by foot and mouth disease, and, where there is hardship, will consider how best to help. That is done case by case and tenants are encouraged to discuss their difficulties with agents or staff. There may be examples in which agricultural land is no longer tenanted as farms and the points that my hon. Friend made will be taken into consideration should such cases arise.

## Tourism

32. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): What role the Church Commissioners have in encouraging tourists to visit ecclesiastical buildings. [158171]

**Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners):** The commissioners' primary role is to manage their assets to support the Church of England's ministry, including the provision of clergy stipends and pensions.

**Sir Sydney Chapman:** I am sure that the Second Church Estates Commissioner recognises that, at this time, it is the duty of us all to encourage tourism so that it returns to its pre-foot and mouth level. Does he agree that the Church Commissioners have a great opportunity to encourage tourists to visit our cathedrals and churches, which, on any account, are part of our glorious architectural heritage? Those buildings should be seen by many more people, not only from outside, but from the inside.

**Mr. Bell:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. As he may know, the Church Commissioners have limited direct involvement with ecclesiastical buildings or tourism. However, he will be happy to hear that most diocese have a diocesan tourism officer and participate in the National Churches Tourism Group, which is an ecumenical body. Cathedral tourism is supported by the Pilgrims Association.

The Church Commissioners are happy to assist in terms of giving moral support to those bodies, which seek to raise awareness in local churches of the opportunities provided through tourism. Given the outbreak of foot and mouth, we hope that all those efforts will surmount the reluctance to visit the countryside, which is felt by many people.

## Churches Conservation Trust

33. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): If he will make a statement on his support for the work of the Churches Conservation Trust. [158172]

**Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners):** The Churches Conservation Trust, jointly financed by Church and public funds, was set up by statute in 1969 to preserve

"in the interests of the nation and the Church of England"

redundant churches of historic, architectural or archaeological quality for which no suitable alternative use can be found. More than 320 such churches now vest in the trust.

**Mr. Bercow:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his characteristically informative reply. Since 1 May 1997, how many churches that otherwise would have been doomed have been conserved as a result of the work of the trust? What representations has he received about the aesthetic merit or demerit of that work, and will he offer us an insight as to the extent of the turnover of the leadership of the trust?

**Mr. Bell:** I am grateful for three questions rather than one and for your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, at this time of the Parliament. I shall be happy to write to the hon. Gentleman, giving answers on all three points. He might, however, be pleased to know that, since 1989, the Government have provided 70 per cent. of the trust's budget and the Church has provided 30 per cent. For the period 2002–03, the commissioners will provide up to £3.8 million, partly from sales proceeds from redundant churches and partly by grants from their own funds.

## Points of Order

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I have had notice of a point of order from the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt).

**Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for this opportunity to raise a point of order of which I have given you prior notice. You and hon. Members will have seen with concern the report in *The Sunday Times* yesterday which unequivocally states:

"Sinn Fein MPs returned at the general election will be given offices and other facilities in Westminster even though they refused to swear allegiance to the Queen and take their seats in parliament.

The concession has been agreed by the Speaker, Michael Martin, after consultation with Tony Blair, according to a Westminster source."

Could you make it clear that this report in *The Sunday Times* is on a par with the other journalistic reports that we have come to expect from News International?

**Mr. Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the point of order, which gives me the opportunity to tell the House that there is no truth whatever in the suggestion that I have agreed to give Sinn Fein Members offices and other facilities at Westminster. The position remains as stated by my predeeessor. Members who choose not to take their seats by swearing the Oath required under the Parliamentary Oaths Act 1866 are not entitled to have access to the facilities of the House. If the Government wished to change that position in the case of particular Members, it would be for Ministers to table a motion to that effect for debate and decision by this House.

I think that I am entitled to express my extreme anger and disappointment that, on such a sensitive issue, *The Sunday Times* chose to publish untrue allegations without waiting to discuss the position with me.

**Mr. James Plaskitt** (Warwick and Leamington): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that some Conservative Members are proposing a reduction in the tax on spread betting which would save the company IG Index £1 million a year. Given that it has donated £5 million to the Conservative party, can you rule on what procedures should apply to declarations of interest in this case?

**Mr. Speaker:** I understand that this issue is being considered in a Committee and it is up to the Committee and its members to decide how they wish to deal with declarations of interest. If the hon. Gentleman has any worries, he can take them up with the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

**Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Was it in order for proper declarations on that matter to be made in the Finance Bill Committee last Thursday when the issue was raised?

**Mr. Speaker:** Obviously, I was not present in the Committee, but if declarations were made, they must have been in order. The Chairman would not have allowed it to be otherwise.

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you invite the hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Plaskitt) to withdraw his remark? He alleged that an organisation had given money when, in fact, it was a private individual.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Mr. Plaskitt) raised a point of order and I have dealt with the matter.

**Mr. Ian Bruce** (South Dorset): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wonder whether you have had any notice on whether the Government are withdrawing their tobacco advertising legislation. Anyone watching the television at the weekend will have been surprised to see the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport attending the Silk Cut challenge trophy and being presented to, and shaking hands with, the sponsors. As hon. Members well know, short meetings with such sponsors often lead to complete changes in Government policy, so before the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill leaves the Lords, I wonder whether we shall have a chance to reflect on the fact that the Government seem to want to support that type of tobacco sponsorship and advertising by their own presence at such an event.

**Mr. Speaker:** That is not a matter for me.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. At the weekend, a report was published of a meeting on the control of foot and mouth disease that took place on 20 April at the Institute for Animal Health, which was heavily critical of the Government. You may know that, as of today, there have been 1,511 cases of foot and mouth disease, but the Government's current policy has resulted in there being more than 6,298 premises where animals have been or will be slaughtered. Given the recent announcements regarding Phoenix the calf and Porky the pig, it would be helpful to know what the Government's principles are in relation to their culling policy and whether it is being driven by headlines or science. I wonder whether any Minister has made an approach to you about the statement made at the Institute for Animal Health at the weekend.

**Mr. Speaker:** I can put the hon. Gentleman at ease; there has been no such approach to me.

# Orders of the Day

## Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill

*Order for Second Reading read.*

3.37 pm

**The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Ms Hilary Armstrong):** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

This Bill introduces two important measures. We are introducing the Bill in the belief that it will encourage farm diversification and give help to rural communities. It fulfils commitments made last year in the action plan for farming and in the rural White Paper, which was published in the autumn of last year. It will also provide some long-term help for businesses inevitably affected by foot and mouth disease.

The rural White Paper set out a comprehensive plan of action to improve the quality of life and increase opportunities for rural communities. It is important to ensure that rural economies are able to establish themselves on a sustainable footing. However, I know, perhaps as well as any hon. Member in the Chamber today, that the effects of the foot and mouth outbreak have been, and continue to be, very serious for farmers, the wider rural economy and, of course, the communities that rely on the rural economy.

The first priority is, of course, to eradicate the disease, but the Government are equally committed to helping the farmers and other businesses affected. We have already committed in excess of £500 million in aid to farmers and more than £200 million of other help for the rural economy more broadly. That includes hardship rate relief, deferment of rates payments, temporary reductions in rateable values and the deferral of the rate appeals deadline. We are also deferring tax and national insurance payments for affected businesses and providing help through the Small Business Service, the small firms loan guarantee scheme and the regional development agencies.

The measures contained in the Bill are designed to help farmers and small businesses that provide key services to local communities. They arise from the local government finance Green Paper, the rural White Paper and the action plan for farming. We have taken forward many of the other initiatives and measures in those documents. The changes to the rating system are part of a wider package to support farming and the countryside, so the Bill should not be seen in isolation. Indeed, earlier this month, the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) and I—along with other hon. Members—formed part of a Committee which considered other rating reliefs.

Clauses 1 and 2 will provide rate relief for small enterprises that are newly established in former agricultural premises. That will include cases where the farmer lets or sells the property to a third party. Of course, farms themselves are already fully exempt from non-domestic rates but, as soon as any part of a farm is used for anything other than agriculture, the business has to pay rates on it.

**Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): In the part of the Bill to which the right hon. Lady refers, will she enlighten me as to why the period of 183 days was specifically chosen rather than any other?

**Ms Armstrong:** I am sorry to say that I do not know that; I shall come back to the right hon. Gentleman on that point later in the debate. I am sure that he will get the chance to speak and I shall be able to intervene then.

When farmers seek to diversify, they face an additional cost through the imposition of rates on a property that was previously rate free. We want to remove that barrier to diversification—*[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) want to intervene? He was talking, so I assumed that he wanted to intervene, but obviously he does not.

We have consulted on our proposals to remove that barrier, and the proposals in this Bill reflect those consultations. The relief will be on similar terms to that which already applies for village shops. There will be 50 per cent. mandatory relief paid for by the Government, which local authorities will be able to increase to 100 per cent. It will be limited to properties below a certain rateable value. We intend to set it initially at £6,000. That will be reviewed at subsequent national revaluations to ensure that the amount keeps in line with general changes in rateable values. For a property of such size, the mandatory relief will be worth £1,290 in 2001–02; and 100 per cent. relief would be worth £2,580.

**Mr. David Curry** (Skipton and Ripon): The question of the rateable values at which those reliefs apply is important. The right hon. Lady will know that for the 75 per cent. relief, a rateable value of £12,000 has been applied. I have failed to discover the logic for that amount. The right hon. Lady now mentions £6,000. Has she calculated the number of properties that will be affected? What are the differences for the properties that fall just over that margin? It is sometimes difficult to understand the logic behind emergency rate relief—or indeed where the real differences exist between the properties that fall on either side of the limit.

**Ms Armstrong:** If the right hon. Gentleman has had a look at the Committee debates on exceptional hardship relief in business rates, he will know that we set the limit at £12,000 for two reasons. The first is that the burden of rates on small businesses is much higher proportionately than for larger businesses. In fact, 77 per cent. of small companies come within the £12,000 limit. We made it clear in Committee—the matter is not part of the Bill—that we would keep that level under review, as indeed we are keeping under review the number of authorities that are eligible for that rating.

**Mr. Curry:** I understand what the right hon. Lady is saying, but does she accept that businesses with rateable values of between £12,000 and £20,000, such as larger rural pubs, might be desperately trying to hold on to employees in the current circumstances? They are sometimes harder hit than smaller businesses and cannot meet the wages bill that they face for a significant number

of part-time, and perhaps a smaller number of full-time, employees when their cash and customers have ceased to exist.

**Ms Armstrong:** When the Local Government Association raised that matter with us, we asked it to go back to local authorities to determine the weight of the concern. The right hon. Gentleman knows that we have consistently said that we will keep the matter under review, and we are serious about that. However, it is obviously important that we get the balance right. We must consider the fact that there are some companies that might not have survived, even without foot and mouth. We must ensure that public money is used effectively. At the same time, we want to act as sensitively and responsively as possible. That is why we asked the LGA to consult local authorities. We have not had a full response and it is difficult to determine the effect around the country. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman has talked to his local authority about the problem; I have talked to mine and know what balance is needed there.

It is also true that larger businesses might be eligible for a reduction in their rateable value. The Valuation Office has agreed to review as a matter of urgency the rateable value of companies that think that they should have a reduction because of foot and mouth. In many areas, that is the first step that larger firms take and it might be the most sensible approach. We are clear that arrangements might need to change, and will ensure that we return to them if necessary.

**Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

**Ms Armstrong:** I have not finished responding to the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), but I shall let the hon. Gentleman intervene.

**Mr. Evans:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way; I did not appreciate that she was still responding to the previous question.

Page 3 of the Bill sets out exemptions, including catering both on and off the premises. Why is that exempted from the rate reductions? It means that former agricultural premises that want to open tea rooms will not qualify.

**Ms Armstrong:** The hon. Gentleman will remember that we discussed exemptions from business rates when we debated previous legislation in the House. The issue as it relates to shops was fully covered and the decision was taken to include general stores. Since then, we have extended the relief. In the secondary legislation that was discussed in Committee about three weeks ago pubs and garages were included in the exemption. The relief that we are discussing today requires primary legislation; otherwise we would have taken the opportunity to include it in that secondary legislation. We are now extending the exemption to stores that predominantly provide food. That means that if a small village has a butcher's shop as well as a general store or a baker's shop, both shops will get relief. The hon. Gentleman raises a separate issue, but as the relief has already been extended to pubs, I think that the point is covered.

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): I apologise if my right hon. Friend has already spelt out this point. Some farm shops have logically expanded into catering for people who come on a trip to the countryside. Am I to take it that they will be included in the exemption?

**Ms Armstrong:** My hon. Friend raises another issue, which is whether shops that have already diversified will benefit from the relief. We are unable to backdate provisions sufficiently to deal with such premises, so I am afraid that they will not, unless they were set up within the past six months.

If the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) was thinking of tea shops, as opposed to pubs, the answer to his question is difficult because tea shops are not essential. *[Interruption.]* We had to decide what was essential. Local authorities can decide to give relief to small businesses such as tea shops if there has been significant hardship, but we have been trying to identify services that are regarded as essential by people in rural areas. On that basis, we have extended the rate relief significantly, but not as far as the hon. Gentleman would have liked.

**Mr. Damian Green** (Ashford): I am slightly more confused than I was before the Minister embarked on that explanation. Where in the Bill or the explanatory notes is there a reference to businesses set up in the previous six months? In response to an intervention by the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), the Minister said that they might be eligible for the relief, but it is not at all clear to me that that is the case.

**Ms Armstrong:** As we go through the Bill, the hon. Gentleman will realise that that is because of the number of days in a year in which a business is able to be operative, a point to which the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) referred.

**Mr. James Paice** (South-East Cambridgeshire): The Minister is now saying that this is retrospective legislation that applies to any business set up in the past 183 days, the past six months. Will she clarify the matter? Will the concessions apply to businesses that exist as of today, or only to businesses that come into existence after the Bill is enacted?

**Ms Armstrong:** We will be able to set the commencement date. If a business was set up in the previous six months and operates within the terms of the Bill, it will be eligible for the relief relating to farm diversification.

Earlier, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon asked how many farms we expected to benefit from the measure. It is difficult to make an estimate, but if about 5 per cent. of farms in England set up a new diversification enterprise that qualifies for relief, more than 7,000 properties could benefit. If 20 per cent. of farms set up a new enterprise, about 30,000 properties would benefit.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In answer to a previous question, the right hon. Lady said that it was hard to tell the effect of a provision. If a Minister is saying that it is hard to tell the effect of a clause in a Bill that she has introduced,

*[Mr. Michael Fabricant]*

the public will find it even harder. Mr. Speaker, do you believe that this is an opportunity for the Minister to clarify what she meant?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Those are matters for debate and are nothing to do with the Chair.

**Ms Armstrong:** If the hon. Member for Lichfield had been listening, he would have heard the explanation. Tea shops are not necessarily seen as essential to the local community, so would not automatically qualify for relief under the Bill. However, if the local authority thought that a certain tea shop qualified for hardship relief, it could get relief under existing rate relief exemptions. If a shop selling food to villagers had a subsidiary business serving coffee at two or three tables on the premises, it would obviously qualify, as the food shop was the main business. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is content with that answer.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Ms Armstrong:** Before giving way, I want answer the question asked by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon, as I have not yet been able to do so. He asked how many businesses would benefit and I gave the number of farms and food shops that will benefit. Precise figures are not available, but we estimate that there are about 3,000 food shops in rural parishes with populations below 3,000.

**Mr. Curry:** I am grateful for the right hon. Lady's tolerance; we are seeking to clarify matters in this debate, not necessarily to dispute them. She talked about contributions to the local community and their importance. Is a facility important because it offers a service to local people or because its economic impact is achieved by attracting and servicing visitors?

**Ms Armstrong:** As a Minister, the right hon. Gentleman introduced the original legislation, and I remember having similar debates with him then. He will therefore know that that is a matter for judgment and has been the subject of serious debate over the years. The number of such facilities has now expanded and I do not want to say that either route is right for a particular village. In some villages, the service provided is important. The intent of the Bill and of the legislation in general is to make sure that communities in rural areas are sustainable in the long term, which is why we must also take account of their tourism potential, their visitors and the service that they get. I therefore talked about other hardship relief for which such businesses may qualify.

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, and as he mentioned earlier, there has been an increase of up to 95 per cent. in the hardship relief that the Government are giving to premises such tea shops. That is why it is difficult to say that such businesses will not be eligible for rate relief; many will be, if not directly under the Bill. That is the point that I was seeking to make earlier.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving way, and I draw attention to my declaration in the Register of Members' Interests. The right hon. Lady will be aware that I have written to her right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment about Stroud district council's rate relief, and the fact that the council cannot recover part of the 75 per cent. rate relief from the non-domestic rate pool. Three weeks ago, that amounted to some £250,000 and many hundreds of applications. Can the right hon. Lady tell us whether the Bill will impose an extra burden on local authorities that cannot reclaim the full amount of rate relief given under the terms of the Bill? If so, it will impose a general burden on all council tax payers in a local authority area.

**Ms Armstrong:** We agreed in Committee—of which the hon. Gentleman was a member—that councils would not have to pay over their non-domestic rate now and claim it back, so the problem to which he alludes should not arise. They will have to do so eventually, but that will be dealt with at the time. We agreed in Committee that it was right for councils to make some contribution to the hardship relief.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** The right hon. Lady says that councils should make some contribution to the hardship relief. Is she saying that the same applies under the Bill? If so, can she say what the total amount will be that local authorities cannot reclaim under the Bill?

**Ms Armstrong:** The Bill will enable businesses to claim 50 per cent. rate relief, not 100 per cent. The 100 per cent. relates to hardship relief. The local authority has the discretion to raise the relief to 100 per cent., but the mandatory level of relief that will be funded by the Government is 50 per cent.

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): I am grateful to the Minister of State for giving way. Given that clause 4 declares that the power to make further orders under the Local Government Finance Act 1988 is unaffected, can the right hon. Lady tell the House whether any such orders would be subject to the House's negative procedure or its affirmative procedure?

**Ms Armstrong:** The hon. Gentleman should know that we have dealt with orders in the past few weeks: we discussed them in Committee. I am sorry that he was not a member of the Committee.

**Mr. Bercow:** Negative or affirmative?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order.

**Ms Armstrong:** I am trying to be helpful. I assure the hon. Gentleman that orders will be made under the negative procedure. That was agreed when the Government whom he supported passed the original legislation. We discussed such orders upstairs. We made it clear that should evidence emerge that the support was insufficient, we would be happy to return to the matter within the three-month period to which the orders relate.

**Mr. Fabricant:** I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for her generosity in giving way. She may inadvertently have misled the House when she answered the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow). She said that the previous Administration had decided the provisions to which clause 4 refers.

However, as clause 4 deals with the functions of the National Assembly for Wales, and devolution was effected under the present Government, how on earth could that have been possible?

**Ms Armstrong:** I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. The Bill as a whole affects the whole of England and Wales, as does the 1988 Act. Orders made under that Act will also affect England and Wales. The National Assembly is responsible for implementing the provisions that affect Wales, but we in the House are responsible for the Bill overall. I hope that that helps the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): Will the Minister help the whole House by spelling out the reason why there is a need for primary legislation in respect of agricultural premises and premises used for the supply of food, but not hot food, while public houses and other shops can be dealt with in secondary legislation? That is crucial to our understanding of why the Bill is being introduced.

**Ms Armstrong:** The hon. Gentleman should return to the Local Government Finance Act 1988. As that Act defines the nature of shops, we must introduce primary legislation to change the definition of eligible shops.

**Mr. Evans:** On clause 4—I know that this provision has always been a bit of a problem for the Labour party, but then so has clause 3—what discretion will the National Assembly for Wales have once the Bill is enacted? Will it be able to vary its application in any way?

**Ms Armstrong:** On the interpretation of the Bill in Wales, I have already said that Wales is responsible for specific rating issues. It must, however, act within the terms of the overall legislation. In that respect, subsequent orders are up to the Welsh Assembly.

The relief will operate on terms similar to those which already apply for village shops. Mandatory relief of 50 per cent. will be paid by the Government, and local authorities can use their discretion to increase that to 100 per cent. The relief will be limited to properties of below a certain rateable value, which we intend to set initially at £6,000. That will be reviewed at subsequent national revaluations to ensure that it keeps in line with general changes in rateable values. For a property of that size, the mandatory relief will be worth £1,290 in 2001–02, and 100 per cent. relief would be worth £2,580.

The scheme will initially run for five years, but we will keep it under review and extend it if necessary. If it were to be extended, however, businesses would be limited to receiving relief for five years after they diversified, because its purpose is to help farmers to diversify, rather than to provide a long-term subsidy.

I should make clear how the Bill impacts on some forms of farm diversification that already qualify for rate relief—an issue that was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). The premises of small-scale bed-and-breakfast businesses and similar businesses are treated as domestic rather than non-domestic properties. Thus, under the current system, they are liable for council tax, which tends to be lower than business rates. That applies to bed-and-breakfast businesses with no more than six beds in a property where the proprietor also lives, and to self-catering accommodation that is available for letting for no more than 140 days a year. The new scheme extends rate relief to agricultural premises that are converted to those uses on a larger scale and therefore do not qualify for the existing rating exemption.

A rating concession is already given to stud farms that are situated on agricultural land. Such farms currently receive a flat-rate reduction in their rateable value of £2,500, which amounts to a reduction of £1,075 from their bills for 2001–02. For the smallest stud farms, the concession amounts to a complete exemption from rates. The scheme is not time limited.

**Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): Will the Minister explain why that relief is given to stud farms, but not to farmers who diversify into breeding horses on ordinary agricultural farms?

**Ms Armstrong:** That is one of the decisions taken when the legislation on stud farms was introduced. The Bill goes some way towards dealing with that anomaly. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will say that it does not go far enough, but if he bears with me I shall explain how new stud farms will fare following this Bill.

Because of the existing concession, new stud farms will not receive the mandatory farm diversification relief. However, we shall increase the stud farm concession to a £3,000 reduction in rateable value, worth £1,290 in 2001–02. That is the same as the maximum mandatory relief under the farm diversification scheme. Thus so long as it is on farm premises, either a stud farm or a horse enterprise of the sort that the hon. Gentleman mentioned will be eligible for the same amount of mandatory relief.

Clauses 3 and 4 of the Bill relate to village shops. Local shops provide an essential service for rural communities. In 1998, we implemented the village shop rate relief scheme, which provides 50 per cent. mandatory rate relief to small general stores and post offices where they are the only such outlets in villages with populations below 3,000. In addition, local authorities can give discretionary relief of up to 100 per cent. to those and other small businesses.

In last year's local government finance Green Paper, we consulted on a proposal to extend the mandatory rate relief to other food shops, pubs and petrol stations. Earlier this month, we extended mandatory rate relief to the sole pub or petrol station in small villages, with effect from 5 April 2001.

The Bill will do the same for small food shops in those villages. At the moment, where there is one general store selling food it gets mandatory rate relief, but where there are two, for example a grocer and a butcher, neither is eligible for mandatory relief. We recognise that separate butchers, bakers and grocers provide the same service to a village as a general store that provides a wider range of foods. I am sure that those of us who live in and represent rural areas want to ensure that local butchers, bakers and grocers can survive. The Bill extends mandatory relief to all village shops that mainly sell food for human consumption. Shops that sell other goods or services, secondary to their food sales, will also be eligible for the mandatory relief.

Relief will be given on the same terms as the existing scheme for general stores and post offices. It will be limited to properties with a rateable value of less than

*[Ms Armstrong]*

£6,000. Local authorities will have the discretion to top up the 50 per cent. mandatory relief to 100 per cent. where they feel that it is needed. They will also retain the discretion to give rate relief to any village business with a rateable value up to £12,000.

Those measures should not be seen in isolation. We are implementing other rural White Paper measures to help village shops. For instance, the new community service fund will mean that the Countryside Agency can offer more support to keep village shops viable. It will also help communities to re-establish a shop where it has closed.

I should make it clear that the Bill amends the main rating legislation, the Local Government Finance Act 1988. It therefore extends to England and Wales. The new order-making powers will be exercisable in Wales by the National Assembly, including setting rateable value thresholds, commencement and possible extension of the farm diversification scheme.

**Mr. Gray:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again. Before she winds up her speech, could she focus her mind on the word "hereditaments" in the title of the Bill? Am I right in understanding that that means any property that can be inherited, and therefore any property that is owned, which would exclude, for example, farms that convert a building and rent it out? If that is the case, does the hon. Lady intend the word to mean corporeal hereditaments or incorporeal hereditaments?

**Ms Armstrong:** I can confirm that the Bill will apply to any premises which used to be used for farming and which will now be used for other purposes, whether the premises are rented out; whether the farmer still lives on and runs the farm but rents out a part of it to someone else; whether the farmer himself uses the premises; and whether the farmer is a tenant or an owner. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman's question.

I shall deal with the issue of the 183 days. We wanted to ensure that the premises were in agricultural use for at least half the preceding year, but we did not want to exclude premises that were not used for agriculture, seasonally, for a smaller part of the year. That is why the period of 183 days was chosen.

**Mr. Evans:** The Minister said that it would be up to the National Assembly to bring the order into play in Wales. Will she tell the House what assessment she has made of the cost to the Assembly of implementing the provisions? Will she give the House an assurance that that money will be forthcoming from the Exchequer to support the National Assembly?

**Ms Armstrong:** I have already explained that it is very difficult to estimate those costs. It will be up to the National Assembly to budget the amount that it will allow for this within its overall budget. For example, the Assembly has decided on totally different amounts for the rate relief that we announced some weeks ago, and it has done that within its budget. It is up to the Assembly to do that. That is why it has set an overall limit on the amount that it is prepared to give in hardship relief. My measures for England do not set such an overall limit. That is one reason why we went for a lower rateable value than Wales. It is up to each of the Administrations to set those amounts for themselves within their overall budgets. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman does not want me to go into the intricacies of how the Barnett formula allocates money to Wales as opposed to England and Scotland.

**Mr. David Heath:** I want to return the right hon. Lady to the point that I raised earlier, because I still have not had an answer to my question. When the order was introduced to extend relief to public houses and petrol filling stations, it was done by an amendment, by order, to section 43(6A) and (6B) of the Local Government Finance Act 1988. The right hon. Lady is now saying that she needs to amend subsection (6C), to apply the provision to qualifying food stores. She defines those stores separately despite the fact that qualifying general stores are already covered by the Act. Will she explain the legal necessity for that? It is not apparent to me or, I suspect, to a great number of other people.

**Ms Armstrong:** It was not very apparent to me, either. However, as a Minister, if one does not take the advice of the lawyers and parliamentary counsel at this stage, one can end up in deep trouble. Whatever the means of achieving this, we wanted to make sure that we could do so without being challenged. This was the most effective way of ensuring that we would not be challenged. The legal advice was very clear that the provisions relating to shops had to be achieved through primary legislation and that we could not achieve that in the same way as we did with pubs and garages—so it may be mystifying to us all. Lawyers will always have their day. My main concern is that rural communities can benefit from the measures. By whatever means, therefore, I was prepared to do the additional work to ensure that we could introduce the Bill without concern that the provisions would be challenged.

**Mr. Curry:** Are small firms of rural lawyers eligible for rate relief?

**Ms Armstrong:** I think that they might have great difficulty in demonstrating that they were undergoing hardship at the moment.

To sum up, the two measures in the Bill will provide welcome financial assistance to rural businesses. The Bill will help to reduce costs for farmers who wish to diversify into non-agricultural activities. It will also provide support to village food shops. It will be helpful as part—I recognise that it will be only part—of the long-term recovery from the problems caused by foot and mouth disease. I commend the Bill to the House.

4.20 pm

**Mr. Damian Green** (Ashford): At the beginning of the Minister's illuminating and helpful speech, she said that the Bill was important. She was right, and it is therefore right to put on record the fact that precisely two Labour Back Benchers were present to listen to the whole speech—less than 0.5 per cent. of the parliamentary Labour party. One of those two hon. Members was elected a Conservative—I welcome the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) to his place. That is a stark illustration of the Government's commitment to the countryside in the middle of the current crisis.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** The hon. Gentleman might be using an interesting form of arithmetic that I have not

discovered, but at least three or four Labour Members were present. Some of us make up for more than one person.

**Mr. Green:** I was going to make the point that although the quantity of Government Back Benchers was lamentable, the quality was extremely high. The hon. Lady makes a significant contribution to the quality. I emphasised that only two Labour Members were present throughout the Minister's opening speech: the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and the hon. Member for Leominster.

The Minister introduces the Bill at a time when the economic condition of the British countryside is unprecedentedly bleak. We are considering a few small but welcome measures to help farmers and other rural businesses. Although we welcome the Government's gesture, it is vital to put it in perspective. The crisis threatens to engulf not only agriculture but many other sectors of rural life in Britain today.

Hon. Members know from the Minister's speech that the provisions arise from the crisis that hit agriculture before the devastating blow of foot and mouth. A little more than a year ago, the Prime Minister presented an action plan for farming, to which the right hon. Lady referred. He stated in it that he intended to introduce proposals that would help

"chart a way out of the current crisis in farming."

Thirteen months after that action plan was produced, things are getting worse faster. Conservative Members therefore believe that the Bill will be useful, but only at the margins of the crisis.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Would not it emphasise my hon. Friend's valuable point if he made it clear to hon. Members and the public that farm incomes have fallen by 72 per cent. since their peak in 1995, and that they doubled between 1990 and 1995? Does not that illustrate the difficulties that farmers faced even before the onset of foot and mouth disease?

**Mr. Green:** My hon. Friend is right. The accountants Deloitte & Touche published an analysis of farm incomes last October, before the outbreak of foot and mouth. I shall illustrate my hon. Friend's point with the stark figures. An average-sized farm of 500 acres, which earned £80,000 in the mid 1990s, earned only £8,000 in 2000. Almost no other business sector has suffered so much in the past few years. Deloitte & Touche also estimated that in 2001, such a farm would incur losses of £4,000.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) mentioned the five-year figures. In 2000, total income from farming fell by 27 per cent., with the consequences that we have witnessed. That is why the crisis is spreading throughout rural businesses. The National Farmers Union estimates that 47,400 farmers and farm workers left the industry in England and Wales in the past two years. Even before that, the industry shed almost 20,000 jobs between June 1998 and 1999.

Inevitably, the position has worsened since because of foot and mouth. A survey shows that more than a third of the farmers hit by the disease plan to scale down their businesses. Part of the problem is that the crisis is all-embracing in farming: the fall in farmgate prices and incomes is affecting every sector of the industry.

**Mr. Bercow:** Given the visceral hostility of most Labour Members to farmers, and their habitual tendency to depict British farmers as the unwarranted beneficiaries of public funds, would my hon. Friend care to re-emphasise the fact that thousands of pig farmers who might benefit modestly from the Bill—I stress the word "modestly"—receive absolutely nothing from public funds, and that 24,000 have gone out of business over the past three years?

**Mr. Green:** My hon. Friend makes his point eloquently. He is right: although some sectors of agriculture are subsidised, others are barely subsidised at all or, indeed, unsubsidised. The crisis in agriculture is all-embracing, so the unsubsidised as well as the subsidised are being hit.

Even more important, however, is the fact that the current crisis is spreading far beyond agriculture. It is affecting all the essential services that provide the lifeblood of local communities. We welcome the fact that the Bill recognises that by including provisions for village shops. The daily customers of many such shops are precisely those whose family incomes are being hit hard, which will be a severe additional problem for businesses that are already in crisis.

In many areas, village shops normally rely for survival on another great source of income—visiting tourists. Again, the effects of foot and mouth will be targeted on the shops that can least afford them. Whatever overall drop in tourist numbers is taking place—and there can be debate about that—urban destinations will probably be hit less hard than rural destinations. Trips to country areas, whether by British or by overseas tourists, are most likely to be cancelled. The summer uplift on which many village shops rely will be less this year than ever before. The Countryside Agency has estimated that rural tourism losses will rise to £2 billion, and I am happy to accept that figure: it comes from a Government agency. I am sure the Minister will recognise that, whatever percentage of that £2 billion loss falls on village shops, the help that the Bill will give them should be judged in the context of the sheer size of the losses that they face. The House should consider this Bill in the context of a terrible overall crisis.

The Bill gives rise to a number of issues, not least the amount by which diversification can help farmers, and the effects on farms and shops. We shall want to make some proposals of our own. At the outset, however, let me urge the Government to consider whether their actions, including the Bill, are adequate to deal with a crisis of this scale. For many businesses in the countryside, these measures are not enough. To thousands of people who are struggling to hold on to their livelihoods, the Government seem to be offering an umbrella in a hurricane. The rural taskforce is meant to be coming up with wide-ranging solutions, but the Minister for the Environment has produced nothing new since he made what he described as a preliminary announcement fully six weeks ago.

Perhaps the Government would command more respect in the countryside if we were discussing a comprehensive package of measures to help rural businesses; but they have not produced such a package, so instead we must consider the details of what they propose in the Bill.

The first big issue that the Bill raises is the scale of possible diversification and the effect of diversification on preserving the long-term health of British agriculture. I do not think that any hon. Member would deny the

*[Mr. Green]*

importance of diversification for farmers. Nevertheless, I hope that Ministers do not believe even for one moment that, in the long run, if it remains unprofitable, farming will be preserved by greater diversification. Ultimately, the long-term economic health of farms depends on farming, not on non-farming activities. Farmers will have the capital to diversify successfully, and to take advantage of the diversification that the Government are seeking to encourage in the Bill, only if the underlying farming business is producing a profit.

Seizing on new opportunities is, of course, a good idea for businesses, but businesses will seldom be able to do so successfully if they act out of a sense of desperation. Currently, desperation is affecting far too many United Kingdom farmers.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Does my hon. Friend agree that speculation on the very future of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is causing considerable concern in the farming community? Does he also agree that many farmers believe that their function in life is not to serve as mere stewards of the countryside or as "park rangers", as some farmers have described it? Do not those facts support his point that farmers wish to remain as farmers, and that although diversification can help farming, diversification should not be used simply as a means to an end?

**Mr. Green:** I agree with my hon. Friend that, in shaping the control of farming, and by its very nature, diversification must remain essentially a side issue. As for his point on farmers wanting to be farmers, the key fact is that the English countryside—the environment that many of us love so much—is so attractive precisely because it has been farmed for hundreds of years. Our countryside has not grown up naturally. If farming declined, the countryside would not return to a more desirable state of nature; it would become environmentally worse.

Too often, if diversification is undertaken for the wrong reasons, the wrong type of diversification emerges—that fact has long been known. As long ago as 1987, David Richardson—who is one of the more insightful commentators on agriculture, and currently writes for *Farmers Weekly*—wrote that farm diversification tends to attract publicity out of proportion to its potential. He said that many ideas

"enjoy a brief period of intense interest and high profits for their originators before the necessarily limited new markets become oversupplied. All over Britain there is a scattering of failed worm farmers; deserted pick-your-own fields; empty farm house holiday bedrooms; and rabbit farms which seemed like a good idea once but proved unprofitable when the animals failed to breed like rabbits are supposed to do."

Quite apart from that salutary warning, the fact is that the amount of help offered in this Bill and in the other measures that the Government have introduced is relatively small compared with the sheer size of the problems facing farming. The Minister acknowledged that when he replied to interventions from my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). Indeed, the Bill's explanatory notes state that farm diversification relief will cost the Exchequer various figures, beginning at £16 million. Although that relief is welcome, it is not sufficient to transform the fortunes of a quickly shrinking industrial sector.

**Mr. Gray:** I am sorry to have to correct my hon. Friend, but, as the £16 million would be provided over five years, the figure could be as low as £3 million annually.

**Mr. Green:** My hon. Friend has caught me out for being generous to the Government. I apologise and assure him that it will not happen again. Even with those caveats, however, there are other important questions. For example, if we accept that farm diversification is desirable, how many diversification projects will be helped by the scheme?

The Countryside Alliance has welcomed the Bill's principles, as do the Opposition, but it has asked some key questions. How many diversification projects will be eligible for the scheme? Is the £6,000 rateable value threshold appropriate? The alliance also rightly says that the rateable value must be realistic if it is to promote diversification, and that, if is not, the Bill will simply be an empty gesture. I am afraid that empty gestures are exactly what the countryside does not need in the current state of crisis.

The Countryside Alliance also made the correct point that the rateable value for similar premises will vary across the country. Indeed, the recent Green Paper on local government finance uses a rateable value of £8,000 to determine a small business. We are entitled to ask, whatever happened to joined-up government if the limit under this Bill is £6,000 and the limit in an extant Green Paper on local government finance for small business is £8,000? As the Minister said, during the foot and mouth crisis relief has been given for premises with a rateable value of up to £12,000.

There appears to be no coherence in the Government's thinking about where the limits should apply. Will the Minister explain the reason for the apparent plethora of limits on rateable value that the Government are scattering around? As we are anxious to ensure that any relief reaches businesses throughout the countryside as fast as possible, we hope that the Government can act quickly to address those concerns.

The Government need to address a number of other worries if this measure is not to be merely an empty gesture. One of the most important, still under the heading of diversification, is that the relief proposed will apply only to farmers and not to third-party occupiers. Many farmers convert or construct buildings to be let to others as light industrial units or storage. If the rate relief were made available to farmers making such conversions and others, it would help not only farmers but the wider economy by providing affordable business premises.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** The hon. Gentleman is very indulgent and I apologise for interrupting him again, but this is an important point. Somewhere along the line, someone must draw a distinction between support to enable people to diversify from farm incomes to something that will continue to make their business viable, and creating an alternative form of development that could lead to problems in the countryside. I sympathise with his point that farmers on occasion want

to rent property, but does he accept that there is a narrow line between farmers diversifying into genuine, agriculturally based and useful businesses and people who seek to create an alternative industrial unit in the middle of the countryside, which could cause considerable problems?

**Mr. Green:** I take the hon. Lady's point about the balance between the environmental need to preserve the beauty of the countryside and to avoid inappropriate development. However, surely that issue can be resolved by planning authorities; it has no necessary relationship with the operation of the business being set up. In theory, a farmer could set up a business that was environmentally inappropriate and someone from outside could set up a business that was entirely appropriate environmentally, providing local employment and other things that the hon. Lady and I regard as desirable.

My point is that there seems to be an arbitrary distinction between which type of business the Government propose to help through the rate relief system. The Bill provides that relief can be allowed only if the business is operated by the farmer. Farmers may be very good at farming but not necessarily at running general businesses, and they may know that someone else could use a building for a better purpose, providing local employment. It seems perverse to deny them that opportunity.

**Mr. Gray:** My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. His understanding of the Bill is, like mine, that only the farmer may benefit from the rate relief proposed. That is why I intervened on the Minister on the rather technical point about the definition of hereditament and corporeal or incorporeal hereditament. Her answer was that the relief would apply irrespective of whether the person claiming it was the farmer or someone renting a building from the farmer. Therefore, if the Minister's words are to be taken at face value—they can, of course, be used in court when these matters come to court—my understanding of the Bill, and that of my hon. Friend, is incorrect.

**Mr. Green:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. That is my reading of the Bill. There is clearly an issue about definition that can perhaps be dealt with in Committee. However, at the very least, this part of the Bill bears further scrutiny and improvement, and I hope that we can achieve that in the coming days and weeks.

One other specific point about diversification relates to the length of time for which the relief will be available, and I am grateful to the National Farmers Union for drawing it to my attention. As I understand the Bill, although I am open to correction by the Minister, the relief will initially be limited to a maximum of five years, which can be extended by order. The relief appears to be available to premises only for a set five-year period from the commencement of the new law. In other words, if a new business was set up in year four and the scheme was not extended, it would benefit from only one year's relief.

**Ms Armstrong:** I discussed that point in my speech, and I made it clear that at this stage the relief will run for five years, but that we will continue to keep the position under review. I also made it clear that even if we extend the five-year period, any individual business will not receive the relief for more than five years, because it is meant to help businesses get going, not to provide unfair competition for other businesses.

**Mr. Green:** I am making a subtly different point. I appreciate that no business will get the relief for more than five years and that the House could decide to extend the scheme, but the point rightly made by the NFU is that if there is a risk that it will not be extended, for whatever reason, those planning a business enterprise would not be able to build the relief into their calculations. That could encourage a rush of applications in the first part of the period in order to gain the maximum definite relief, and a tailing off later as the value of the relief waned. All the history, in agriculture and all other industrial sectors, suggests that grant-driven or rate relief-driven business decisions are likely to be bad business decisions. The more we can clear up the position at this initial stage, the better it will be for farm diversification in the long run.

I have spotted one other puzzling anomaly in the part of the Bill that is designed to encourage diversification, and I hope that the Minister will be able to clear it up. As she knows, we have welcomed the mandatory element of the relief, but some people believe that the discretionary element adds nothing to the existing power under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. Not only are the criteria for the discretion exercised under the Bill exactly the same as in the 1997 Act, but the threshold in the 1997 Act is £12,000, which is twice that proposed in the Bill. The Bill would add nothing to the status quo. Indeed, it is clearly unlawful for the same discretion present in two Acts of Parliament to be exercised in different ways. I can assume only that I have misread the situation or that it is a genuine oversight, and I would be grateful for the Minister's clarification. As it stands, once the Bill is on the statute book, we shall have two contradictory Acts. In fact, the 1997 Act is more generous and useful, and that is puzzling.

**Mr. Evans:** Can my hon. Friend confirm that many local authorities would dearly love to help some of their small rural businesses but simply do not have the cash to do so? If they helped all their small rural businesses by the 50 per cent. discretionary rate, council tax rises would be even higher. In some places, the rises are in double digits, which is way above the rate of inflation.

**Mr. Green:** My hon. Friend is right and he anticipates a point that I intend to make later.

The Minister glories in the fact that the proposals on shops might involve subsidising more than one shop per village. Even more damagingly, some shops could be subsidised at the expense of others. Can the Government bend their mind to the problem whereby one shop in a village would fall just under the limit while another would fall just over it? In such an example, the Government would be providing a subsidy to help one business against a similar competitor.

Have the Government conducted any research to ascertain how common such a situation would be? Where one existed, what would they do about it? It would be perverse if the effect of this attempt to do good for rural

*[Mr. Green]*

businesses made life more difficult for certain shops in rural areas. As the measure stands, we cannot rule out that possibility.

**Ms Candy Atherton** (Falmouth and Camborne): I understand that the hon. Gentleman is in favour of the Bill, but his speech is making me more confused by the minute. Is he in favour or not?

**Mr. Green:** I have already said that I am in favour of any measure that helps small businesses in rural areas during the crisis. Although the Bill is inadequate, it is a step in the right direction and I do not oppose it in principle. However, the hon. Lady has been a Member long enough to understand the process of parliamentary scrutiny, whose purpose is to allow us to welcome the principles of the Bill while referring to a number of genuine practical problems that might make matters worse in a situation such as I am describing, or whose effect could be lessened.

It is the job not only of Parliament and the Opposition but of Government Back Benchers to try to improve Government legislation. I appreciate that that has not been their practice in this Parliament, but I commend to them the Bill, which they will enter the Lobby to support, in order that they will read it.

**Ms Armstrong** *rose—*

**Mr. Green:** Ah! The right hon. Lady has an answer.

**Ms Armstrong:** I simply ask the hon. Gentleman whether he is suggesting that the Government should offer rate relief to businesses such as antique shops. If he reads the list of shops that exist in such villages as we are discussing, he should remember that a population of 3,000 is the key figure. The rateable value of food shops is simply not above the level that we are talking about. The only shops that have a rateable value above that level are antique shops and specialist shops, which are not considered to be essential to the life of the village.

**Mr. Green:** For the Minister's sake, I hope that she is right that there are not a number of shops—largely food shops—that are just above the rateable level. She has put what she believes on the record, but if she is wrong I suspect that her postbag will be extremely large in the months ahead.

**Mr. David Heath** *rose—*

**Mr. Green:** I may be about to be given a counter example.

**Mr. Heath:** I shall not give such an example, but I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, because I agree with the point that he is making. Has he considered the circumstances of two rural settlements, perhaps within a few miles of one another, with populations of 2,999 and 3,001? The food shop of one would be subsidised by the measure and the food shop of the other would not, simply because of the artificial threshold of 3,000 as an absolute figure for a settlement.

**Mr. Green:** That is a good point and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making it. Have the Government consulted on whether some proposals, due to their potentially arbitrary nature, are legal under European Union state aid rules? Are they confident that they are legal?

**Mr. Tony Baldry** (Banbury): Is not the main offence of the Bill that it gives the impression that the Government are doing something for the countryside and for rural England following the foot and mouth disaster when practically nothing is being done? The bottom line is all spin and no substance. Will my hon. Friend make sure that he explains to the House what the Conservative Government will do to help rural shops and rural village post offices? *[Interruption.]* In the coming weeks, it will be extremely helpful for rural England to know exactly what we are offering to it in clear contradistinction to the Government, who are all spin and no substance.

**Mr. Green:** Let me cheer up my hon. Friend and, indeed, the Minister, who was shouting from a sedentary position, by explaining not only our proposals for helping village shops and other businesses under threat from the Government, but where the money would come from. I made the point that these small steps are welcome, but they are inadequate.

The House has spent time dealing with the detailed problems in the Bill, but it is important that we deal with the Bill's sins of omission, namely those provisions that would improve the Bill and that we have urged on the Government. The House will be aware—the Minister certainly is—that a Conservative Government would save money by abolishing the regional development agencies and the regional assemblies that add layers of bureaucracy to political life in this country without providing benefits to rural or urban areas. Some of the money that we would save by doing that would be used for our practical proposals to help businesses in the countryside. We are about substance and not spin, so we would use the money sensibly.

For example, there are just under 10,000 post offices in rural areas. At present, under this Government, they are closing at a rate of nearly two a day. We propose to cut an average of £1,000 from their business rates, with many of the most vulnerable paying no business rates under our proposals. On the specific issue of rural shops, we propose a similar cut of £1,000 in the business rate for a shop serving a particular local community.

The advantage of our proposals—which we will also extend to vulnerable garages and pubs in rural areas—is that the funding will not put any pressure on local authority funding in the way that the Government's proposals do. That point has been made by several Conservative Members, and it is vital because, in many rural areas, small district councils are already under extreme financial pressure. If those councils are to give help to the vulnerable businesses that, I suspect, all Members want to help, they will be under great pressure to cut essential services or increase council tax to unacceptable levels. Our proposals are better for small businesses and for small district councils.

We also have detailed proposals for the equestrian industry, which has so far been very unhappy with the Government's proposals. Several of my hon. Friends speak with passion and great expertise on the subject of the equestrian industry and I am sure that the House will

benefit more from hearing their views than mine. Therefore, I shall restrict myself to saying that that we believe that equestrian buildings should be deemed to be agricultural rather than light industry, and that the next Conservative Government will exempt new and existing equestrian businesses from business rates.

To help farm diversification, we have also suggested slashing the bureaucratic obstacles that make diversification so expensive and difficult for farmers. As the Minister has pointed out, we are all aware of the need to balance environmental protection with the business needs of rural areas. That is why we have proposed much greater devolution of planning decisions to local levels where decisions can be made in the full knowledge of local environmental conditions. In the end, decisions will be taken by the people who have to live with the consequences of them rather than by remote Ministers and bureaucrats in Whitehall. Within that general pattern, we believe that genuinely redundant farm buildings of up to 1,500 sq ft can be allowed to be used for commercial purposes, allowing small-scale non-farming operations.

We also think that it is a shame that the Government are missing a huge opportunity with this Bill. We have made proposals for emergency interest-free loans to relieve the cash flow problems of rural businesses affected by the foot and mouth crisis. By contrast, the Government's proposals under the small firms loan guarantee scheme involve a complex and lengthy application procedure and, even more important, charge interest rates of 8.75 per cent. Small rural businesses affected by cash flow problems simply cannot afford to take on new interest-bearing loans, especially when the interest payable on those loans is higher than the interest that they pay on existing loans from their own banks. Our proposals—which, sadly, the Government have neglected to take up in this Bill—would provide businesses with an essential cushion to get them over the problems of the next few months. It is a terrible wasted opportunity that they have not been included in the Bill.

The Minister will be aware that the Bill does little to tackle some of the unfairnesses that are emerging from the crisis in the countryside. There is unfairness between England and Wales about the size of the ceiling for emergency rate relief—the figure is £12,000 in England, but £50,000 in Wales. There is a potential unfairness built into this Bill between businesses set up more than 12 months ago as farmers tried to diversify and businesses that will be set up under the Bills's provisions. There is unfairness in the discretionary element of the rate relief available, simply because some local authorities will be able to afford it better than others and big authorities will have an advantage over smaller ones.

The Bill is better than nothing, but it is less good than it should be. It offers a small degree of palliative care to some extremely fragile businesses. We will do everything we can, within the bounds of proper parliamentary scrutiny, to ensure that the small amount of relief that it proposes is available to businesses as soon as possible. However, we have proposed a set of measures that would make a real difference to hard-pressed farmers and struggling small businesses in rural areas and provide some hope in the current catastrophe facing the British countryside. I welcome these small steps by the Government, but I urge them to adopt some of our more radical proposals before it is too late.

4.55 pm

**Mr. Peter Temple-Morris** (Leominster): It is a pleasure for me to participate in the debate. Although it is not for me to estimate the exact date of a certain event, I suspect that this speech will be something of a swan-song. Although the Bill is not extensive in itself, it is very much to do with wider rural questions and the wider rural package that the Government have proposed, so it is perhaps fitting that the hon. Member for Leominster—whatever side of the House he might sit on at the present time—should speak in a rural debate.

Indeed, I was flattered that the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), who speaks for the Opposition, should remark on my conscientious presence in the Chamber throughout the Minister's speech. I was here not necessarily as a Labour Member of Parliament, although I am very proud to be such; I was here for my constituency. I have always sought—as, I think, the hon. Gentleman knows—to represent my constituency from this side of the House in exactly the same, I hope, conscientious way as I did from the other.

I shall talk a little about my constituency because it more than qualifies me to make the comments that I shall make. The most encouraging thing that the hon. Gentleman did was not to approach the matter in a party political knockabout way, and I compliment him on that. It is utterly proper that the Opposition should make proposals, although I do not know how they would pay for them in the context of their overall commitments, but I shall not be distracted on to that matter. The important thing is that he has done what, in essence, he had to do—welcome the principle of the Bill. He said that it is a step in the right direction. I would add that, as my right hon. Friend the Minister made very clear, the Bill is part of a package, virtually every element of which is subject to review.

Another point to consider before we reach any closing debate on such issues is that we are dealing with very wide matters involving agriculture, foot and mouth disease, the environmental aspects of rural areas and the benefits, or otherwise, to those who live in them. In this regrettable and tragic outbreak, there is a need to reach a conclusion so that we can understand and, to an extent, quantify the damage before taking any final decision on what help is given and, incidentally, what help goes where. We should have a vigorous debate on the balance of rural and environmental support, defining each in the context of the other, and so on.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman would agree that a thorough review must take place when we are over the immediate tragedy, and I dare say that it will have to go well beyond FMD, although FMD nationally and internationally will form an integral part of it. However, we must undoubtedly review the support in that context. I welcome the Bill because people will increasingly go out of small farming—perhaps regrettably, but necessarily—and into rural business. That aspect of the Bill is commendable.

**Mr. Evans:** Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Bill represents nothing more than a sticking plaster for a patient who has had a heart attack? Does he accept that it would be far better if the smaller businesses that are in trouble because of foot and mouth and the lack of tourism were given access to interest-free loans, given that many

*[Mr. Evans]*

small businesses owe money to other small businesses, as that would pump-prime the whole industry and put it back on its feet again?

**Mr. Temple-Morris:** I do not accept that. We have to consider the whole context. The matter is up for review, but the Opposition's proposal is not the Government's policy, as the hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well. Incidentally, the way that he introduced his remarks with the example of heart attacks and sticking plasters was colourful—talk about spin! However, given the whole context, the Bill is of value and has been welcomed as such by the hon. Gentleman's party; it is part of a continuing process.

As I said earlier, we shall need to take a thorough look at agriculture and benefits to get over the situation in rural areas. In that connection, the hon. Member for Ashford made a point—with which I very much agree—that the long-term economic health of farmers depends on farmers and farming. I am sure that he well realises that although reform and change are expected in the agricultural community, the constant doubt, because people do not know—in the context of the common agricultural policy and elsewhere—what their eventual fate will be, causes many of the difficulties. Most farmers in my constituency accept that there has to be change—that the terms of subsidy will be different—but they need to know where they stand. The Bill is a step in that direction.

I said that this speech would be a swan-song. I also said that I have a rural constituency. I am pleased to be speaking on a rural matter, and I take this opportunity to thank my constituents for putting up with so many speeches over the years on matters other than agriculture and the rural areas—especially on foreign and European affairs and Ireland. My constituents tolerated that; indeed, occasionally they encouraged it. However, in this debate I speak on behalf of a constituency of 700 sq m. I am happy to say that I have a lovely memory of the fact that when I was first elected to this place in February 1974—27 years ago—there was not one traffic light in that 700 sq m. Regrettably, I have to announce that there are about two and a half at the latest count; one of them—dare I say it?—covers the entrance to a supermarket.

There are five market towns in the constituency. Two have benefited from the wider programme of which the Bill forms part—the Government's regeneration programme—and no doubt others will benefit, too. Much public money is going into areas such as mine, and there certainly is no area more rural than mine. We have countless villages. Fourteen foot and mouth outbreaks have occurred and there are more just over the border in Wales, which means that exclusion areas spill over into my constituency. There are 68 outbreaks in the whole county of Hereford and Worcester.

There has been much hardship for animals and farmers alike, for rural areas generally and, indeed, for the rural businesses dealt with under the measure. No one is happy. We can always criticise financial support by saying, "We want more". Indeed, we have already heard that call from the Opposition today; it does not surprise me. However, my constituents are grateful for that financial support. They welcome the gradual relaxation of restrictions and the opening of markets. Goodness knows, no one is happy, but those measures have been welcomed.

Almost every day—like other hon. Members representing rural constituencies—I hold conversations with individual farmers; I shall be doing so later today. I take my hat off to those farmers. Despite their dire circumstances, they appreciate the sheer scale and extent of the outbreaks, which dwarf anything we or others have seen.

My home is about four miles outside my constituency in the Welsh border area, just inside Wales, and has been in an infected area since the beginning of the outbreak. It has the shop, the pub—all the characteristics that we are talking about—and bed and breakfasts galore. In fact, bed-and-breakfast businesses and smaller hotels and accommodation are the main losers at present. However, to put that in context, all was not complete gloom over Easter. Many rural attractions did remarkably well—indeed business was up on last year. The statistic that tourism is 70 per cent. down overwhelmingly relates to accommodation. I am happy to say that the village pub was crowded during my last Sunday visit, and will remain so.

I think that a personal anecdote helps. Some comments, especially by the Opposition, imply that everyone is seething with discontent against the Government. That is not the case in my area. Indeed, the farmer who farms immediately around my village, who is an embarrassingly enthusiastic member of my former party and farms in a Conservative area, told me last weekend that, all things considered, the Government have done as well as any could. That is a true anecdote and we should acknowledge such opinions.

There is not much to say about the Bill's contents and I admire the extent to which the Opposition have examined its minutiae. They mounted a veritable barrage of questions to my right hon. Friend the Minister, for which I commend them. My study might appear to be limited in comparison, although as a lawyer I have some understanding of hereditaments.

Measures in the overall rural package need to be mentioned and gratitude should be expressed to my party and Government. We must not forget that the cost of the total effort is much greater than the rural aid to farmers, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has not put a limit on that. Direct agricultural support as a result of foot and mouth is climbing above £500 million and the support to the rural economy is nudging above £200 million. The Government have announced immediate measures, such as hardship rate relief, deferment of rates payments and temporary reductions in rateable values. In addition, an effective appeal has been made to the banks, which has not been mentioned. Their initial reaction was a little bank-like. However, the Government made a public appeal for them to go easy, which they have done. I have been in contact with constituents and banks, and approaches to them have had to go no further, which is a good sign.

The village shop rates relief scheme, which was introduced in 1998, has been mentioned. The 50 per cent. mandatory relief applies to my village where the shop is doing the same business during the outbreak as it has always done. It is certainly a small business. The pub is down on accommodation bookings, but its general business, including serving food, is relatively normal.

**Mr. Gray** *rose—*

**Mr. Temple-Morris:** I see an impatient hon. Member who wants to intervene.

**Mr. Gray:** I have tried my best to be patient, but I have two questions for the hon. Gentleman before he gets carried away with praising his new friends in the Labour party for what they have done for rural businesses. First, will he acknowledge that the mandatory relief on village shops is a result of an initiative introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) when he was Secretary of State for the Environment? It was merely brought into operation by Labour. Secondly, will he also acknowledge that according to the notes produced by the House of Commons Library, the Bill's provisions may amount to as little as £3 million a year help for businesses throughout England? That is a drop in the ocean compared with the hundreds of millions that are being lost by rural businesses. Perhaps he could include that in his speech.

**Mr. Temple-Morris:** Overall support is climbing above £200 million, and it will continue to increase. Much as I appreciate the Library's devotion, and although I have not seen the paper, it appears we are taking a step in the right direction. The hon. Gentleman said "may amount to"—"may" being the operative word. I have a suspicion that when Governments offer such support, it absorbs more money than they initially promise. I am pretty sure that this measure will do the same. Incidentally, the relief is greatly welcomed by my constituents. I do not see why I cannot praise my present political party. This is one of the best Governments we have had for years. Compared with the time that I had under the previous Government, I have had a very peaceful Parliament.

Regardless of who introduced what, the issues that affect rural areas have been around for years, as all hon. Members know. They include access, the motor car, people retiring to rural areas and the decline of agriculture. When I was an eager young Conservative Member in 1974, newly elected and anxious to assuage the concerns of a shopkeeper in a small village who had just had to close his shop, I told him that I was pleased to see the support that he had received from the village in a petition. I had better leave out his expletives, but the broad gist of his reply was that although he was pleased about the petition, if the villagers who had been so eager to sign it had shopped in his establishment a little more often, it might still be open. Many people in rural areas, particularly those who wave the banners the most, are the first in the Saturday morning queue in the supermarket. That is true of the relatively new supermarket outside the market town of Leominster.

This month, rate relief for village food shops, pubs and petrol stations has taken effect. That applies to my village and many others in my constituency. About 8,000 pubs will benefit, so the measure will absorb quite a lot of public money.

The Bill caters for the future. It goes beyond the question whether we should change the bottom line for rate relief and spend more; it tackles the fundamental issues. We will hear more and more about those because, regrettably, the debate is far from over. I am sure that the Government, after the election—I say that deliberately—will have much to do about the shift from farming to small business which is represented by the Bill. Unfortunately, many farmers will go out of business, but they are already excused domestic rates and it will now be easier for them to diversify into bed and breakfast. The rateable values ceiling, which has already been mentioned several times and in this case is £6,000, is subject to review.

I have said a little about village shops and given a personal example, but I want to deal with rural areas more generally. It is an unfortunate fact of life that when so many areas are in a state of change, that change leads to fear where there is uncertainty. It is the Government's duty to recognise, as I am sure they do, the extent of the change, particularly as it concerns the elderly, the need for increased services and the undoubted decline of agriculture. As we know, the latter affects not only those who are in farming, but the vast number of families and ancillary industries that are connected to or dependent on agriculture. The Bill forms a small part of an overall programme for the future, and I trust that that programme will include a full review not only of foot and mouth disease, but of the whole question of agricultural subsidies.

**Mr. Bercow:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Temple-Morris:** The hon. Gentleman may not have realised, but I am just perorating. However, I cannot resist his plea.

**Mr. Bercow:** The hon. Gentleman really ought to make up his mind. I say to him beyond peradventure that his attitude makes Dr. Pangloss look a pessimist. How does he justify the Government's refusal to introduce honesty in food-labelling legislation, whereby consumers can know both the country of origin and the method of production of all the main ingredients so that they can make a free and informed choice of what to buy?

**Mr. Temple-Morris:** I seem to remember being asked that question as a Conservative Member when the Conservatives were in power. As for labelling in shops and supermarkets, it is infinitely better than it has ever been. Indeed, I am always clear about the origins of what I am buying. The Minister concerned has been tightening up regulations on labelling.

I know that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) is well practised, but I could not resist giving way to him. I am sorry that I hesitated to do so at first, but perhaps I was overcome by my own oratorical efforts and was anxious to complete my speech—*[Interruption.]* Well, he has made his point now and I have dealt with it. I wish him many more happy interventions; I am sure that he will be making them in opposition for a long time. Finally, I thank the House for occasionally listening to me over the years and my constituents for putting up with me.

5.15 pm

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) who, if I may say so, brought urbanity to his rural subject. Having listened to him carefully, I have the impression that the picture in Leominster is different from what we are experiencing daily in Somerset. The hon. Gentleman would be

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hard-pushed to find people in my constituency who were quite as optimistic about their future or as complimentary to the Government as his constituents are, although that may be a regional difference. The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) gave a good analysis of this brief Bill and covered many areas that I intended to cover. I therefore make no apology if some of my comments are along the same lines as his.

The Bill was not introduced in response to the present crisis. If it had been, it would be even more inadequate. It was introduced in response to an old anomaly in the effects of the uniform business rate, to the closure of shops in small communities—which has been going on for a long time—and to the difficulties that many in the agricultural industry are experiencing in diversifying. Whatever the response to the present crisis, it is extraordinary that everybody is gripped by the urgent need to do something for our rural areas, apart from the Treasury and the business managers of the House.

It is extraordinary that the Bill has been introduced at such a late stage. As the Minister said in her introductory remarks, the Bill had its genesis partly in the action plan for farming that was drawn up a year ago. We then waited for the rural White Paper, which eventually appeared in November. However, after that, nothing was done to put any proposals into effect. The Government finally got round to publishing the Bill on 16 March and it was introduced in the House, but we have had to wait until now for it to see the light of day. I suspect that we might not be discussing it now had I not asked the Minister for the Environment the other day when it would be debated on the Floor of the House. The right hon. Gentleman realised that it was rather embarrassing for the Government that a Bill that they had introduced purporting to give support to rural areas had not even been debated in this place.

I shall not labour the point about whether we need primary legislation. I was not convinced by the Minister's reply, which was based on something that we have heard before from this Government—an assertion that the lawyers know best. Our role in this place is to question what Government lawyers say about legislation; we need to be told the reasons for any course of action and consider whether it is right. No doubt, we shall return to that in Committee.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Robert Ainsworth):** Does the hon. Gentleman not appreciate that if a piece of primary legislation states specifically that relief is for a sole business in a community, it is not possible to undo that without primary legislation?

**Mr. Heath:** I understand that perfectly well. I did not want to extend the argument as we will have to return to it in Committee, but I question the distinction that is still made between a food store and a general store. The qualification on sole business is on the general store, not the food store. Why does the Minister's point not apply to the public house or the petrol station? The distinction is not a matter for a long debate on Second Reading. *[Interruption.]* The Minister says from a sedentary position that I am wrong. He will have to establish that to the satisfaction of members of the Committee. Let us have that debate at the appropriate time.

The Bill does not address the basic inequities of the uniform business rate. Some of us have argued ever since its introduction that it was based on an erroneous premise and was unfair in its application. It is biased against the interests of small businesses, particularly small high street businesses in villages and market towns in areas such as the one I represent, and it benefits large retailers—supermarkets and hypermarkets—which are laughing all the way to the bank because the overhead that the uniform business rate represents reduces the opportunities for competition.

I would have liked to see a Bill to reform the uniform business rate and make it fairer than the present system. If that is not possible in one leap—and why it should not be, I cannot imagine—perhaps we might at least have had some form of tax allowance for a certain turnover or income in order to take smaller businesses out of the uniform business rate net entirely or to reduce its impact on them. That would have been a fair approach. Instead, the Bill tinkers at the edges to make exceptions piecemeal and on an interim basis. It is unfortunate that we cannot address the basic problem.

**Mr. Evans:** Can the hon. Gentleman remind the House whether it is still Liberal Democrat policy to scrap the council tax and business rate and replace them with a varying rate of local income tax throughout the country?

**Mr. Heath:** The hon. Gentleman knows that it is still our policy that local income tax would replace council tax. We are discussing the uniform business rate, which militates against rural areas and small businesses. It was introduced by the Government whom he supported and its reform is long overdue.

**Mr. Bercow:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Heath:** When I have made some progress, the hon. Gentleman will have his opportunity.

The problems with the Bill have been outlined by the hon. Member for Ashford. I shall deal first with the aspects relating to agricultural premises. I am greatly in favour of means of support for rural businesses deriving from agriculture. The re-use of agricultural premises in the form of diversification is consistent with what my colleagues and I have been arguing for many years in the context of common agricultural policy reform. We are in favour of support for rural economies and rural societies, rather than simple commodity support. It is important for us to make that move, although the Bill is a very limited part of that process.

The Bill contains no definition of agricultural premises or of agriculture. It does not purport to address that, as the matter is covered by other legislation, but it is time that we grasped the nettle and stated what agriculture is. Some of the businesses that are currently excluded from the definition of agricultural businesses should be included, because times have moved on.

I am pleased that the hon. Member for Ashford raised the topic of third-party use, but I am less pleased with the fact that we had no clear answer on the point. I do not read the measure as applying to third-party users. The Minister indicated that it applied to tenant farmers. We knew that.

The question is whether someone unrelated to agriculture can use the premises and benefit from the relief afforded by the Bill. I am not clear that that is the case.

**Mr. Gray:** It is worth repeating that, when I intervened on the Minister for Local Government and the Regions to ask her about the matter, she made it absolutely clear—tomorrow's *Hansard* will confirm this point—that the relief applied not only to farmers who own their land and to tenant farmers, but to any other business that rents the premises. Thus, a farm could convert a barn into a small office and rent it to an outside interest in industry that would benefit from the reduction in rate relief. I agree that that is not what the Bill says, but I point out that the Minister said that it would have that effect.

**Mr. Heath:** I wish that I could rely to the same extent on the Minister's words, but I do not interpret the Bill in the same way. We will have to explore the matter further in Committee to make certain that the Bill achieves the intention that she described.

Concern was expressed about the five-year expiry period, but the Minister appeared to misunderstand the point that was made. Surely, the question is not whether businesses can benefit from rate relief for longer than five years, but whether a business that wishes to take advantage of rate relief in, say, the fourth year after enactment of the Bill will be subject to a five-year or one-year period of relief. Clearly, the period can be extended by the Government, but that will not impress a bank manager who is presented in the fourth year with a business plan that can extend to only one year. We need clarification and we must press the Government for it. I suspect that they have good intentions, but that they have not written them into the Bill.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) spoke about the business of whether diversification is always good or bad and about the wrong uses to which it can be put. I feel strongly that rate relief is an economic and fiscal measure, and not a means of policing environmental and planning considerations. The planning regime must be sufficiently flexible, but also sufficiently robust, to deal with those issues, which should not be the subject of measures such as the Bill.

I should like to deal briefly with the provisions on food shops. I welcome the principle of extending rate relief to such shops.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** The point that I sought to make—obviously, I did not do so with sufficient clarity to get it across to my colleagues—is that, although there comes a moment at which planning laws mean saying yes or no to particular developments, the Bill is meant to support businesses. At some stage, the House will have to decide on the ranges of business that are suitable and unsuitable for rural areas. As we are currently anxious to develop any sort of employment, people are not prepared to confront that question, but it will be a significant problem at some future time.

**Mr. Heath:** I understand the hon. Lady's concerns, but I believe that the matter must be determined by local authorities, which must fulfil their planning function in respect of what is appropriate to their local areas. The House cannot determine such matters, but we can set out the support that we can offer when a business is determined by the planning authority to be appropriate to an area. Perhaps that is where the hon. Lady and I have a difference of opinion, but it is only slight, as we are dealing with essentially the same point.

On food shops, we must consider the key issue of the rateable value threshold. I do not think that the £6,000 threshold is appropriate. The matter was the subject of substantial argument in the statutory instrument Committees that have dealt with related issues concerning pubs and petrol stations. It is a matter that has caused some concern in terms of hardship relief, in respect of which there is a great disparity between what is being offered in England and what is being offered in Wales. I think that the Welsh are right to ask for an increased deal.

On food shops, some basic issues need to be addressed and the Government need to clarify their thinking. We were told that the matter could be reviewed whenever there were revaluations. We have had revaluations since 1977 but have seen no change, despite the fact that the revaluations have mostly been upwards and have often been challenged by businesses that are subject to the business rate. I have no confidence that the threshold will ever move; it will simply stay at a grossly inadequate level.

Evidence from the shops themselves shows that the level is grossly inadequate. I have a letter from the Association of Convenience Stores, which might be said to know the nature of the business of its members. It argues that, although there are exceptions to the rule, in general, a convenience store needs about £4,000 a week minimum turnover in order to be viable. That is a very different figure from the £6,000 rateable value mentioned in the Bill, which suggests a turnover of less than £1,346 a week. Thus there is a huge disparity between what the Association of Convenience Stores says is a viable level and what the Government say is the maximum allowable. We must get to the bottom of that.

It is argued that pubs and filling stations are being given an enhanced level of £9,000 because many of them share large premises, but so do many food stores in rural areas.

**Mr. Bercow:** I do not dispute what the hon. Gentleman says about sharing premises with larger outlets. However, as he has just referred to the Association of Convenience Stores, does he accept that in the overwhelming majority of cases, those stores occupy a space of under 3,000 sq ft and, almost invariably, occupy a space of about 2,000 sq ft or less? Will he also factor into the equation in support of his general argument the fact that those stores operate on substantially smaller margins than their big business counterparts?

**Mr. Heath:** The latter point is self-evidently the case, and I am happy to accept the hon. Gentleman's figures on the first point. Although I have no evidence that his figures are correct, I feel intuitively that he is right, so I am grateful for his general support for my proposition.

Those businesses must cross not only the rateable value threshold, but two other thresholds. First, there is the Government's definition of a rural area. As we know, some rural areas are defined by order of the Secretary of State, while others which happen to be on the periphery of conurbations and which are clearly rural areas, are not defined as such. We have had this debate in terms of the

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hardship funding. It is difficult to stand on the banks of the lower estuary of the Severn, in an entirely rural setting with not a vehicle or house to be seen, and explain to someone—as my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) has had to do—that they are not in a rural area because the Secretary of State says so, and simply because of the definitions being used. That anomaly must be dealt with.

The third threshold is the limit of the population of a settlement to 3,000. I accept that a limit must be set and that 3,000 is towards the upper end of a village size, but in my part of the world we have many small settlements of around that size. Broadly speaking, it is a very rural county, but our population pattern happens to be in settlements of about 3,000 every three or four miles.

It is a townie's conception of rural life to think that only shops in small villages serve rural populations and are suffering from a downturn in the present crisis. It is principally the shops in the market towns that serve the rural population. That is where those people go to shop, and those are the shops that are feeling the squeeze at the moment.

**Mr. Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire): This is the key issue for me in the Bill. Is my hon. Friend aware that the "big smoke" in Montgomeryshire—indeed, in mid-Wales—is Newtown, whose population is 11,000? The Bill will be extremely helpful for the shopkeepers there, yet they might in part be excluded because of the limitation that my hon. Friend has described.

**Mr. Heath:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That it exactly the kind of illustration of which we should take careful note.

Surely it is possible for there to be either an assessment based on local circumstances or a taper of some sort? The hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) mentioned the original £8,000 level suggested in the Green Paper. The Government's response to that has, as I understand it, been that 50 per cent. of all small businesses fell into that £8,000 rateable value category. That is not true: it was 50 per cent. of all hereditaments, including telephone boxes and the like. Those were not all genuine small businesses. However, there should be some sort of tapering arrangement to enable a sensible assessment to be made.

In relation to hot food, I cannot believe that the Government intend to disqualify all the little food shops that happen to have a pasty counter in the corner from benefiting from this relief. However, that is clearly there in black and white in the Bill at the moment. The qualification is not that the business consists

"wholly or mainly of the sale by retail of food for human consumption".

Instead, there is a specific exclusion of

"the supply of food in the course of catering".

That needs to be clarified. Could a shop with a microwave in the corner that sold a cold sausage roll to a customer, who then put it into the microwave, be disqualified from rate relief? I do not think that that is the Government's intention, but that is what has been written into the Bill, and it needs to be looked at.

A large element of discretion still forms part of the arrangements. There will still be patchiness across the country. We have already seen that, wherever discretionary rate relief applies, some local authorities are able and willing to do a lot to support smaller businesses; some are willing but not able to do so; and some are neither. I am not arguing against local discretion. The Bill will help to provide a bedrock of mandatory relief, but anomalies will still exist between different areas, sometimes over quite a narrow grid. I hope that they will eventually be ironed out, because the people who have the courage to carry on small businesses in rural areas at the moment need all the help that they can get.

This is an inadequate Bill. It moves in the right direction, but it is not part of the larger package that I would like to see and that we have discussed on many occasions, which would include the interest-free loans that the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) mentioned. Incidentally, I think that the banks should play a part in providing those loans, perhaps by being responsible for the interest element. I see no need to use Treasury money for that.

These issues need to be treated with an urgency that the Government have so far failed to display. This is not an urgent measure of the kind that we need, but it is welcome none the less. I hope that it will have a swift passage through the House, but I also hope that it will be followed by something much more substantial that will give real support to the businesses that are failing at the moment and will continue to do so over the next few months.

5.38 pm

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): Napoleon was supposed to have said, "Let me have lucky generals" when he was asked to appoint a particular man to be in charge of his army. In agriculture, perhaps the one question that should be asked is, "Is this farmer lucky?" In my constituency a number of farms have been put through enormous hell—there is no other way of describing it—and have sought to alleviate their condition by moving into some form of diversification. Some of them seem to have suffered simply because they got their timing wrong.

I welcome the Bill because, perhaps for the first time in my career, British agriculture faces barriers that are genuinely so great and soul destroying that those affected are under tremendous pressure. For most of my working life, I have listened to the moans of farmers on greater and lesser incomes. The common factor, usually in direct proportion to their affluence, is their ability to complain bitterly about the amounts of money that they receive from various sources. I have therefore not always been as sympathetic as I might have been.

After many years of subsidised farming, however—there have been two different forms of subsidy, but farming has clearly been supported by taxpayers' money—we are paying an enormous price for the growth of agribusiness and damaging methods of farming. It is therefore important to seek any possible means to help farming communities and rural areas to maintain their services and the facilities that we are discussing today.

The Bill is useful. Of course it is possible to argue, as several hon. Members have done, that if one draws a line, someone will be to the right of it and others to the left, and that that creates anomalies. However, anyone who runs a farm shop successfully, for example, in my constituency, competes with my rural butcher in the middle of Nantwich or Crewe. We are therefore not

immune from the charge that, by helping one rural community, we are damaging people in the same line of business elsewhere.

The Bill tries to subsidise particular businesses that are under enormous pressure because they provide an essential service. We should be clear about that. The House has not suddenly decided that the whole of agriculture should be reformed, but we realise that village communities cannot exist without shops and schools. Without village communities, there is a rash of gorgeous but empty villages, which incredibly but continually turn into dormitory areas for people who work elsewhere. That is sterile and cannot be supported.

Many farm shops will experience some difficulties. I have in mind two farm shops in my constituency. I shall do my advertising bit, and say that I hope that anyone in Cheshire will support Snugberry ice cream, which is home made and of excellent quality, and Mrs. Miranda Shufflebottom's best sausages, which I buy on every possible occasion. Those products are of high quality and the shops provide good service. However, the amount of relief for which the Bill provides, although necessary and welcome, is small.

We must acknowledge that the sort of support that we can give any business is finite, can continue for only a specific amount of time and can provide only temporary aid. We cannot support rural shops without affecting rural towns; we might otherwise distort competition. Vast distortion already exists because many rural shops pay more for their goods wholesale than supermarkets pay retail. If we are to consider methods of supporting rural industries, we should also examine supermarkets' impact on agriculture, buying patterns and subsidies for business. Those considerations are essential because of their effect on the people whom we are discussing.

Farm diversification is interesting because I suspect farming communities, especially families who have initiative and do not want to be left in an intolerable position, try to diversify. Many diversify into related businesses such as food. I hope that the comments of the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) about hot food are wrong, because many farm shops will not only sell some heated food, but will try to expand that provision.

I am thinking in particular of a business that grew out of the destruction of an entire pig herd. It diversified first into butchery, and then into the provision of teas and light refreshment. Presumably, it might not be able to claim relief. That would be unkind and unfair, and would cause the business great difficulties.

**Mr. Gray:** The hon. Lady makes a good point. The tragedy for that business, and for the excellent Mrs. Shufflebottom's business, is that they will not benefit: only businesses that are fortunate enough to have been established in the last six months will receive the relief. Mrs. Shufflebottom's business, and the other shops that the hon. Lady has described, will therefore be faced with unfair competition.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** I think that Miranda Shufflebottom—whose excellent sausages, pies and hams I hope everyone will buy—will sidle in, because I believe that the diversification took place within the specified period.

I hope that Opposition Members will speed the Bill's progress, and that it will reach the statute book in time for everyone to benefit from the relief. Farm diversification, however, can only ever be a subsidiary to agriculture. It is an extension, and a sensible option for most farming units that are thinking about their economics; but it will never be an alternative to agricultural employment or proper control of the countryside.

There are those who will eternally carp about the Bill, saying that it is not enough, that it does not encompass everyone, and that it makes difficulties for people in villages that could have been dealt with differently. I hope that when that happens my hon. Friends and I will remind the House that the last Government took no action of this kind, and certainly did not give rural communities the support that they should have given.

**Mr. Green:** Uncharacteristically, the hon. Lady has overstepped the mark. As has already been said today, the whole concept of rate relief was introduced by the last Government. It is uncharacteristically unfair of the hon. Lady to say that the last Government did nothing. In fact, this Bill is based on legislation passed by them.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** I am delighted to learn that the Conservative Government did something right. I pay tribute to them: I cannot think of anything else that they did in almost 20 years on which I could even vaguely congratulate them. I am happy to withdraw my remarks, and to say that the carping tone of the hon. Gentleman's welcome for the Bill clearly does not demonstrate that he does not approve of rate support, but—presumably—demonstrates that he does not think we are providing enough money, in enough ways, at the right time.

There has been a constant leaching of both population and jobs from agriculture, first into small towns and then into cities, throughout my lifetime. Measures such as this, welcome as they are, constitute only a small step, and only a small part of the process of reversing the damage that has been done to the British countryside over not one generation, but several.

If the House of Commons is serious, it will begin to address the problems in the next Parliament. One thing that it will have to do is face up to the enormous erosion of power represented by the common agricultural policy. It will also have to explain seriously to members of the farming community that if they go out alone into the cold, hard world of total competition, things will be difficult for them unless they receive some form of support—support which will, I hope, be targeted in a new and completely different way.

In the meantime, I welcome the Bill. It is a small measure, but a good measure. It is going in the right direction. I am glad that we are doing something for villages and shops; I only hope the inevitable arguments that will arise in my constituency, where people will say, "I am on the wrong side of the line by five yards", will be met with sympathy.

I have been very impressed by the work of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food during the current crisis. I have been very impressed by the hard work of Ministry veterinarians and civil servants, many of whom have given up their free time and worked extremely hard. They are not infallible, but they have done a fantastically good job and I thank them for all that they have done.

I also believe that the type of change that we are proposing is simply an acknowledgement of the fact that the House has to think clearly about where we want United Kingdom agriculture to be in the next 10 years.

5.50 pm

**Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): It is a great honour and pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). I agreed with almost every word that she said, at least until the last moment, when she offered strange praise to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Many Ministry staff have of course worked very hard and done their best in very difficult circumstances. However, I think that most people in the countryside and on farms would agree that the foot and mouth crisis has been characterised by astonishing incompetence, a general shambles—

**Mr. Bercow:** And bungling.

**Mr. Gray:** Yes. If the Sunday newspapers are to be believed—perhaps they should not be—I understand that that view is shared in high places in the Government, by people who are talking about abolishing MAFF after the general election and replacing it with a department of rural affairs.

Although the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich was quite right sensibly to praise people working in the Ministry, as do I., and particularly to praise veterinarians—who have done a very fine job in very difficult circumstances—I am not sure that senior officials, and more particularly Ministers, have done anything other than a most abominably incompetent job in the crisis. However, assuming that the Minister for the Environment is right and that there will be a public inquiry into the outbreak—although I understand that the Prime Minister believes that there should not be an inquiry—that fact will undoubtedly emerge.

I very much welcome the fact that the delay to the general election that was caused by the foot and mouth crisis has enabled the Government to introduce this Bill, which will be of some help to them. It has been a matter of great regret to the Opposition that the Government have found no time at all for a debate on the foot and mouth crisis, whereas the Opposition have found two or three days to debate it. Although Ministers have found time to introduce the perfectly obnoxious Bill to ban the innocent sport of foxhunting, they have found no time to support farmers in a debate on foot and mouth.

I am therefore glad that Ministers have found time for this modest little Bill, and hope that they will find a way of ensuring its smooth passage through the House. However, as Ministers seem to have thought up the Bill last summer, at the Prime Minister's so-called farming summit, it is perhaps to be regretted that it has taken them until the 11th hour of this Parliament to introduce it—in the reasonably certain knowledge that it is unlikely to become law before the general election, unless cross-party co-operation allows it a very swift passage. There may of course be such co-operation. Opposition Members welcome the Bill, although we think that it has come very late in the day and is very modest and ineffectual.

We should remember that the Bill's proposals are not related at all to foot and mouth disease, but were announced by the Prime Minister at last year's No. 10 Downing street summit, before the crisis broke, with particular reference to the horse industry. The proposals were consulted on last autumn. By November, however, Ministers decided that proposals affecting only the horse industry would be too narrow and should be widened to include farming diversification initiatives. The Bill therefore had nothing whatever to do with the foot and mouth crisis, but was a reaction to the underlying agricultural crisis which long predated the foot and mouth crisis—which in turn merely exacerbated an already disastrous situation.

It is never otiose to remind the House of the precise nature of the crisis in agriculture. Last year, accountants Deloitte & Touche produced an analysis showing that an average-sized farm of 500 acres earning £80,000 in the mid-1990s is now earning only about £8,000. Such farms may also be supporting two or three farm workers. Farm incomes are down by 90 per cent. across the board. In 2000, total income from farming—TIFF, as the MAFF report calls it—had decreased by 27 per cent. There has been a catastrophe in farming that is quite distinct from the problems that have been caused by the foot and mouth crisis.

It is therefore not surprising that farmers across the nation have been very actively considering diversification. A recent *Farmers Weekly* survey discovered that more than one third of farmers are currently considering diversifying into activities other than farming. It is very useful that Ministers have introduced the Bill, which one third of farmers will undoubtedly welcome. None the less, as I said and as the figures in the Bill's explanatory notes show, it is a very modest measure. Paragraph 23 clearly states that

"farm diversification relief is likely to cost the Exchequer something between £16 million and £65 million per annum over the five year period."

The relief could be as little as £3 million annually, with another £2 million from local authorities.

As I said, compared with the gigantic crisis in all farming sectors, this is a very modest Bill. There have been huge losses in farming, rural businesses, rural villages and—particularly because of foot and mouth—the tourist industry, but the Exchequer will be providing only £2 million or £3 million a year to deal with them. That is a minute sum. I very much hope that, after this debate, we shall not be hearing the Millbank spin doctors saying, "Haven't the Government been marvellous about it? Aren't they a fantastic lot? They are helping out the countryside in crisis by introducing this business rate relief Bill."

The Bill is worth £2 million or £3 million annually, which could amount to only a few thousand pounds to each constituency. The Bill is worth almost nothing in terms of money, although it may be worth a little more in terms of its principle, which can be extended later. However, farming is in a massive crisis, and there must be no suggestion whatsoever that the Bill will do anything about that. It takes only a tiny midge nibble at the edge of the current farming crisis.

It is reasonable to accept that the Bill will bring about some benefit. As a Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions report states, 33 per cent. of farmers' wives say that they make income from activities other than farming. That is a very important statistic. Many farms can survive only because of their very limited diversified activities. As the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich quite correctly said, farmers can no longer survive only on farming, but make money from renting out cottages, selling cheese in a farm shop or renting out a barn to an associated business. Farms have a chance

of surviving only because of such limited diversification. However, people can do that only if they own the farms and do not have a mortgage.

Farming is therefore facing a catastrophe that can be dealt with only by diversification. What have the Government done about it? They could have done many things, such as exempting all farm businesses from business rates, as they have done in relation to agriculture itself. It would have been perfectly sensible and easy for Ministers to say that any business on a farm occupying a previously used agricultural building will be entirely exempt from business rates, and not to limit relief to a five-year period or only to new businesses or to those with a rateable value not exceeding £6,000. Such relief would have been at least a gesture towards assisting agriculture as we know it to survive. Instead, Ministers have presented their very modest proposals which are tied to so many conditions that few of my constituents who are doing their best to diversify will be able to use them.

Earlier, in reply to an intervention from me, the Minister for Local Government and the Regions caused some confusion which the Minister may wish to clarify when he replies to the debate. From my reading of the Bill, it certainly seems true that the provisions will not apply to people other than the farmer himself or to other businesses that use the farmer's old barns, for example. They are, under no circumstances, allowed this rate rebate. That, however, is not what the right hon. Lady said, and I am keen to have it clarified. What she said, which will appear in *Hansard*, becomes law, so it is important that if she made a mistake she should admit it.

My understanding of what the Minister said in answer to an earlier intervention from me was that all businesses will be eligible for this rate relief. As well as the farmers themselves, that includes tenant farmers and those who rent premises from a farmer. That is a very important concession, and I hope that that is what she meant. In Pinkney Park in my constituency, for example, such a concession would be extremely important to the survival of the 20 or 30 businesses that rent small accommodation from the farm. However, I fear that my detailed reading of the Bill suggests that that was an error on the part of the Minister. She may seek to correct it later in the debate. If it is an error, this is a very modest little Bill.

I want to address the Bill from a particular viewpoint. I declare a non-pecuniary interest, in that I am chairman of an organisation called the horse and pony taxation committee. It was set up some time ago by Sir Adam Butler, the erstwhile Member of Parliament for Bosworth, and then taken on by Lord Cope of Berkeley, the former Member of Parliament for Northavon. The horse and pony taxation committee is an informal committee of this House which seeks to lobby the Government, as the name suggests, on issues of taxes and rates with regard to horses and ponies.

I am also an unpaid consultant to the British Horse Industry Confederation, the overall body that tries to bring together racing, sporting interests and all other horse interests in its representations to Government. Although it is an unpaid post, I think it none the less important that the House should know that I speak on behalf of the horse industry.

The horse industry is involved because one of the primary areas of diversification that may be allowed under the Bill will be from farming into equestrian businesses of one sort of another. That was acknowledged by the Prime Minister during the farming summit at No. 10 Downing street last year; it then became a consultation paper, examining how equestrian businesses' rating could be helped by a rate rebate for diversification into horse businesses. It was discovered last autumn that that was much too narrow, which is why the Government introduced this rather wider Bill which includes other rural businesses besides horse businesses. I should however like to address the horse industry for a moment, and consider what the Bill's consequences for the industry will be.

Equestrian businesses, which are thought by some to be a little elitist, or posh, are worth some £2.5 billion a year to the nation. It is an enormous industry, the second largest in the countryside, and is responsible for 150,000 jobs in Britain. One million people own horses in Britain, and 2.4 million people ride horses every year—an extraordinarily large number of people who are, by no means, nobs and toffs: they are ordinary people of all sorts.

The horse industry is nevertheless in sharp decline. It has been having very real problems over a number of years, for a variety of reasons, and is nearing crisis. Some 272 riding schools have closed since 1999. They are closing at a rate of about 20 per cent. of the total each year. Many have closed during the foot and mouth crisis and are losing an enormous amount of money.

In 1992, there were 3,016 full-time registered riding schools in Britain. By February 1999, that number had declined to 2,371, and it has gone down further since then. Riding schools are facing a very real problem during the foot and mouth crisis. It is estimated that between 65 and 85 per cent. of all the income earned by riding schools has been lost during the crisis.

The Bill would enable a farm to open a riding school or to allow some instruction to go on in DIY livery yards, as they are called, and to benefit from a 50 per cent. rate reduction. However, at the end of the farm drive, an established riding school that may have been there for many years would not benefit from that relief. As a result of the Bill, one business would receive 50 per cent. rate relief while an identical business next door would not.

The consequence, I fear, would be that most existing riding schools would progressively go out of business. They are already in deep trouble and face a whole spectrum of problems, not least those of taxation, the minimum wage, the bureaucracy involved in registering riding schools and a number of other Government measures. The catastrophe of a neighbouring farm being given 50 per cent. business rate relief could mean very severe problems.

When this measure was announced during the Downing street summit this time last year, the riding school industry's initial reaction was to oppose it lock, stock and barrel, but people such as Michael Clayton of the British Horse Society, myself and others persuaded the riding school industry that if new businesses were at least allowed to be set up on farms, that might be a toe in the door—the thin end of the wedge—and it might eventually lead to business rates on existing riding schools being reduced.

If the Government care about riding schools, they will either have to consider that or consider not introducing this measure for farms, which every Member would

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regret. The Government must pay particular attention to the specialist case of riding schools, which are facing catastrophe. The Bill would only add to their problems. We persuaded the Association of British Riding Schools not to oppose it lock, stock and barrel in the hope, and on the understanding, that sooner or later the business rate for riding schools would also be reduced.

**Mr. Bercow:** I rather fear that the anomalous position that my hon. Friend has eloquently described will be greeted with some reservations, not to say sadness, by the Addington equestrian centre in my constituency. Does my hon. Friend believe that the differential, and the apparently capricious treatment of new businesses and existing enterprises, is attributable to Government folly or to knavery—or to a combination of the two?

**Mr. Gray:** Only my hon. Friend could turn a differential between existing riding schools and those that might be created and benefit from the Bill into a choice between folly and knavery. I, like my hon. Friend, suspect that the Government are guilty of folly and knavery. However, I raise the issue because I hope that they are ready to listen to reason. I hope that they will listen to the horse industry and correct the anomaly, demonstrating that they are guilty neither of folly nor of knavery. If we are holding a similar debate this time next year and we find that the closure of riding schools has accelerated quite considerably, it may be a result of the combination of the two. I hope, however, that the Minister will listen carefully to the arguments of the riding school industry.

The effects of foot and mouth are evident in other areas of the horse industry. The British Equestrian Trade Association, which represents those in the equestrian industry who make saddles, clothes and provide feed, for example, estimated that in March this year its turnover had declined by some £40 million and in April by some £57 million. These industries are not in rural areas but are nearly all in Labour-controlled constituencies in towns. People who make clothing for the riding industry tend to do so in towns, so Labour Members may wish to take an interest in this matter.

Those industries are being damaged not only by the foot and mouth crisis but by the decline in riding schools and in agriculture in general, as I described earlier. Industries such as riding schools will not be helped by the Bill. Items such as riding boots and riding clothes are often made in Germany and elsewhere on the continent. The Bill will not help the factories here that make those items.

The Government might like to consider how to help businesses that are equestrian and rural in nature but are not in country areas and may not be covered by the Bill. Racing, livery and hunting yards all face huge problems and none of them will benefit from—and some will be damaged by—the Bill.

We need to give careful thought to the issues, as the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions said in its response, published in November, to the consultation paper that it issued last year:

"All those against the scheme gave consistent reasons for their opposition. They expressed the view that the equine industry is currently suffering a decline, with many parts of the country experiencing an over capacity of equine businesses. They felt that those currently in business are finding it hard to survive and operate on very low profit margins. They thought the proposed relief would give newly established farm enterprises an unfair economic edge in this tight market and the industry could not sustain any sudden growth that might be generated without widespread closure of existing establishments. They said this would seriously damage the wider rural economy."

The Department acknowledges that the cut in business rates proposed in the Bill might have serious deleterious effects on existing businesses in the countryside, which will require careful consideration.

I have outlined the problems that the Bill might cause, and I shall now focus on possible solutions. One obvious solution lies in the zero rating of farms and agricultural businesses. Equestrian businesses are rated in full, and many of us have lobbied for years for that situation to be changed. The Bill will give relief only to new businesses with a rateable value of less than £6,000, but some livery yards and riding schools are larger and, of course, are more than six months to a year old, and so would not benefit.

It is a strange anomaly that buildings used for heavy horses for agricultural use and for race horses kept for breeding use receive rate relief, yet buildings housing other kinds of horses used for riding, hunting or any other legitimate purpose receive no rate relief. That was the result of a decision by the House of Lords in, I believe, 1987. It was said at the time that the decision about whether to allow rate relief depended on the nature of the animal. Therefore, a horse bred and kept to be eaten attracts rate relief as an agricultural animal, but a horse designated for riding does not. Curiously, a sheep that is kept not to be eaten but to be shorn does attract rate relief.

The logical approach would be to give 100 per cent. rate relief to farmers for using buildings and land for the spectrum of equestrian purposes, as it is given for any other agricultural business. All horse activities should be reclassified as agricultural, which almost happened in 1987 but was blocked by the House of Lords decision. At this difficult time for farming and the horse business, that would be the sensible approach. That point was made forcefully by Mr. Owen Tebbs, who serves with me on the horse and pony taxation committee and advises the Thoroughbred Breeders Association on tax matters, to the DETR:

"If the government wishes to encourage farmers into new fields of farming activity it should remove completely the obstacles in terms of planning and rates which prevent farmers from breeding horses to the point of sale."

He said that

"there is no justification for penalising farmers from conducting what can only be regarded logically as a normal farming activity—the breeding and rearing of horses to the point of sale."

If the Government, who seem very pleased with their little Bill, wish to correct the anomaly that I have described, the easy way to do so would be to designate all horse businesses as agricultural activity and thereby exempt them from business rates altogether. The cost would be small, compared with the losses experienced in the countryside today, but the benefit to farmers would be huge. In North Wiltshire, for example, most farms are small family businesses of 200 or so acres, with perhaps 120 to 150 milking cows and beautiful Cotswold stone farmhouses. Such farmers would benefit greatly from the

ability to convert their farms into horse businesses, if only they had zero business rates, and there would be huge demand for their services if they did so.

**Mr. Bercow:** Once again, my hon. Friend is on to an extremely pertinent point. Does he agree that in addition to the advantage that the universality of relief that he commends would provide, a simple and universal system would save time and expense because businesses would no longer need to study the issue in detail and employ external professional advisers to determine whether they were eligible for relief? That would be a material advantage to such businesses, the overwhelming majority of which are small.

**Mr. Gray:** My hon. Friend makes an astute point. Such businesses are already over-burdened by bureaucracy, and puzzled and confused by regulations. From the Government's point of view, it would also remove the need to create so many regulations and fool around with Bills such as the one before us. It would be clear and straightforward to say that horse businesses are exempt from business rates, and the only downside that I can imagine would be a cost to the Exchequer. If that is the Government's argument against the change, they should produce figures to demonstrate the exact cost. I suspect that the cost would be small, because at present no business rate is charged on a farm. If it converted to a horse business, no business rate would still be charged. It would involve a marginal differential between business rates. The cost would be zero but the advantage to farmers would be huge.

I hope that the Minister will also address one small anomaly concerning private stables. If a private stable is attached to its owner's house, it is exempt from business rates. If it is apart from the house by even a very small distance, business rates are payable. There is no logic in that, because it is a private yard and no business is involved at all. The mere fact that the loose box is situated a short distance across a yard attracts business rates. The Minister may wish to consider correcting that anomaly.

Those concerns were brought to the Government's attention by the horse and pony taxation committee, which I chair, in its Budget submissions for this year, for last year and for the previous year. The Minister for the Environment held a meeting to discuss the matters fully—as we hoped—with Michael Clayton, the chairman of the British Horse Society and of the British Horse Industry Confederation, and Anthony Wakeham, the director-general of the British Equestrian Trade Association. The purpose was to discuss the consequences of the foot and mouth crisis on the horse industry, as well as the general malaise in the industry even before the crisis.

The horse industry was extremely disappointed by the outcome of the meeting. The BHS's press statement, issued on 24 April, read:

"Keen disappointment has been expressed by the British Horse Society and the British Equestrian Trade Association that the Minister for the Environment, Mr Michael Meacher, made no mention of the plight of the horse industry in his latest report to Parliament on the work of the Rural Task Force on the Foot and Mouth crisis."

Some 2.4 million people ride horses, and the horse industry is an essential part of rural life, but the Minister made no mention of it. He did not refer to specific measures to help the horse industry or to his meeting with the BHS and the British Horse Industry Confederation.

In that context, we are particularly disappointed that the Minister for the Environment failed to mention bridleways, which are not opening, although footways in the countryside are. Once again, the horse industry, which is hugely important to the countryside in general, has been ignored.

It is a shame that the Government pay so little attention to the horse industry, which can easily be dismissed as somehow rich or somehow self-sufficient. Across the nation—not only in the country, but often in suburban areas—the reality is that horse businesses are experiencing huge difficulty, and the terms and content of the Bill run a significant risk of making that difficulty a great deal worse. It is too little, too late and may be rather damaging.

In contrast, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), from the Front Bench, referred to what the incoming Conservative Government will do with effect from 8 June. I welcome the fact that, unlike the Minister for the Environment, who so notably failed to listen to the horse industry, my hon. Friend has done so with some care, announcing that

"riding has long been part of rural life."

Indeed, it is an essential part of the countryside. He continued:

"The next Conservative Government will exempt new and existing equestrian businesses from business rates."

There was no talk of new businesses, no talk of small ones, no talk of exceptions—we will simply exempt equestrian businesses from business rates.

We will also relax planning restrictions that prevent farm buildings from being converted to equestrian premises. Such conversions represent a huge problem and planning restrictions are such that they are difficult to achieve. Anyhow, there is no incentive to convert, because of the lack of business rate relief.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** Are we being told that, no matter what the size of a building, no matter what its facilities and no matter where it was sited, planning permission would be given for conversion to a riding school?

**Mr. Gray:** No, that is not what I said. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for making that point, because I am happy to clarify my remarks. Of course, consideration would have to be given to the size of the riding school, where it was sited and in what circumstances restrictions would be relaxed. Planning restrictions represent an enormous hurdle to overcome and my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford has proposed that they should be very much relaxed.

I would happily have given time to discussing many other measures, but hon. Members have referred to the question of village shops and rate relief for businesses in areas such as Lacock in my constituency. I welcome those provisions, which will make it a great deal easier for such businesses to survive the crisis through which they are going, but my particular interest is the horse industry. I hope that the House will forgive me for having concentrated my efforts largely on that.

The Government have consistently ignored the industry, although there has been talk of having a Minister for the horse. We think that there should be one. It is

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unclear which Department is responsible for the horse and there are a significant number of anomalies in the way in which horse businesses are rated.

**Mr. David Heath:** The hon. Gentleman has touched on an important point, because it is not clear which Ministry is responsible for recreational horse riding. There is a clear need for the Government to develop a strategy encompassing not only the points that he has made about the status of businesses, but the provision of an adequate bridleway network to enable people to ride horses safely in the countryside. That would achieve a bonus not only in recreational terms, but in tourism terms.

**Mr. Gray:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. When we come to power, I hope to persuade my right hon. Friends to establish within a Department a clear responsibility for the horse. I suspect that that Department will be the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, if it still exists, although I hear on the grapevine that it is about to be broken into pieces. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or a department of rural affairs might take charge and a Minister would have clear responsibility for the horse.

The hon. Gentleman's point about bridleways is extremely good. The recent Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 did not address bridleways at all satisfactorily and it is important that we have a go at producing a sensible network across the nation.

The horse industry has been ignored by the Government and, to a degree, by previous Governments, but the Conservative party has committed itself to addressing it sensibly and effectively when it comes to power. A central part of our consideration must be the way in which it pays business rates. Once again, I congratulate my hon. Friends on the Front Bench on committing the party to giving 100 per cent. rate relief to new and existing equestrian businesses. I call on the Government to match that.

6.25 pm

**Ms Candy Atherton** (Falmouth and Camborne): I am grateful for the chance to take part in the debate. Last week, I hoped to participate in the rural economy debate, which should have been the parliamentary equivalent of the Radio 4 programme "Just a Minute", with no repetition, deviation or hesitation. Many Members wanted to take part, so that is how I thought the debate would go. Sadly, far too many Members did not follow the rules of the game and spoke for far too long, so I was unable to take part. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] I know.

I am pleased to take part in tonight's debate and speak in favour of the Bill, which is relevant to the broader discussion and to my constituency in Cornwall, which represents part of the rural economy. I am one of the Labour Members with a constituency that encompasses coastal towns, former industrial areas and rural areas. There is an interesting symbiosis between them, and I am honoured and privileged to represent such a diverse range of communities.

We all accept that the unforeseen outbreak of foot and mouth has put great strain on rural areas, farmers and tourism in my area in particular. Worryingly, there are specialist businesses whose plight has been worsened, given their lack of a voice or group to represent them. Throughout the crisis, I have been in contact with a local shop selling equestrian equipment—this might interest the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray)—whose owner has built up the business over some 20 years only to see it hit with the body blow of foot and mouth. All the local horse shows were cancelled just after she had purchased the prizes and the equipment for this season.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister recognises that identifying businesses that need assistance is not easy, but a case must be made for such businesses, which, by their very nature, are hit so hard—they do not have the might of the National Farmers Union to put their case for them. Of course, that is the job of their local MP, so I ask my hon. Friend please to bear in mind the fact that isolated shops and businesses have been affected by the disease. Their concerns and the real threat to their existence have hardly been heard in the Chamber.

I am also concerned for recently diversified farms, which are suffering the most in my area. In particular, those farmers who have taken the plunge, converted their barns and considered different land usage such as camping—often, they are the younger ones—are having difficulties. I hope that the Bill will assist some of them.

Perhaps the Government will go further and look to those farmers who have not sat on their hands and said, "We won't do anything to help ourselves. We'll just keep getting the subsidies." Some have established tourism businesses, particularly in my part of the world, but they find themselves unable to open them because they have been hit by foot and mouth. They cannot allow tourists on to their farms, let alone invite them to come.

The county of Cornwall is, thank God, only mildly affected by foot and mouth—mostly in the east, adjacent to Devon. We all hope that it will stay that way. Of course, as any Cornish man or woman would say, Cornwall's biggest problem has always been that it is next to Devon. Given the plight of our dearest neighbour, many in Cornwall are justifiably worried about the knock-on effect on the south-west economy at large, particularly our all-important tourism industry.

It was a relief, particularly for me, to read in last Monday's *Western Morning News*—the newspaper has regularly featured in debates in the Chamber in recent weeks—that the Falmouth Beach hotel has announced record winter bookings. The hotel was a magnificent 77 per cent. full between November and March. Although foot and mouth had an initial effect on bookings, the situation still looks good and that bodes well. That was a great boost for the town and the county. Over the Easter period, our tourist attractions were well attended and the queues in my patch stretched for miles. There are several reasons for that. One is that it is a sign that the efforts of many—from Ministers to film stars—in spreading the word have borne fruit. They are to be thanked for that.

In the past month, I have welcomed my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting to Cornwall. Like many others, they have joined me in putting out the message that Cornwall remains the country's No. 1 tourist attraction and destination. We have a lot to shout about. For example, those hon. Members who have not been to the fantastic Eden project have not lived. Get down there,

enjoy it and keep going back. It will be an emerging and growing attraction. The maritime museum will also be great for attracting visitors.

In Cornwall, finding new ways to attract tourists is the way forward, and support from my hon. Friend the Minister's Department and from the regional development agencies is critical to that. We all know that this country has enjoyed a period of sustained growth in recent years, which benefits every region—whether urban or rural—and every sector of the economy. That is why unemployment has gone down dramatically in my constituency since 1997.

There are deep-rooted problems and reasons for other concerns. The future of post offices and other shops is an obvious example. Villages have had varying fortunes as people change their work patterns and shop in supermarkets. That puts more pressure on village shops. We all know the dangers of that. A visit to some areas of France highlights the risks of a rural economy caught in decline. They include depopulation, empty buildings and the predominance of second homes and British number plates in the Dordogne. I do not want that for Cornwall, and it can be avoided.

The Government's rural White Paper gave a valuable indication of the way forward for villages and towns alike. The Bill is another step in the implementation of that blueprint for the future. However, we must not stop there. Structural economic change can be both positive and negative, and we would all agree that there are rarely quick and easy solutions. We must look to innovation within the rural economy and to local branding, information technology and—in Cornwall's case—renewable energy. Just because Cornwall currently lags behind other parts of the country, we must ensure that it does not remain so as other areas move forward.

Difficulties in the rural economy are often most acute in the most rural areas. Equally, the effect of foot and mouth on businesses may follow that pattern. The smallest most vulnerable businesses may suffer the most. However, it is important to realise that they are also the businesses most vital to the preservation of village and rural life.

Soon after the outbreak began, I conducted a snap survey of local businesses. Some reported, as borne out by the Employment Service, that there had been little effect on employment so far. However, it was no surprise to learn that the effect had been most noticeable in the businesses that organise walking tours, supply bikes for hire or use the coastal footpaths and the open country. They will be helped by the news that the county council will open another 50 miles of the coastal footpath on Wednesday and that the Government have made extra funds available for signing, fencing and the extra staff needed to enable the county council to open the path. No other measure will help the rural economy in Cornwall to overcome the effects of foot and mouth more than the opening of footpaths. Every member of the tourism industry whom I have met in the past two weeks has said the same thing over and over again: "Please open our coast paths."

I have also argued to Ministers that there is a strong case for a job or wage subsidy in the tourism industry. If a hotel or pub recognises that it has problems in the short term and threatens to lay off staff and to close down, the money for unemployment benefit or the jobseeker's allowance could be used to keep people in employment—perhaps with an element of training—while keeping the business open. I believe that Ministers are warming to such a proposal, and I have stressed to them that it is one way of keeping the rural economy and the tourism industry going. It will also help to keep people in work while offering them proper training.

A number of meetings have been held in villages across my constituency to discuss the rural White Paper. Overall, it has been well received by people, no matter from which political party they come. At last, the Government have looked right across the board at the issues affecting rural areas. Villages are evolving and they are very different from the image that some who live in the M25 corridor might have of them. Many people now work from home, using new technologies, and others commute into local towns and cities. As people shop weekly in supermarkets rather than daily in the village store, that affects local shops. Fewer and fewer people work on the land, and the Government and communities need to wake up to that fact. This Bill reflects the evolving and changing countryside.

Last week, my mother used our local post office in St. Day in my constituency as a bank, paying in money and changing coins. She did not travel into a local town and that saved her money. More of us need to follow that example and support our village stores and post offices. I am often struck by the fact that calls to save post offices are often made by those who—as my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) said, in what I was sad to hear may be his last speech in the House—are least likely to have set foot in a post office for many years.

I have given a cursory outline of several issues relevant to the debate and of the broader issues that affect farmers in the Camborne area and Cornwall. However, those issues form part of a much wider debate and, like many, I believe that if there is one silver lining to the awful foot and mouth disease, it may be that we shall finally have a proper and comprehensive debate on the future of rural areas and of farming in particular. I strongly urge Ministers to ensure that, after the election, we have time on the Floor of the House for such a comprehensive debate.

Members of the farming community in my area have appreciated the work of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and of his Department and they have asked me to relay their thanks to everyone involved. They tell me that they want the Government to send a clear message about what they want from the farming community, and that is not too much to ask. If the Government do not want farmers to use subsidies, the farmers say, "Fine." However, they want to hear from the Government and do want to have to second guess their intentions. After BSE, foot and mouth and the other problems facing rural areas, people who live in the towns and who buy from the supermarkets and from farmers' markets are now saying, "Times have got to change. What are the Government going to do?" As other hon. Members have said, the Bill is a step in the right direction. Although we have a long way to go, I am pleased to support it because it makes a start.

6.39 pm

**Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): The hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) mentioned the radio programme "Just a Minute". I fear that my remarks

*[Mr. Michael Jack]*

may take a little longer than that, but her comment triggered in my mind questions as to what the cast of "The Archers" would think of this Bill. With the thought that all sorts of rural developments could be encouraged by rating relief, I imagine that Linda Snell would be organising a protest group against them. Whether Brian, on his big farm, would have enough money to diversify given the loss of Borchester Mills is a burning question in the minds of "The Archers" scriptwriters. Would the Bill induce Pat and Tony to open a second organic food shop on Bridge farm? Undoubtedly, the Government's spin doctors will be considering those questions very carefully in trying to influence the scriptwriters of "The Archers" in promulgating the new-found message of hope that the Government want to come from what is palpably a very modest measure indeed.

This debate, not unnaturally, has included matters connected with foot and mouth disease, but other hon. Members have rightly reminded the House that the Bill is built on proposals made by the previous Conservative Government in recognising the need to pay attention to the viability of businesses in rural Britain and to reduce their rates. To that extent, I am glad that the Government have followed the lead set by the previous Conservative Government, as they have done in so many other ways. The fact that we are debating the Bill is useful, and I certainly would not disagree with it, but let us have a little look at some of the measures because there are some specific points to tease out as well as some more general points to be made.

I wonder how much new diversification is available in the farming community, because especially in those areas affected by foot and mouth disease, and whatever moneys might be available, the problem is one not of diversification but of survival and it involves restocking the farms and dealing with the consequential losses of having no farm income for the next six, nine or even 12 months.

I listened carefully to the remarks on the potential for further diversification. My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) mentioned that possibly a third of farmers were considering diversification, but when I look around in my constituency—Fylde in Lancashire—hardly an original barn is left to be diversified; they have already been turned into houses or some form of rural enterprise. I wonder about the physical opportunities to develop diversified businesses.

An aspect that has not been mentioned is the fact that diversification is a great deal easier for those who own the freehold of their farms than it is for tenants. In considering businesses and new ventures, those tenants who do not have a farm business tenancy would, in the first instance, have to seek the agreement of their landlords—the principal landowners—and that may involve some very great difficulties. As we consider farming generally and those areas affected by foot and mouth specifically, I suspect that the tenants will suffer the most, and that, sadly, they will benefit the least from these proposals.

From where will the money for diversification come? Sadly, the Bill does not give much hope that the Government are trying to encourage new sources of capital to enter agriculture to take up the opportunity of diversification. In my speech on Second Reading of the Finance Bill, I suggested, for example, some changes to the qualifying terms of the enterprise investment scheme and the venture capital trust scheme that would enable new money, with the limited tax advantage already conferred on urban investment, to be visited on rural investment. Sadly, the Government have not yet responded, but I pay tribute to the Paymaster General, who very kindly said that she would consider those proposals. If the Government are truly interested in diversification, they will have to consider such issues.

We must focus on an important detail in the notes on clauses that accompany the Bill, and I make no apology for returning to an issue that my hon. Friends have mentioned. Paragraph 7 states:

> "Therefore, farmers face a new rate liability when moving any of their property from agricultural to non-agricultural uses. This is perceived as a barrier to diversification into non-agricultural activity."

Those very words raise the question of who is the beneficiary of the proposal. The assumption in the Government's own words is that farmers will benefit, yet the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) talked about the use of new technology in the rural environment. She was right to do so because those businesses that, for example, can deal with information technology—data processing, or whatever—may find farm environments very attractive given the lack of rates under the Bill, but will they necessarily be able to take up the advantage, as clause 1 does not make it clear who will be the beneficiary?

As other hon. Members have said, the Minister suggested that third parties may be able to help, but I hope that, in winding up the debate, the Under-Secretary will make it absolutely clear who will be the beneficiaries of the proposals. Certainly, new forms of agricultural business partnership may well represent the way forward, and farm business tenancies, which I had the pleasure to bring into law, may well find a further boost. They have been popular, they have been taken up, and they provide certain opportunities for tenanted farms to diversify. The people who have adopted such leases will be anxious to ensure that new forms of partnership in the rural areas can be developed.

The term "rural settlement" has been used in relation to clause 1, and I want to consider the important issue of what is rural. Coincidentally, in my mail today was a letter from my local authority, Fylde borough council. The letter, which was written in the context of the foot and mouth disease outbreak, is headed "Designation of 'Rural' Areas". Fylde borough council has written to the head of the rural development division, Mr. Henry Cleary—who may be known to the Under-Secretary—to debate what is rural. The letter was written by the acting chief executive. In fact, he is now the deputy chief executive; I had forgotten that Fylde has appointed a new chief executive.

Mr. Bramhall wrote to Mr. Cleary stating:

> "Fylde Borough has an area 16501 hectares, and a population of 75000. Nearly 60 per cent. of the population are concentrated in the narrow coastal strip at Lytham St Annes, while another 15 per cent. inhabit the small adjacent towns of Kirkham and Wesham."

He points out that 10 per cent. of the population effectively live in what are defined as the urban areas. The land use of the borough of Fylde effectively shows that it is a rural area, but we do not qualify under the designation used for the foot and mouth rate reliefs because we have been judged not to be rural. Colleagues

have talked about rural settlements of 3,000—plus or minus one person—on cliff edges being included in the measure, but I am not certain whether parts of Fylde that would consider themselves to be entirely rural would benefit from the proposals. I shall send the Under-Secretary a copy of the Fylde borough letter, and perhaps he will be kind enough to acknowledge that he will consider those concerns, which are important to Fylde borough council.

Paragraph 10 of the notes on clauses refer to

"a rural settlement of no more than 3,000."

The Under-Secretary will, no doubt, tell us that that phrase comes from some well-defined source, but I am not clear about what will happen during the proposal's five years. Will there be any creep? Will people consider the figure of 3,000 as of now, or will such an area not qualify if another baby is born there? I am sure that that is not the case, but there is a lack of clarity about how the proposal will work and it is time that that was sorted out.

As has been said in referring to the definitions of the rate relief, the mandatory relief will be limited to £6,000, whereas the discretionary relief will reach a rateable value limit of £12,000. Again, I am intrigued about how such numbers and limits are set, but, like other contributors to the debate, I am worried that councils such as the hard-pressed borough of Fylde—if it was to be included—would not necessarily have enough money in their budgets to enable them to take advantage of the discretionary relief. What work has the Under-Secretary done to assess whether rural local authorities are actually able to take up the opportunities proposed in the Bill? The proposals will be hollow indeed if local authorities find it difficult to take advantage of the flexibility of the measure.

I was also intrigued by clause 3. It gave rise to an interesting debate in which the Government say, in effect, that in order to ensure that all the key retail outlets in a rural village are able to benefit from the proposals, a business will qualify if it is "wholly or mainly" for

"the sale by retail of food for human consumption".

Questions about the nature of petrol retailing go through my mind. Nowadays, many petrol stations contain a shop, a bakery or a newsagent—one can buy numerous other things there. Such businesses already attract some rate relief because of their importance to the rural community, but there seems to be substantial doubt as to whether a diversified food business will qualify.

If the spirit and purpose of the Bill is to safeguard, develop and sustain the villages of rural Britain—or certainly of England and Wales—why are we nit-picking in that way? Why do we not recognise premises that are central and important to the well-being of a village community? If necessary, we should turn to local authorities and ask them which businesses are important. Why do we not ask parish councils? They know their area; they know which businesses are important. It would have been nice if there had been a little local consultation to deal with these nit-picking points in the Bill.

The clause contains the phrase

"excluding confectionery and excluding the supply of food in the course of catering".

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions suggested that if the premises had a few seats for people to have a cup of coffee and a bun, that business would be included. However, I have visited places in the Lake district where three old cottages were knocked together—one bit is the post office, one bit is the cafe and one bit is mainly for food sales—

**Ms Armstrong:** Those businesses already qualify.

**Mr. Jack:** That may be so, but there will be grey areas. If I am wrong, I shall be the first to thank the Minister for clarifying the point. However, we have raised the matter in this debate because the framing of the Bill lacks clarity.

**Mr. Evans:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that, due to that confusion in the Bill, enormous discretion will be given to the people who will decide whether businesses qualify when the measure is enacted? There could be arguments—businesses could be allowed to benefit in one area, while in another area identical businesses might be excluded. That will lead to even more confusion.

**Mr. Jack:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend—my near neighbour in Ribble Valley—for that observation. He understands, from the many small villages in his constituency, what such questions could mean. If we are wrong, I shall be the first to thank the Minister for clarifying the matter. Perhaps the time is right to produce a simple, easy-to-read booklet of guidance on the whole subject. That might save the Minister's correspondence unit time, energy and effort—if nothing else—in replying to all our letters about who will be included and who will be out. I should certainly be grateful if some thought could be given to pulling together the various definitions of what is rural; sometimes, I struggle to find out whether parts of my constituency are included under various schemes.

I come to the wider context of the Bill. The National Farmers Union, in its representation to Members, rightly drew our attention to the anomaly that the Bill favours new, not existing, diversified businesses. If we are trying to safeguard the rural economy, that issue must be addressed. I support those hon. Members who have raised the five-year period and I am glad that the Government will review that carefully.

Much has been said about diversification of the rural economy and the fact that the activity of agriculture is suffering in that regard. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) is no longer in her place, but I want to qualify some of her remarks. The moaning has not come from the whole agricultural sector, nor is the whole sector subsidised. The poultry, pig and horticulture industries receive no direct subsidy, but they, too, are as interested in the measures as the subsidised sector.

The Library document rightly reminds us, under the heading "Factors limiting diversification", that:

"Finance is almost always important in diversification, since investment is almost inevitable".

One of the issues that we shall have to address—although perhaps not directly through the Bill—is from where new investment in agriculture will come. As hon. Members point out when they comment on the lack or decline of farm incomes during the past few years, the amount of new investment capital in agriculture is significantly limited.

*[Mr. Jack]*

Table 6 of the English rural development plan—a weighty document—lays out some of the help that the Government purport to be able to give over the next seven years to enable rural Britain to take advantage of some of the provisions in the Bill. According to the table, investment in agricultural holdings in 2002 will, in effect, be only £1.5 million; in the following year, it will be £2.3 million. Those amounts are for the whole of British agriculture.

In 2002, there will be £6.3 million for the improved processing and marketing of agricultural products—the type of diversified activity that might receive assistance under clause 1; in 2003, the amount will be £8 million. In 2002, £1.8 million will be allocated for the encouragement of tourism; there will be £3.6 million in 2003.

When we hear talk of *£1.6 billion* over seven years, the English rural development plan sounds wonderful, but break it down into its constituent parts and we find a pretty thin diet—a limited amount of jam is being spread thinly through the rural economy to enable diversification to take place.

I conclude my remarks with an observation on another key barrier on which much work is needed. The rural White Paper produced by the previous Conservative Government addressed planning in the countryside. In fairness, the Labour Government have also done so. However, there is great feeling, especially among people who moved to rural Britain because they seek an idyllic life style, and opposition to substantial development. Development on farms will excite a large number of people.

It is clear that although planning guidance has been changed, we have not yet dealt with all the barriers to developments on farms. If genuinely new enterprises are to develop, there may be a lack of fit between the rural idyll and the needs of the farm. For example, access is one such issue. If an IT-based industry is developed within the curtilage of a farm, using redundant buildings, and 20 or 30 people use cars to go to those premises, one can imagine the concerns that will be expressed in villages.

I could continue, but such practical issues may act as a constraint on the type of diversification that the measure is supposed to address. I very much hope that when the election is out of the way, we shall return to a full, frank and public debate on and discussion of all these matters. It is important that we maximise the potential of the rural parts of the United Kingdom, just as we try to do in the urban context through inner-city regeneration. This is the equivalent challenge to inner-city regeneration; it just happens to be taking place in the countryside. The same difficult issues present themselves there as in urban Britain. Although I welcome the measure, it is but a small drop in what will be a big ocean when it comes to reviving the rural economy in this country.

7 pm

**Mr. David Drew** (Stroud): I am grateful to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate and apologise for not having being present for as much of it as I should have liked. Unfortunately, it clashed with an interesting scientific exposé of bovine tuberculosis which is ever present in my constituency, and the next problem after foot and mouth. There is nothing new in our having to face up to animal diseases.

In our discussion on how businesses can be helped, we must get right the context within which they operate. The Bill is not an isolated measure; it is part of a raft of Government initiatives. Given that the Government are sometimes criticised for not knowing what is going on in rural Britain, or for not representing it, the hard and fast way in which they have introduced many different policies deserves close examination and hearty congratulations. The rural White Paper is an important document in its own right, and several initiatives have sprung from it. The Bill is not necessarily one of them, but we must start from the perspective that it is integral to it. The action plan for farming is central to the debate. Although we are not dealing with the immediate crisis, we are concerned about the way in which we can help farms and alternative businesses in rural Britain.

Some issues that I want to raise have already been mentioned; others remain to be highlighted. We must get the Bill right because businesses will need to understand it and call on the help that it offers. I welcome the Government's clarification of diversification as it relates to farming and other businesses in the rural economy. We need to build on that; we cannot wait for the market to make it happen. Intervention is necessary, and some of us want to see more of it. That policy can be delivered by direct Government support or by using the tax or rating system to encourage new businesses to set up, which hopefully will help existing businesses to flourish.

What I like so much about the Government's approach in the White Paper is that, rather than just talking about the need to help rural industry, they are providing it with resources. That was lacking in the previous Government's attempts. The Government are a decentralising Administration. They are giving resources to the first level of government—parishes and towns. Various schemes are under way, including the parish initiative for transport and the more effective use of resources to bring businesses into operation locally. In addition, we are starting to believe that we can lay down a minimum service provision. That links up with the Government's policy on retention and protection of rural sub-post offices. As I have said before, we need to bring that together and recognise how crucial transport is to rural Britain. We must provide genuine alternatives to the car so that people can get about if they cannot or do not want to drive.

I welcome the recognition of the important role played by tenant farmers in the rural economy and the difficulties that they face. We must give them particular help. Clearly, that has to relate to the nature of their tenancies. We also have to consider how we can encourage them and give them the wherewithal to diversify so that they can run other businesses alongside their farming activities. I hope that, as it develops, the Small Business Service will play a major part in that by giving advice and financial help. The countryside group, which was set up by the Gloucestershire development agency, is beginning to have an important intermediary role. It is helping to use the rural development regulations to find money that can be invested in different ways. Not only does that work at a county level, but it could be successful as part of a more decentralised structure. I believe that the organisation will take on other roles.

My only criticism of the Government is in relation to their approach to early retirement. That nettle will have to grasped, as I have said openly before. I welcome the gradual movement towards that. I understand the concern of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food about pumping money into supporting dead weight—I do not use that term pejoratively, but in an economic sense. I realise that it would be better to front-end the money and ensure that it is provided effectively. However, an industry with an average age of 58 does not have the best future ahead of it. We must do something about that.

The Bill is part of a cohesive policy. We should not separate different aspects of that. As the official Opposition said, there is a danger of setting business against business if we do not handle the problem sensitively and sensibly. I hope that the Bill will help us to consider how we can keep shops in operation. They need to be able to source locally and get supplies from local abattoirs. Perhaps greater economies of scale will allow them to keep the sub-post office going. That could be achieved as part of the ratings system. Those are the very costs that businesses want to reduce and I am sure that we can help them to do that.

We are working through the problems created by the difficulties of the foot and mouth crisis. However, we must move beyond the specific help that is being offered and consider a cohesive way in which we can rebuild the food chain and offer services that do not rely purely on subsidy. Those businesses need to function in their communities in the long term so that people are willing and able to buy into them. It is important that they have a future, not only for the local communities, but, of course, for the people who run them.

I am always depressed by the fact that when the official Opposition have to find money for rural regeneration—whether it be additional help for rate relief or grants—their answer is to get it by the emasculation of the regional development agencies. I say categorically that if they want a complete vote loser in my constituency, that is it. The regional development agency is pumping in £90 million to overcome the decline of one key industry in Dursley in my constituency. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members may laugh, but they should bear that fact in mind when the official Conservative candidate tries to defend their policy. They must understand that the local rural economy is dependent on the regeneration of that site and it will be greatly damaged if we get rid of the RDA without giving it a second thought. There is a total misunderstanding of the relationship between small communities in isolated rural areas and the market towns on which they depend. The whole point of RDAs is that they provide seedcorn investment to market towns, which creates employment for people in surrounding villages. Getting rid of the RDAs would be vandalism. They are supported not only by Labour Members but by businesses and communities who see the investment that they make. I hope that the official Opposition will reconsider, even at this late stage, their decision to find the money that they need by abolishing the RDAs.

I have become increasingly aware of how foot and mouth disease directly affects local authorities, which have a key role to play, because, as many hon. Members have said, they know the problems experienced by businesses and communities in their area. Even if we provide help from the centre, largely through mandatory rate relief, local authorities have to be allowed a certain amount of discretion. That is the right approach, but we must not leave it to local authorities to find all the funds because that will cause them difficulty.

On Friday, I will meet the officers of my local authority to talk about the implications of its funding relief for businesses suffering in the foot and mouth crisis. I am sure that central Government will be able to find methods of making additional finance available, but unless we put together a comprehensive package for the rural economy, and not only for the foot and mouth crisis, local authorities will be in a difficult position. It has been said many times that that can only result in higher council tax charges and, potentially, a conflict between methods of raising money and of spending it. We must work with local authorities in rural areas to put in place a funding stream that works properly.

We must also consider how we value property and lock in place rate support. I know that the notes accompanying the Bill are merely explanatory, but they say that there is not expected to be much call for rate revaluation tribunals. A clear way to provide substantive help would be to reduce rateable values when businesses—particularly, but not exclusively, in rural areas—get into trouble. My experience is that it may be a long time before a tribunal hears an appeal, and if a business was in difficulty, a reduction in the rateable value could make a substantial difference. This is a question not only of resources but of people, and we need to involve them so that tribunals can be held as soon as possible.

I welcome the Bill, which shows that the Government are in tune with the help that is needed by our rural economy. Individual businesses are crucial to that economy. We need to keep shops and small firms operating, and the Bill will help us to do so. Clearly, it will be subject to further improvement. When the Government are re-elected, they should build on community regeneration, which is also crucial. With that in mind, I am sure that we will send the Bill on its way, having improved it, and put in place the rural support that is needed.

7.15 pm

**Mr. Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire): This is the first debate on the countryside that the Government have held since the foot and mouth crisis began. We have had three such debates in Opposition time and we have had statements from the Government, but we have not had a full day's debate, and that is appalling. The problem concerns not only farming but the whole rural economy.

I had a meeting with my county council chief in the early days of the crisis, when I also met the chief executive. In Shropshire, 12 per cent. of the population is engaged, directly or indirectly, in farming activities and 15 per cent. is engaged in tourism and related industries. I went to a crisis conference in Telford. My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) and I were the only MPs present, but 200 people came along at short notice to stress the immediate crisis that they are facing.

The Government set up the taskforce, but before that the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport came to the Chamber to make a statement. I had already had letters and phone calls from people who were desperate because their business had simply stopped. I asked the Secretary of State whether he had talked to banks about loans or to the

*[Mr. Owen Paterson]*

Chancellor about rates and what he had done about promoting tourism. I was accused of being partisan and of ranting, which I hope you think is an uncharacteristic feature of my performance in the Chamber, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Paice:** My hon. Friend is never knowingly under-ranted.

**Mr. Paterson:** I am touched by that endorsement from my hon. Friend.

Three weeks later, the Minister for the Environment, came to the Agriculture Committee. He talked about the very same interest-free loans, rate relief and promotion and marketing, but he was only talking. The Government are "considering" and saying that they are "sympathetic", and the taskforce is "meeting", but where is the action? We have had an announcement on rate relief for businesses affected by foot and mouth. Businesses in my area went to Oswestry borough council about that, but the council had not been informed. Months after the crisis began, we have this puny little measure. It would be churlish to deny that it will help, and it will provide some small help to some businesses, particularly those which will have to diversify away from basic farming. However, it is too little, too late.

I would be grateful if the Minister paid attention while I give a few examples of local people who are absolutely desperate. I can see that she is in deep conversation with the Whip.

**Ms Armstrong:** My hon. Friend is very sensible.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord):** Order. We must not have interventions from a sedentary position.

**Mr. Paterson:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was just trying to get the Minister's attention. I want to be brief because I know that other hon. Members want to speak. I want to talk about the second largest industry in the rural sector, which is the equestrian business. It has a turnover of £2.5 billion, 2.4 million riders, 900,000 horses and 20,000 businesses employing 40,000 people, and that is excluding racing. In April, the industry lost about 50 per cent. of its turnover. In May, it is likely to lose 60 per cent. The revenue lost in April was £57 million, and the industry reckons to be losing about £29 million a week. Those losses are simply unsustainable by small country businesses, and the decelerator effect in the countryside will be massive. Farriers, horseshoe manufacturers, tack shops, saddlers, retailers, equestrian magazine publishers, specialist equipment suppliers, feed merchants and competition organisers will all be affected. They are short of cash.

The other day I went to a large, successful riding school whose name might make the Minister's ears prick up. It is called the Prescott equestrian centre, having the same name as the great Jaguar owner. The school is based in Baschurch near Shrewsbury. It was involved in classic diversification; large barns, originally set up for agriculture, were converted by Mrs. June Haydon. In the past 14 or so years, the school has created a successful business; it owns about 70 horses and employs 20 full and part-time staff. When I went there the other Friday, it was quite dead, which is shocking. When one drives past, one can see that there are not many cars around; but to go to such a large establishment, with a huge indoor school, an outside showjumping arena and a dressage arena, and find no activity on a beautiful sunny morning in the run-up to Easter is shocking and brings home how devastating the crisis is.

The business has weekly overheads of about £3,000, but is nowhere near getting that back. Such businesses will not carry on without an immediate injection of cash to help cash flow, as we have suggested in our interest-free loan proposal, which is considerably better than the Government demanding 8.75 per cent. interest and collateral. As one farrier, whose business is down from 150 horses to just eight per week, told me, that is just a shovel to dig a bigger hole for one's grave.

Without being churlish, what is offered on rates on new businesses is welcome. However, Mrs. Haydon cannot touch it, as her business has been going for 14 years. Surely, it is iniquitous to create a division in the equestrian business. It cannot be fair that established businesses cannot take advantage of that fairly puny measure. The cost of business rates can make or break diversified business.

Another constituent of mine, Mr. Richard Matson from Twemlows Hall, had a substantial dairy and pig business, and has diversified. He set up an equine therapy pool for exercising injured race horses; a highly enterprising idea which required considerable investment. However, because of the racing season, it was open for only six to eight months a year and it simply could not bear the cost of business rates. In future, that sort of business would perhaps benefit from this fairly stingy measure. Sadly, however, it is too late for Mr. Matson, who had to close his business because he could not afford the business rates. He is bitter about the fact that the measure will apply only to new equine developments.

Mr. Matson also made the point that agricultural colleges pay no rates on riding stables, arenas or indoor schools, although they can use them for all sorts of purposes to do with horses. That seems to be another pernicious effect of a two-tier system of rating. It is not fair that established businesses should have to compete, first, with educational establishments that do not have pay rates and, secondly, with a new tranche of people coming in. There has to be a level playing field; if there is going to be a rebate, it must be available to all.

**Mr. Gray:** Does my hon. Friend not agree that, when the Government say that giving zero rating to equestrian establishments such as those that he has described will cost them £3 million, £5 million or £10 million, they are being slightly misleading? The moment that they get no business rates from a building because it is being used as a farm, which is zero-rated anyhow, all that they will be doing is giving up a potentially much larger figure. The cost to the Government would be nothing at all if they were to give such businesses a zero rate as well.

**Mr. Paterson:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his prescient comment. I was just about to go on to a similar point made by my constituent, Mr. Matson. My hon.

Friend gave an excellent speech and went into great detail about the impact of the measure on the horse industry; what he said is endorsed by Mr. Matson, who said:

"The most damning point of the document is the reference to cost. Other than administration costs this will cost the Government nothing. If it attracts new equine enterprises the Government/local authority will be in receipt of more business rates—albeit at 50 per cent.—than it would have been without the scheme."

So my constituent endorses the exact point made by hon. Friend.

There is therefore not much risk to the Government. The measure demonstrates that they do not take the rural economy seriously. After three or four months of the crisis, this is the first Government debate that even touches on the rural economy; Members now have a chance to come to the House and debate the issue. It is interesting that only two Labour Back Benchers are present; throughout our debate, only one Liberal Democrat has turned up to make a brief intervention for a press release, and he has now bailed out. By contrast, numerous Conservative Members have participated, intervened and made valuable comments such as those made by my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray).

**Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe** (Bradford, South): He is a Whip.

**Mr. Paterson:** He may be a Whip, but there are great merits in being a Conservative Whip with a country background.

I shall conclude as I know that other Members wish to contribute. I welcome the idea behind the measure, which is that there has to be some diversification—which must, however, be uniform. Clearly, the equestrian sector is the largest area of activity in the countryside which will benefit from rate relief, but that relief must be uniform across the entire sector.

7.25 pm

**Mr. Tony Baldry** (Banbury): There was an outbreak of foot and mouth in my north Oxfordshire constituency which had a devastating impact not just on the farming community but on the tourism industry in north Oxfordshire.

Many people were confused about just who in Government had responsibility for responding to wider concerns about foot and mouth. For a long time, there has been a Cabinet Sub-Committee, chaired by the Minister for the Cabinet Office, but at no point in the disaster has she appeared on the scene. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food then sought to answer questions on a wider brief, but he was overtaken by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, who came to the House on a couple of occasions to make statements. Latterly, responsibility was given to the Minister for the Environment, and we were told that the Government had set up a rural taskforce.

My concern about the Bill, and my reason for wishing to speak this evening, involves the fact that, with the rural taskforce and the Bill, the Government are seeking to give the impression that they are doing an enormous amount for the rural community, rural tourism, village shops, and garages and pubs, when in fact they are doing precious little. The Bill is the sort of measure that will be spun by parliamentary candidates at public meetings in rural constituencies in the next few weeks as an indication of what the Government are doing for the rural economy, when in fact they are doing nothing whatever.

I have constituents whose livelihood and business have been all but destroyed by foot and mouth. The Oxford canal, a beautiful and attractive canal, runs through my constituency, and goes from Oxford up to the Grand Union canal. Oxfordshire Narrowboats at Lower Heyford hires out narrowboats to people on holiday. However, at the outset of the crisis in early March, the board of British Waterways, rightly and understandably, closed all the towpaths. Effectively, no narrow boats could go up and down the Oxford canal or, indeed, any other canal, which of course meant that, almost overnight, Oxfordshire Narrowboats closed down, since it had no customers. Easter is its busiest time for bookings, but it received practically none until Easter week. I am glad to say that, from that week on, things started to improve slightly as the towpaths began to open. However, the closure of those paths was pretty devastating.

I wrote to Ministers asking whether the Government could explain what the rural taskforce would do for businesses such as Oxfordshire Narrowboats. The Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Lord Whitty, who, as junior Minister, wrote on behalf of the Minister for the Environment, telling me about things that the Government were doing that could assist my constituents—including providing

"in depth consultancy support via the Small Business Service helpline."

Well, that is great and fantastic; it really cheered up my constituents, who were glad that there was a helpline for them to telephone.

I was also told that my constituents would receive

"a sympathetic approach to deferred and rearranged payments to Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise."

That was really helpful, and it might marginally help my constituents with their cash flow. However, they have still got to pay the money; no one is going to say that there is going to be any rebate or remission on Customs and Excise duties or tax.

Then there was the suggestion that there would be

"extra cash support to enable rural local authorities to provide hardship rate relief—up to £1,290 for three months for a business with a £12,000 rateable value."

That was the only positive help in the entire package for a business such as Oxfordshire Narrowboats. If it met the £12,000 rateable value criterion and if the local authority chose to provide rate relief, it could benefit from up to £1,290 off its business rates. Such businesses, which have been devastated by foot and mouth, would consider that pretty small beer.

The Bill does not do much more. It extends the 50 per cent. mandatory rate relief to all food shops in rural settlements of fewer than 3,000 people. I do not know about my colleagues' constituencies, but most of the villages in north Oxfordshire have more than 3,000 people; or the shops, pubs and filling stations that are left tend, by definition, to be in the larger villages and to serve several smaller villages. So I expect that the proposal will benefit practically no shops, no pubs and no fillings stations in north Oxfordshire.

Practically all the village shops, village post offices and filling stations in my constituency are in villages of more than 3,000 people, because that is the only way those

*[Mr. Tony Baldry]*

businesses have managed to remain viable at all. It will be interesting to see how many shops, post offices and pubs across the country are helped by the Bill—precious few, I suspect.

Why 3,000? If the Government really want to help village post offices, village shops and filling stations in rural areas, why not extend or give local authorities far greater discretion to extend rate relief to them? After all, local authorities know and should be able to decide locally which village post offices, which village shops and which village filling stations are worth supporting. The Bill gives local authorities scant discretion and will give—*[Interruption.]* If, instead of chuntering, the Minister of State would like to intervene, she is welcome to. I realise that we may be detaining her from her dinner, but there are many of my constituents whose businesses are in dire straits.

**Ms Armstrong:** I was simply saying that post office relief does not come within the terms of the Bill. It is covered by other legislation which is already in operation. It is also possible for businesses such as those that the hon. Gentleman describes in larger areas—not very small villages—to apply to their local authority for hardship relief. Their local authority has full discretion to award hardship relief, of which the Government fund 75 per cent.

**Mr. Baldry:** I am grateful to the right hon. Lady. Of course, she is right in her clarification about post offices. However, hardship relief is available only in the immediate circumstances of foot and mouth. The Bill, as I understand it, is intended to carry on for ever. It is not just for this particular period.

The right hon. Lady may wish to clarify the position, but if a post office or store in a larger village was having difficulties, it could not apply on that basis to the local authority for rate relief. The business would have to get over the hurdle of the case law relating to hardship. There is no statutory definition of "hardship"; it is entirely contained in case law. I hope that at some stage the Government will consider providing a statutory definition of hardship, to help local authorities to decide whether to give relief.

The Bill will give scant help to a very few rural businesses. I have a wildfowl sanctuary in my constituency. Mabel Warner, who runs it, told me that her busiest two months were February and March. At Easter, the big attractions open, so the sanctuary takes much of its money during February and March. As a consequence of closing because of the foot and mouth disaster, the business has been seriously affected. It is true that Mabel Warner can go through the rather cumbersome process of applying to the valuation office for a reappraisal of her business rates, but with the exception of a modest reduction in their business rates, if the overall rateable value of the business in question is less than £12,000, businesses such as the Wiggington wildfowl sanctuary will get no help at all from the Government.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) said from the Front Bench, the Bill is unobjectionable. But I do object to the way in which it will be spun as being of substantial help to rural businesses and to those who have suffered from the foot and mouth crisis. It will do nothing of the sort. I suspect that very few, if any, businesses in a constituency such as mine will be helped by the Bill.

Those on the Government Front Bench demonstrated some surprise when my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford said that the Conservatives could do and, I am sure, would do considerably better. One of the ways we would do better would be to save money by abolishing the regional development agencies. The right hon. Lady and any other Government Minister will always be welcome in north Oxfordshire—we have had precious few visits from Ministers in the past four years. Statistics seem to demonstrate that Ministers only visit target seats, but they are always welcome in north Oxfordshire.

If a Minister went down Banbury high street or Sheep street in Bicester and asked people the name of the local regional development agency, or even asked members of the chamber of commerce to name the regional development agency, I would be extremely surprised if, even at the chamber of commerce, more than 5 per cent. had ever heard of SEEDA—the South East England Development Agency. If SEEDA were abolished, it would be unmourned. No one from north Oxfordshire would waste money sending a wreath to the funeral of SEEDA. It is a total waste of money, so far as Oxfordshire is concerned.

We have no strategic interest in what is happening in the southernmost reaches of Kent or Surrey. Ours is a strategic area between the Thames valley and the west midlands, and the South East England Development Agency has been a waste of funds. Far better that such development agencies be abolished and the money given to provide real help to rural businesses.

At the general election, which I expect is not too far away, I very much look forward to going round the village shops, village pubs, village stores and filling stations in my constituency, explaining the genuine help that a Conservative Government can and will give them. That will not be spin; it will be solid substance. What we and the countryside require at this time are not gimmicks or a taskforce which does nothing but direct people to helplines. We want real assistance and solid support.

7.39 pm

**Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to this very important stage of the Bill's passage. As my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) pointed out, this is our first opportunity since the foot and mouth outbreak began to discuss in Government time anything that relates even remotely to the crisis. We have so far used Opposition days for all such debates. Indeed, the Liberal Democrats used part of one of their days for the same purpose. It is a great shame that the Government have not allocated a whole day for us to discuss the problems that all hon. Members who represent rural constituencies face with the appalling onslaught of foot and mouth.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) asked what the Archers would be thinking. Let me strain the comparison and say that Emmerdale farm would have closed down a long time ago. That would be nothing to do with foot and mouth, but part of the general rural crisis. No doubt a supermarket would be situated there by now.

The countryside is in deep crisis, but that crisis has not occurred only because of foot and mouth. It has been happening for several years, during which farm incomes

have declined so much that some farmers must dream about earning even the minimum wage. I have received a letter from Anthony Goldstone, who is chairman of the North West tourist board. He writes about the importance of tourism in the north-west, which provides about £1.5 billion a year and supports 7 per cent. of the work force. That is how important it is. His letter states:

"The current Foot and Mouth outbreak is putting at risk up to £8 million of tourism revenue and 200 jobs per week in the rural economy."

**Mr. Paterson:** Before my hon. Friend moves on from farm incomes, may I remind him that, under the Government whom he so nobly supported, total farming income doubled between 1990 and 1995? It has fallen by 72 per cent. since it reached those heights.

**Mr. Evans:** As my hon. Friend knows from his rural constituency, some farmers now earn less than £100 a week. The foot and mouth crisis means that some of them have been earning absolutely nothing. We should pay tribute to the agricultural charities. Without them, one of my constituents would have nothing. Fortunately, two charities stepped forward and gave her some cash, but, because of the sort of farming in which she works, she has been unable to move or sell any of her animals. No income whatever has been coming in, so her situation has been desperate. I pay tribute to all the agricultural charities, especially those that deal with daily calls from farmers who are stressed out and at their wits' end.

Let me return to Mr. Goldstone, whose letter states:

"The leadership and personal support of the Prime Minister and other Ministers in reassuring the tourism industry and encouraging the consumer, has been big on words, but short on practical substance."

The Bill sums that up. As has been pointed out, hardly anybody will benefit from the amounts of money that are being provided, which are small in comparison with the deep problem that exists. I said that the help was a sticking plaster for a heart attack, and that is exactly what it is. The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) said that I was exaggerating, but I am not. There are businesses in deep pain that need direct and immediate assistance from the Government.

Interest-free loans are at the top of Anthony Goldstone's list of suggestions. Why cannot we have such loans? The Opposition have been suggesting for several weeks that they should be introduced. They should be provided now. It is not as if businesses can wait much longer. No doubt many have already closed and laid people off. They need the money now. Many small businesses owe money to other small businesses that are equally affected by the outbreak of foot and mouth. If they could only get access to an interest-free loan, they could start to pay off their debts to other smaller businesses. The money would then start to fuel the economy. The Chancellor of the Exchequer should like that idea, as it would not cost him anything in the long term. Once businesses start to earn a profit again, they will begin to pay the money back, so the Exchequer will not lose out. If businesses stay in business, they will pay taxes in future, but if they go out of business, they will pay no taxes whatever. I ask the Government yet again to consider the proposal.

Earlier today, I asked the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether he had made representations to the Chancellor on that exact point. He did not answer my question. Of course, that was no surprise, as he did not answer any of the questions that he was asked today, but as he did not respond to my specific point, I can believe only that he has made representations to the Chancellor about the matter. We are told that the Chancellor is awash with money, including the £22 billion gained on licences for third-generation mobile phones, but he must have said no. For some strange reason, he does not want to help out the affected businesses.

Anthony Goldstone ends his letter by stating:

"Importandy, we are not currently talking about recovery, but survival. This is a passionate, fighting industry, usually a good news industry. It will not survive without significant support. The situation is critical and urgent assistance is long overdue.

The tourism industry needs your help now more than ever before."

I ask the Minister to consider carefully what Mr. Goldstone says on behalf of the North West tourist board. I suspect that he speaks on behalf of tourist boards throughout the country, which all feel exactly the same: they need assistance now.

It is a great shame that the Minister for the Environment, who has responsibility for the rural taskforce, is not using this debate to propose a more substantial package of measures than the Bill. We have said that we will take anything that the Government are prepared to offer, but we must be realistic. The Bill will be spun out of all recognition and presented as the great saviour for rural businesses throughout the country, but it is nothing of the kind. A lot of the farming and tourism businesses in my constituency will not benefit from the Bill at all. The Government keep saying "Diversify away from farming, please", but from where will businesses get the money to make the capital investments that they need to diversify in the first place?

I remember when the Prime Minister visited a farm in the south-west that had diversified. I think that the visit occurred about two years ago, and that the farm in question was running a form of restaurant. However, not every farm can turn itself into a restaurant, and the Bill does not allow such farms to benefit from the skimpy offering that is being made anyway. We must be realistic about what activities farms can diversify into.

**Ms Atherton:** I was present when my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister visited the diversified restaurant to which the hon. Gentleman refers. Farmers from a range of industries were also present; one was a cheese maker who had received £500,000 of Government support to enable him to create his Cornish cheese company. The hon. Gentleman is slightly off target.

**Mr. Evans:** I am never knowingly off target; the crisis in farming means that diversification is a problem. Those who want to diversify should be given every encouragement, but we must remember that many farmers want to get on with farming. There are posters throughout the countryside that say, "Keep Britain farming." That is exactly what we should be about, but what can we do to help farmers to keep on farming? By all means, we should support those who want to diversify and who have good ideas about that, but we must also recognise that if all farms turned into restaurants, it would do them no good

*[Mr. Evans]*

whatever. In three years, we would be talking about introducing a recovery package for every restaurant in the country.

**Mr. Gray:** The Prime Minister is no great expert in these matters. Does my hon. Friend remember the remarks that the right hon. Gentleman made about foot and mouth about a month ago in Prime Minister's Question Time? He said that one thing that he would do to help farming would be to remove business rates from farms. Of course, he did not realise that farms do not pay business rates in the first place.

**Mr. Evans:** I am not surprised by that statement. It is now well accepted that the Government do not understand the countryside or care much about it. The sooner the general election, the better, because we can then have a Government who know about business and the countryside.

**Mr. Paterson:** Does my hon. Friend agree that although the hon. Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) described a meritorious enterprise in her intervention—which might have been described as valedictory—it would have taken time to develop the cheese business to which she referred? At the conference that I attended in Telford, it was clear that we had an immediate crisis. These people need cash now, for cash flow reasons. There is no time for investment or marketing; they need cash, and the only answer is an immediate, interest-free loan such as that which we propose.

**Mr. Evans:** An interest loan is little use to businesses with no money coming in and debts piling up. The chief executive of my local council spoke to me about the relief that the council could give on business rates and council taxes. He said that the council had to be realistic because those were the bills that farmers would shelve immediately. People with no money and no access to further loans would put their council tax bill and business rate bill at the bottom of the pile. If they had any money left, they would use it to pay their suppliers or as a means of keeping the business going.

So let us be realistic about the support that exists now and about the help for which businesses are crying out. Three weeks ago, I met 30 business men in the Parker's Arms in Newton. They were crying out for help and the situation has got no better for them. Unfortunately, Easter was not the great gold rush to the countryside that we all hoped that it would be. Those business men thought that if they could get access to cash now, it would greatly assist them and boost their businesses. It would be a lifeline. By all means, let us look at a recovery package afterwards, but let us have a survival package now.

I know of no patient who has died and gone on to recover. When a business dies, that is it. The only thing that remains is to bury or burn it. We do not want businesses to collapse when there is a sensible, cost-effective means of giving them a lifeline, which, in this case, is the loan that we are asking for.

The Prime Minister is pretty good, during a general election build-up, at announcing measures that he thinks will be popular, irrespective of whether they cost him nothing, such as the baby bonds that were announced the other day. They will cost the Government nothing for 18 years and will no doubt all be grabbed back in the form of higher education tuition fees by the time people turn 18. He still has a few days to come forward with an interest-free loan for rural businesses. If he announces it now, he will have the full support of Conservative Members. We shall not say that he is electioneering; we shall simply welcome the fact that that money is coming through. I ask Labour Members to pass that message to the Prime Minister, who does not come here very often. Let us give those businesses the support that they desperately need now.

What has shocked us all about foot and mouth is the inter-dependence of many businesses on the countryside generally. It struck me as surprising because I had not given it much thought. The crisis has affected feed merchants, those who sell cars and machinery to farmers, and other businesses involved in tourism. A window cleaner even came to see me, saying that much of his business had disappeared because of foot and mouth, not just because people could no longer afford to pay to clean their windows when money was tight, but because he could not gain access to many houses.

As was mentioned by a Labour Member following last week's statement by the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the problem also affects trout farms. Nobody is fishing much because people cannot cross farms, and the trout farm in my constituency has a real problem in terms of the welfare of the fish. As they grow, they become vicious in a confined space. The owner told me that unless he can start to get rid of some of his stock, he will have to start killing them. The months of February to May are crucial for trout farmers, as that is when they have to get their stocks out. After that, they have had it. We must therefore look at all sorts of ways in which we can help such businesses.

I also had a phone call from someone who runs some tea rooms—that is why I mentioned tea rooms earlier—in a village in my constituency and who had to get rid of their staff and close, hopefully temporarily.

Sadly, the people whom rural businesses employ are often the wives or husbands of farmers, who work in other businesses to help out with their income. They do not have just one job, although given the hours that they work, one would think that they could do no more. Helping out in the tourism trade gives those people another source of income. We should help those people, which is why I could not understand the exemptions in the Bill—which does not go very far anyway—for catering and confectionary businesses.

I hasten to add that I have no interest to declare. The only business that I possess is in a very urban area and I am delighted on this occasion not to declare an interest for having a business in a rural area.

I do not understand the exemptions. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde said, the confusion and stress caused by the discretion in the Bill will lead to many arguments because people will not know whether they qualify. The Minister was nodding when it was suggested that some guidelines should be published explaining to people exactly who is eligible. People should be clear about who is eligible once and for all. I suspect that the Government will spend more on the

booklet and on advertising the scheme—we know that they spend a lot on advertising these days—than they will ever spend on the scheme itself.

When the Minister replies, will he say something about the National Assembly for Wales and how it will run the scheme? I gather that it might decide not to introduce it at all. I understood from the Minister that no extra money would come in from the scheme, so it would have to be paid for from existing budgets. That would mean that other expenditure would have to be cut. I suspect that nothing much will be cut and that more will be spent on bureaucracy than on the scheme.

Will the Minister also say something about assistance to local authorities? I understand the 50 per cent. mandatory grant, but not the discretionary aspect. My local authority tells me that it is already strapped for cash. Many rural businesses are tightly balanced. Many are already applying to their local authority for help with their business rates. Once they start applying for this scheme as well, many local authorities simply will not have enough money. They will have to start putting up council taxes by an enormous percentage. The Government need to look at that again.

On diversification, the Government need to get their strategy together and decide what they want farming in this country to do. The Prime Minister says that he wants a fundamental review of farming once the crisis is over, but we need to know the Government's strategy for farming. Do we want to ensure that our farmers, who love their industry and are committed to it, and who work all the hours that are sent in their industry, to continue farming? I hope that the answer is yes.

Farmers' tending of the countryside is value added. They do it for nothing; it is simply a by-product of farming. We now know how important that is because of the number of tourists who have stayed away from the countryside. People go to the countryside because it is beautiful and we should ensure that farming is in such a state that it can continue to produce the goods and at the same time make a profit. Farmers at my surgery say, "Nigel, all I want to do is make a living." The treaty of Rome contains a paragraph saying that that is exactly what farmers should be allowed to do. If that requires a fundamental review of the common agricultural policy, let us have it. However, let us not have the same old CAP reviews that always cost more money. We spend billions on such reviews, while our farmers do not get the money through.

It would have been far better if the Government had used this opportunity to present a package of measures such as the £10,000 loan, which would help kick-start many businesses that are on their uppers. Over the past four years, the Government have piled billions of pounds of extra taxation on rural businesses. Today, they are giving back crumbs and we are supposed to get on our knees, say thank you and praise St. Tony. It simply will not happen.

We need honesty in food labelling so that people who want to buy British products can do so in the sound knowledge that the products are British and do not come from somewhere else. British products must not be those that are put on a British farm for a day or products that have simply been processed here. We also need equality in the treatment of goods that enter this country. I am proud that we have high standards and I applaud the Government for imposing them, but the Government should go one step further and ensure that all the countries with which we trade match our standards.

I hope that the Minister will be able to answer some of the questions that we have raised today. I also hope that the Minister for the Environment, who is responsible for the rural taskforce and who waltzed into the Chamber briefly during the debate, will come to the House—before the Prime Minister goes to Buckingham Palace to ask for a Dissolution—to introduce a real package of measures. Such a package would not need spinning, because the farmers and people involved in tourism would say themselves that it was good news.

I hope that the Government are not going to spin this little measure today as the great saviour of our farms and our tourism industry, which are on their knees and need the Government to listen to them. They need the Government to act, and the Government have failed to do that to date.

8 pm

**Mr. James Paice** (South-East Cambridgeshire): I start by declaring my interest as shown in the Register of Members' Interests. I see that the Minister for Local Government and the Regions, the right hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), wants to have a look at the register. I have a smallholding and an agricultural building and, therefore, on some basis, I might gain from the measures. The right hon. Lady, with her inquisitive mind, no longer needs to bother to look it up; I have told her.

What really matters is the issue raised by my hon. Friends the Members for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) and for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans): that, despite the fact that foot and mouth has been ravaging the countryside for two and a bit months now, and that we have not had a single debate in Government time on that dreadful issue or on the way in which it has been handled, the Government can find a whole day for a Bill with just three substantive clauses, for which the Government ran out of speakers by 7 o'clock. They can find time for that, but not for a debate on the much bigger issue that faces the countryside.

When we consider that it is now six weeks since the First Reading of the Bill, we can understand that the Government are not using the utmost haste to help farmers, even in the way that the Bill proposes. We have heard a number of speeches, including several swan-songs from the Labour Benches: one voluntary one and some involuntary ones. I am impressed by the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who seems to believe that the population of Stroud think, sleep and talk of nothing but the regional development agency. That demonstrates why, in five or six weeks' time, the hon. Gentleman will be looking for a new career.

The background to this debate is the state of agriculture today, after four years of Labour government. My hon. Friends have given various statistics, including the fact that income from farming is down 27 per cent. on a year ago; of course, that is 27 per cent. down on what was already a record low. If we consider agriculture sector by sector, we find that for pigs and poultry, net farm incomes showed a loss of £8,000 a farm last year, compared to a profit of £15,000 two years ago. In the dairy industry, lower support prices—a major factor in the drop in milk prices—have meant that net farm incomes have dropped by 41 per cent. to £8,000 a farm in the past two years.

*[Mr. James Paice]*

In the cattle and sheep sector, the incomes of lowland producers fell to £1,500 last year, and the incomes of hill farmers fell by 50 per cent. to £2,500. Even the arable sector has not escaped. The net income of cereal farms has dropped by 80 per cent. to £8,500 a farm. Not one of those sectors has earned the equivalent of the minimum wage in the past 12 months. The state of agriculture today is such that the net worth of farmers is 25 per cent. less than it was four years ago. That equity has gone out of the agriculture industry. Agriculture's contribution to the national economy is now down to just 0.8 per cent.: it was 1.6 per cent. just five years earlier. Its contribution has halved thanks to many of the Government's policies.

This debate is not just about foot and mouth disease. Indeed, it is not about the foot and mouth crisis at all, although my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and my hon. Friends the Members for Banbury (Mr. Baldry), for North Shropshire and for Ribble Valley all quite rightly made the point that this measure has to be seen against the background of the crisis, which has come on top of all those years of decline.

It is always pleasant to stand at the Dispatch Box and welcome the conversion of the Government to a policy that was introduced by the Conservative party. On 21 May 1998, I stood here in an agriculture debate and called for rate relief to be extended to non-farming businesses on farm premises. That is recorded at column 1172 of *Hansard*. The response of the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), who was then Minister of State responsible for these matters, at column 1173, was that he was not sure that he could agree with me on the subject of rates. I always welcome a sinner who repenteth.

I realise that the Conservative party understands more fully the situation in the countryside and the needs of agriculture. It is absurd that business rates are not paid if a stable or loose box contains pigs or calves, but are paid if it contains a horse. But, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) said, the situation is not even as clear as that. If a heavy horse is kept in a stable, rates are not paid, but if a light horse is kept in it, they are. That is plainly nonsense. Simply to extend the idea of 50 per cent. rate relief, as the Bill does, does not overcome that completely anomalous situation.

We must also consider extending the definition of agriculture to provide the agricultural exemption for land-based industries that are closely allied to mainstream agriculture. I mentioned the horse world, but another important sector is the game farming industry, in which we can see comparisons with what goes on elsewhere in Europe. Anyone who studies the sporting magazines in the spring will find a legion of advertisements for French-sourced game birds and eggs. This country is currently receiving, week after week, tens of thousands of French game eggs. In a few weeks' time, it will be receiving day-old—and older—chicks. The French Government value the role of game farming in the national agricultural and rural economy: this Government do not. It is essential that game farmers should be considered part of mainstream agriculture—as they will be under a Conservative Government—and receive full agricultural exemption.

We have heard a great deal about the role of diversification. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have made the point that it is not necessarily the panacea for all farming. Indeed, most agricultural advisers to whom I have spoken over the years have said, "Do not even contemplate diversification or think about a different sector of enterprise until you have got your farming business as efficient and modern as possible." For most people, diversification is merely an adjunct to their farming business, not a wholesale replacement for it, although there are examples of diversification taking over. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde said, after the catalogue of disaster in the agriculture industry that I have recited, the question that arises is, who has the resources to invest in such diversification enterprises in the first place?

We cannot talk about the future of farming without considering its role in the countryside. Many hon. Members have referred to the tourist industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley referred at some length to the importance of that industry, and to why it is suffering. We have to understand that the features that encourage tourists to come to the British countryside are there because of farming, not in spite of it. Tourism is the root of so many farm-based visits. Visits to open farms, pony trekking and all sorts of other activities stem from people wanting to enjoy our countryside.

Listening to the Government, one sometimes might believe that the landscape existed in spite of farming, not because of it. No one planned the landscape and then considered how to farm it; it is the result of millenniums of farming. Farmers have created it for farming needs. To claim, as Ministers often do, that farming no longer matters and that we must concentrate on the landscape and the environment, turns thousands of years of agricultural development on their head. Only a party that did not fully understand the countryside could make such a claim.

The debate has raised several issues. First, there is the problem of the five-year period. It appears that, for the first five years of the Bill's existence, people who fulfil the criteria will receive the mandatory relief, but that those who take up the option in four years' time will receive only one year's relief. It is common sense to provide the relief only as a start-up aid, but granting it solely for five years, starting today, is not. The Minister suggested that she did not understand that the Bill would provide for that. The measure should grant any business five years' relief as long as the legislation remains in place. Businesses would thus know that they had five years in which to ease into paying full business rates on their diversification.

Secondly, let us consider third-party occupiers. Again, the Minister implied that her interpretation was different from that of Opposition Members, including the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). The purpose of diversification is to generate further income, and most business advisers would tell farmers to get their farming right before starting to adopt skills that they did not have. Many farmers would prefer not to move into new ventures, but to allow others to use their buildings for such purposes. Various proposals for third-party occupancy of a stable include garden machinery, metalwork, woodwork and even do-it-yourself livery. It is therefore essential for discretionary rate relief to apply when the farmer leases part of his premises to someone

else. It is part of diversification and an attempt to generate income from agricultural assets, albeit by using them—perhaps temporarily—for some other purpose.

Thirdly, we should consider several activities that are closely allied to agriculture. It is absurd that neither mushroom farms nor on-farm processing are deemed to be agriculture. For years, farmers carried out some processing in the dairy sector, but that is no longer considered to be agriculture. Machinery rings constitute an effort by farmers throughout the country to share the enormous overheads on farm equipment. They are not deemed to be straightforwardly agricultural, and are therefore not entitled to the exemption.

Fourthly, we should examine planning. My hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire made several comments that excited the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who has apologised for her absence during the winding-up speeches. My hon. Friend's point was crucial. If farmers are to generate extra income, a relaxed attitude to planning is essential. The Conservative party will therefore provide deemed planning consent for all farmers for use of up to 1,500 sq ft of their agricultural property for non-farming activities.

Several hon. Members have referred to equestrianism, and my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire brought his considerable expertise and knowledge to bear on the subject, including the dreadful decline in riding schools of some 21 per cent. in the past 12 years. Indeed, 272 such schools closed in the past 12 months. As my hon. Friend said, the Association of British Riding Schools and the British Horse Society have expressed anxiety that the aid for which the Bill provides could disadvantage existing equestrian establishments compared with new schools. He also reminded us that the horse industry is the second largest in the rural economy, accounting for some £2.5 billion.

The Government claim that providing five years' relief for start-up businesses was the right way in which to avoid the long-term disadvantages to which my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire referred. I do not believe that that is the case. There is a problem of striking the right balance between helping new businesses without disadvantaging existing businesses. That principle extends beyond equestrianism, but the only way to tackle the problem for equestrianism is to adopt the suggestions of my hon. Friends the Members for North Wiltshire and for Ashford (Mr. Green) and provide the full agricultural exemption for all new and existing equestrian businesses.

The Bill also refers to village shops and we have had much debate about tea shops and what can be classified as a food shop. In my constituency, post offices are under threat in many villages—for example, in Fordham and Cottenham. Neither the Bill nor the Postal Services Act 2000 will help them because Government policies have put the future of our sub-post office network at risk. That problem cannot be resolved by a small amount of rating relief.

Clearly, it would be absurd to oppose a step in the right direction, especially as Conservative Members called for it three years ago. As my hon. Friends said, it will not make much difference on its own and, as I have shown, the foot and mouth crisis follows many years of declining incomes.

Some people view the crisis as an opportunity for restructuring. Indeed, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food described that opportunity only yesterday as the silver lining to the foot and mouth cloud. Many farmers will find that comment offensive. It is offensive that anyone could find a good story in so much tragedy. Reform of agriculture policy is essential and overdue, but doing it on the back of a national disaster is bound to lead to a distortion of long-term policy.

Farming is and must remain the centre of the rural economy; it is not simply an add-on. Many other rural businesses depend for their livelihoods on trade with farmers. Until we develop policies that allow farming to continue, measures such as the Bill will ultimately fail. We must restore agriculture to the position of strength that it enjoyed only five years ago.

8.18 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Robert Ainsworth):** I am pleased to respond to the debate. Over the weekend, I contracted some sort of germ and I sound like a tractor that needs its tappets adjusting. I apologise for that but I hope that I can make myself understood.

It has been acknowledged during the debate, albeit grudgingly by some Opposition Members, that the new rate reliefs for which the Bill provides will help farmers and village communities. The measure fulfils commitments that we made in the action plan for farming, the local government finance Green Paper and the rural White Paper. Farmers who wish to diversify will pay less to set up new, non-agricultural businesses, and more help will be given to village businesses to provide essential services to the community.

The National Farmers Union and other rural bodies have welcomed our proposals for farm diversification, and a wide range of respondents to the local government finance Green Paper welcomed our proposals for extending village shop rate relief. The Country Land and Business Association has welcomed the Bill; it has written to my right hon. Friend the Minister to urge its implementation as quickly as possible.

Many hon. Members have contributed to the debate. I apologise in advance in case I do not pick up all hon. Members' points. If I miss any and hon. Members raise them with me later, I shall ensure that they receive a response. I shall do my best to respond to as many points as possible now.

In what he described as his swan-song, my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Temple-Morris) spoke knowledgeably about his constituency and also about wider issues of policy. He said what a good time he and his constituents had had under the present Government. I hope that when he considers what a good time he has had under the present Government, he will not forget what a wonderful regional Whip he had for most of that time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton) welcomed the Bill, but asked—as did my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew)—for it to be part of a more comprehensive review. Indeed, both recognised that the Bill constituted only a small element of a more comprehensive programme.

A procession of Opposition Members suggested that the Bill did not do this, that or the other. In fact, the Bill introduces two measures, in response not to foot and mouth but to the rural White Paper. In an intervention,

*[Mr. Robert Ainsworth]*

the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) suggested that our proposals had been plucked off the shelf and presented at the last minute. If he had read the White Paper—as we would expect him to, as a Member representing a rural community—he would have seen the proposals on pages 25, 89, 96 and 97. I commend the document to him and hope that, even at this late stage, he will read it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne and several others asked about the definition relating to food stores. They asked whether, if hot food—not surprisingly, my hon. Friend mentioned pasties—was served as a secondary operation, relief would be ruled out. The store's main business must be the provision of food: if hot food is provided as a side activity, it will not be ruled out.

The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) got into a bit of a tangle in regard to hereditaments. In terms of rating law, a hereditament is any unit of property that is subject to business rates. References to hereditaments in the Bill mean that all farm premises that are currently exempt from business rates which would immediately become liable under present legislation in the event of diversification will receive relief under the Bill. The issues raised by the hon. Gentleman about inheritance have nothing to do with the Bill, and he need not worry on that score.

**Mr. Gray:** The Minister makes an interesting point. He might like to have a word with the House of Commons Library, which has given me a four-page extract that is all about hereditaments. I still cannot pronounce that word as well as the Minister, despite his flu. Every single definition suggests that a hereditament must be capable of being inherited if its holder dies. At no stage does the extract say what the Minister has just said.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** If the hon. Gentleman will not be reassured by me, we may have to engage in lengthy correspondence, which will bore both him and me.

Along with others, the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) raised the issue of definitions of a rural area. Discretionary relief is available to all businesses, but the special grant is being made available to local authorities that are looking after completely rural areas. Given that the problems experienced by the rural community have a specific and greater impact on totally rural areas, 151 local authorities have been defined as needing additional assistance. There is nothing to stop local authorities that straddle rural and urban or rural and suburban areas giving rate relief to businesses in difficulty; central Government pick up most of that in any case. It was felt, however, that additional help was needed for local authorities representing remote and totally rural areas because of the disproportionate impact on them. That is the only reason and, as I have said, it does not prevent other businesses from being eligible.

The right hon. Gentleman asked about the population limit of 3,000, and wanted to know how it would work over time. A limit must be drawn somewhere, and the measures we propose are designed to maintain the viability of small rural areas. It is for local authorities to keep registers detailing which settlements in their areas contain more or fewer than 3,000, and which will or will not be eligible for relief on that basis.

The hon. Member for North Wiltshire mentioned stud farms and other horse interests. He will know that stud farms already benefit from reduced rates: they all receive a reduction of £2,500 in their rateable values, currently worth a maximum of £1,075 off their rate bills. We propose to increase the reduction to £3,000 to bring it into line with the maximum mandatory relief for new farm enterprises, which is worth £1,290 off the rate bills of all stud farms. The Bill will extend the discretionary top-up relief for the farm diversification scheme to new stud farms on the terms that apply to other farm businesses.

Several Opposition Members, including Front Benchers, mentioned the apparent rate relief anomalies arising from the exemption of agricultural land from business rates. I should point out that those anomalies have existed for a long time; indeed, they existed throughout the 18 years for which the Conservatives were in power. Opposition is a wonderful way of becoming enlightened, and Opposition Members seem now to have discovered the existence of those anomalies, which they have described as disgraceful. I simply remind them that they did nothing about them when they were in government, and that they did nothing because the anomalies are greatly complicated and difficult to remove. Any attempt to redefine agriculture to remove those anomalies would have to be very carefully thought out, or even greater anomalies could be created.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said that those who are not in designated areas could be excluded from the relief scheme. However, I think that I have already addressed that issue. He also said that he believes that there should be fundamental reform of the rate system. In last year's local government Green Paper, we consulted on that issue and proposed a rate relief scheme for all small businesses. Although there will have to be continuing discussion on the issue, any attempt to address it will, as I said, give rise to various anomalies.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome also asked about the need for primary legislation to provide relief for shops—whereas such legislation was not necessary to provide relief for garages and pubs—but he seemed unable to understand the answer I gave him. I tried to answer the question as clearly as I could, and it is very difficult if he cannot or will not understand what I say. However, the issue is very simple. The original legislation refers specifically to sole general food businesses, and that provision cannot be modified without further primary legislation. Such a situation did not pertain in the legislation on garages and public houses.

Opposition Members have said that the Bill does not tackle the problems and issues facing rural Britain. However, we have consulted on our proposals and said that we would introduce them at the earliest possible opportunity. We are doing so. Consultation ended on the same day that the Bill was presented to Parliament, and—with the co-operation of the Opposition—we now have a parliamentary opportunity to implement those proposals. We should take that opportunity.

No one is trying to suggest that our proposals are the answer to every question. Nevertheless, Opposition Members should recognise that, since 1997, the Government have taken various action to provide financial assistance to farmers. The fact is that £1.35 billion has been injected into the sector, including about £785 million in agrimonetary compensation and annual supplements of about £3 billion in direct common

agricultural policy payments to United Kingdom farmers. Several initiatives introduced in early 1998 were worth more than £150 million, including £85 million of agrimonetary compensation. In November 1998, a further £120 million aid package was introduced.

All of those actions were taken before our current efforts to deal with the current difficulties caused by foot and mouth. Opposition Members who say that the Bill is a response only to the current difficulties are deliberately ignoring our long record on providing assistance to the sector.

**Mr. Jack:** The Minister was very generously dealing with the points that hon. Members have raised today, many of which concerned clause 1 and the question of whether third parties who invested on a farm would be eligible for help. Clarification of the point is needed, and I should be grateful if he would provide it.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** Small businesses that fall within the definitions and scales provided in the Bill—in relation to exempt agricultural businesses and non-exempt agricultural land, for example—will be eligible. The businesses do not have to be run by farmers themselves. Farmers may well have someone else to run the businesses on those premises, thereby constituting diversification. That is not necessarily a problem, but we may need to spell things out in Committee and make people understand exactly what we are proposing.

Conservative Members said that they would do a lot more were they to get back into power. They went on to say that the main way in which they would pay for that would be to abolish regional development agencies, by which they would save more than £100 million. However, the administration costs of RDAs was only £62 million last year—8 per cent. of their total spend—most of which was spent on the wages of those employed on regulatory programmes.

If the Conservatives are to transfer the powers and funds of RDAs they will have to keep the staff in employment, and because they will lose the economies of scale, they may employ far more and at a far higher cost than is the case at present. Even that ignores the fact that the Conservatives are effectively double counting savings that do not exist, because the shadow Chancellor has already spent the money from the abolition of RDAs. It is already part of the £16 billion worth of cuts that will pay for the tax cuts that the Conservatives are promising.

Are Conservative Front-Bench Members telling us that they will not follow that programme and would not make those tax cuts because the money that the shadow Chancellor has already spent on them will be redirected to additional assistance for the farming industry? They must say one thing or another—they cannot simply double count money that is probably not there in the first place.

In conclusion, the Bill takes forward important measures that provide rate relief for rural businesses. It will help farmers to diversify into non-agricultural activities by reducing the costs of doing so, and it will ensure that all food shops in small villages benefit from mandatory rate relief in addition to the sole general store. These measures are not the answer to the recent problems facing the countryside, but they are part of a continuing programme introducing measures to assist diversification, the strengthening of the rural economy and the viability of life in small villages. The Bill is part of the proposals contained in the rural White Paper last year. Our countryside needs effective measures to eradicate the current foot and mouth problem as well as on-going assistance, and that is what it will get from the Government.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read a Second time.*

## Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill (Programme)

8.37 pm

**Ms Hilary Armstrong:** I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill:

*Standing Committee*

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

2. Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 8th May 2001.

3. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.

*Consideration and Third Reading*

4. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Six o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Three o'clock on that day.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Seven o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at Four o'clock on that day.

6. Sessional Order B (Programming Committees) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

*Lords amendments and further messages from the Lords*

7. Paragraphs (6) and (7) of Sessional Order A (varying and supplementing programme motions) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on any motion to vary or supplement this order for the purpose of allocating time to proceedings on consideration of any Lords amendments, or on any further messages from the Lords, and the question on any such motion shall be put forthwith.

I do not intend to delay the House for too long. The motion suggests a sensible timetable for the consideration of this small but none the less important Bill. It provides that Standing Committee consideration will be concluded on 8 May—that is, in two sittings—and that the remaining stages be concluded in about four hours. In line with the new programming procedures, the terms of the motion have been agreed through the usual channels, giving the Opposition parties a real say in how Government business is to be conducted.

8.38 pm

**Mr. Green:** The Minister deserves a small award for chutzpah when she says that the programme motion gives the Opposition parties an opportunity to contribute. It has become apparent in the course of our debate this afternoon how much improvement the Bill needs.

The Government and their business managers will no doubt be relieved that I am not about to make the speech that they are accustomed to hearing from this Dispatch Box about their appalling conduct over programme motions—although it is richly deserved every time it is delivered—because we believe that time is of the essence in delivering relief to rural areas. We have made it clear throughout the debate that we have no desire to delay even the small and peripheral measures contained in the Bill because we welcome any help for rural businesses in the current crisis.

When the Under-Secretary wound up on Second Reading, he was honest enough to say that the Bill would not solve the problems. I part company with him when he says that it is part of an on-going programme, because it is so far the only concrete measure that the Government have produced to help rural businesses, although I agree that it is an aid—albeit a relatively small aid—in the face of the crisis that rural businesses now face.

I also wish to pick the Minister up on his claim that today was the first opportunity the Government have had to introduce the Bill, and that they have rushed it through. Not only have we had a mysterious six-week gap between First Reading and today, but the Minister knows—as does every other hon. Member—that when the Government introduced the Bill on First Reading, they assumed that today we would be two days away from a general election. The idea that the Government ever intended to get the Bill on to the statute book before an election is so much hogwash, and the Minister need not try to convince the House otherwise.

We do not intend to oppose the programme motion, but it is important to set out some of the issues that the Government should address before remaining stages, especially if they are to be rushed through. The Government will have heard hon. Members raise several issues today—especially the fact that in relation to the equestrian issue the Bill as it stands would be incoherent and perverse, and would not achieve the Government's purposes. On several other issues, hon. Members on both sides of the House have reached the same conclusion about the Bill's effect but Ministers have assured us that the effect would be different. We need some clarity, especially about farm buildings that are not used by the farmer himself and on the issue of fairness, both geographically and in terms of businesses set up at different times—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot have a repeat of the Second Reading debate. I remind him that we are considering the programme motion.

**Mr. Green:** I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I sought to explain to the Government that we are not opposing the programme motion, but that several important issues remain to be addressed in Committee. The Government will also need to table amendments before the Bill reaches Committee, because the programme motion will truncate the normal length of the Committee stage. It is therefore important that the Government take seriously the issues that have been raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The programme motion will mean that we will rush through all the remaining stages of the Bill, and it is clear that it must be severely improved if it is to achieve the Government's ends—which we share—of making a small improvement in the desperate condition of so many businesses in rural areas.

8.43 pm

**Mr. David Heath:** I, too, shall be brief. We have all heard the standard speech on programme motions which has been repeated week in and week out recently, and the fact that we accept this motion does not make our criticisms of the Government's approach any less valid. They have consistently failed to consult appropriately or to try to reach an accommodation with Opposition parties about areas of dissent.

In the case of this Bill, the difficulty is compounded by the fact that we know that it has been sitting on a shelf somewhere since 16 March and could have been introduced earlier as a matter of urgency. Many of us have argued that it is a matter of urgency and that, however modest its intentions, it should reach the statute book as early as possible. However, I admit that the time made available in the programme motion is not dissimilar to that which would have been available had we dealt with the matter as secondary legislation in the same way as other amendments to the rating regime, so it would be wrong to suggest that there is a need for prolonged consideration in Committee or on Report.

Having said that, I ask Ministers to take careful account of the points made by the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green). The consideration period is being truncated and we do not want unnecessarily to extend our debates, but Ministers should, where possible, consult with representatives of the Opposition parties to agree on clarificatory wording before the Bill is discussed in Committee. There is no great division between any of the parties on the content, but there is a division on the interpretation of some provisions.

Some of us detect ambiguities and, while Ministers may not at the moment be prepared to accept that they exist, if they reflect, they may realise that, potentially, they do, and that it would be far better to agree a Government amendment to deal with them rather than take up time in Committee or on Report.

I do not intend to divide the House and I hope that we will be able to proceed in good order so as to put the measure on the statute book ahead of the events of the next few weeks. My party is happy to make sure that, with the Government's co-operation, the Bill will achieve what they claim it will, however modest that may be.

*Question agreed to.*

## RATING (FORMER AGRICULTURAL PREMISES AND RURAL SHOPS) BILL
[*MONEY*]

*Queen's recommendation having been signified—*

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),*

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other Act.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## ADJOURNMENT (MAY)

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 25 (Periodic Adjournments),*

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 3rd May, do adjourn till Tuesday 8th May.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to European Community documents.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),*

POSTAL SERVICES SECTOR

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 10544/00, and welcomes it as a useful framework for the future liberalisation of the postal services sector in the European Union provided appropriate safeguards are in place to maintain the universal postal service at a uniform tariff.

AVIATION SAFETY

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 14329/00, a draft Council Regulation on establishing common rules in the field of civil aviation and creating a European Aviation Safety Agency; considers that the establishment of a high uniform level of aviation safety in the Community can best be achieved by the establishment and implementation of common rules which are developed and monitored centrally; agrees that the operation of the single market would also be improved by the establishment of a Community body for the certification of aeronautical products; supports the Government's position that the model mapped out in the draft Regulation could provide the building blocks to meet these objectives by improving the present European safety regulation system, the key elements being that the Agency is endowed with the necessary powers and sufficient autonomy to exercise its responsibilities, to attract high quality staff and to make certification decisions efficiently and effectively; and supports the Government's intention to press for this approach in the EU.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 11529/00, a Commission Communication on a Community immigration policy; and supports the Government's active participation in the debate on the Communication and the Government's intention to ensure that the UK's immigration policies are broadly in line with those of other Member States, whilst retaining domestic control over immigration policy and avoiding measures that could undermine the integrity of the UK's frontier controls.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

*Question agreed to.*

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),*

OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION

That the draft Asian Development Bank (Seventh Replenishment of the Asian Development Fund) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 6th April, be approved.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

*Question agreed to.*

COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICE

*Ordered,*

That the Community Legal Service (Funding) (Counsel in Family Proceedings) Order 2001 be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

## Asbestos-Related Diseases (Compensation)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

8.47 pm

**Mr. Stephen Hepburn** (Jarrow): Like many Members of Parliament, over the past few years I have been contacted by constituents about asbestos and the terrible diseases that it causes within communities. Members need no information about asbestos-related diseases, because their constituents will have described in graphic detail their true horrors, so I shall not waste time discussing them. However, in recent months a great deal of concern has been caused by the appalling case of Chester Street Holdings, the insurance company that collapsed under the weight of compensation claims for asbestos-related diseases. I know that the mailbags of many of my colleagues have been swelled by letters about the matter and many constituents have visited their surgeries to discuss it.

For some sufferers, that collapse has not caused a problem, as a claim can still be pursued against individual employers if they can be traced, or against the insurance industry if the claim is post-1972 and made through the Policyholders Protection Board. However, many victims find themselves without cover owing to the fact that their claim is pre-1972, or because the company for which they were working when they contracted a disease cannot be traced or does not have the assets to handle such a large claim. It has been estimated that there are some 10,000 such victims in Tyneside and 50,000 nationally.

Tens of thousands of men find themselves in such a position following the scandalous collapse of Chester Street Holdings. I shall give a brief history. Chester Street Holdings was previously Iron Trades Holdings Ltd. That company had been the employers' liability insurers for the shipyards and other sectors of heavy industry throughout the country. In 1989, the Iron Trades Employers Association dumped all its pre-1990 policies, most of which were asbestos related, in Chester Street Holdings. The most solvent part of the business—the post-1990 policies—stayed with Iron Trades.

Once freed from its liabilities for asbestos, Iron Trades was bought in January 2000 by an Australian company, QBE International Insurance Ltd. The whole deal was set up by a character called Robert Hardy, the former chief executive of Iron Trades, who—to put it in a nutshell—bought an off-the-shelf company in 1997 called Chester Street Holdings. He then deliberately set it up to fail by loading it with Iron Trades' asbestos liabilities. He sold the profitable side of the business that was left to QBE Insurance for £75 million less than its value and, in the process, earned himself an annual pay increase of £460,000 a year—an amount equivalent to the compensation for between six and 12 of the people who die of mesothelioma each year.

To add insult to injury, the liquidators have decided that Chester Street has the assets to cover only 5 per cent. of the tens of thousands of asbestosis compensation claims that should have been compensated in full over the next 40 years or more. Even worse, the first people who have a claim on the assets under the scheme drawn up by the liquidators are Chester Street's very own solicitors.

It is worth putting the scandal of Chester Street into context, because it is fundamentally not about money but about people's lives. The TUC has estimated that a victim dies of an asbestos-related disease every 10 days in my area of south Tyneside. For example, Mr. Garrett of Cedar grove, Hebburn is a sufferer. He has mesothelioma, and that means that he is condemned to die. He is not interested in the money for himself; it is for those who have nursed him. He would like to live. He contracted the disease in the shipyards where he worked as a blacksmith and his claims has been accepted. However, as the situation stands at the moment, he will end up with nothing.

**Mr. Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley): A widow came to see me in my constituency the other week after the long battle that she and her husband, who died a horrible long and lingering death because of asbestos, had had in the courts. The courts awarded her £200,000 but, as my hon. Friend said, she will unfortunately only receive 5 per cent. of that if she is lucky. That is the horror of the story. People die horrible deaths and are awarded compensation but those who survive them do not see a penny of it.

**Mr. Hepburn:** My hon. Friend highlights one case, but there are 50,000 of them nationally. That shows just how important this debate is.

I asked for this debate to highlight the scandal and to ensure that the victims are not forgotten. With that in mind, I have two basic demands. The first is that the Government and the insurance industry will undertake that the victims of asbestos-related diseases will get nothing less than the 100 per cent. compensation to which they are entitled. The second is that there should be a full public inquiry into the Iron Trades and Chester Street Holdings scandal.

The victims of this scandal have never been big earners. They earned an honest living in the shipyards—unlike the morally deficient boards of directors who have caused such heartbreak. The victims helped to build the wealth of Tyneside and Britain. Many of them even helped to build the defences of the nation when that was needed during the second world war when they worked all sorts of shifts—at the very time when there were air raids and their lives were threatened—to make sure that ships were repaired and built to go out to fight the Nazi menace. In return, they were poisoned in their thousands by employers who did not care about anything other than their shareholders' profits. We cannot let those victims down.

8.53 pm

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Miss Melanie Johnson):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on securing the debate and thank other hon. Members for their interest in the topic.

The Government fully understand the concerns that my hon. Friend has raised. We are sensitive to the anxieties of those most affected, not least because of the meetings and representations that we have received. I have had representations from hon. Members, including my hon. Friend, and the Government have also received significant correspondence on this issue. Furthermore, we very much understand the concerns of those suffering from

asbestos-related diseases, especially where their condition is the result of employment in firms whose employers' liability insurance is provided by Chester Street.

I welcome the opportunity to respond to the issues raised, and to update my hon. Friend on progress on this matter. I should like first to explain the Government's approach to asbestos in the workplace, then to give an explanation of the different sorts of compensation available and to conclude by discussing the issues raised to do with Chester Street Holdings.

For many decades, asbestos was used by many employers, especially those involved in heavy industries and manufacturing, as my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow has said. Those industries that had an extended reliance on the use of asbestos in the production process included shipbuilding, drop forging, steel production and insulation manufacturing. During that time, the substantial risk to the health of employees who handled asbestos was unknown.

Asbestos is made up of many particles that can cause considerable damage if they enter people's lungs. The most common conditions related to exposure to asbestos in the workplace include pleural plaques, asbestosis and mesothelioma. Those conditions can be extremely unpleasant and are often fatal; and for those reasons, the Government were committed to addressing the dangers of asbestos as soon as we came to office.

In 1999, we fulfilled that commitment by banning the importation, sale and use of all forms of asbestos. Unfortunately, we are only now seeing the damage that years of inaction by previous Governments has caused. We have addressed the problematic source by removing the threat of asbestosis for future generations, but we as a society need to care for those who are ill and their families.

I should like to stress that the Government have in place two well established no-fault schemes to provide some financial support for those who were exposed to asbestos by their employers and have now developed one of the conditions that I have mentioned. First, there is the industrial injuries disablement benefit, which is administered by the Department of Social Security. The scheme provides an allowance payable to people depending on the level of disability caused by the exposure to asbestos.

Over and above those arrangements, the Pneumoconiosis etc. (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979 provides compensation for sufferers of certain dust-related diseases, or for the dependants of sufferers who have died, to the extent that they are not able to claim damages from their employers because the latter have gone out of business or there is no realistic chance of pursuing a court action. The scheme provides for a variable lump sum payment, again depending on the level of disability caused by exposure to asbestos in the workplace. Since 1980, that scheme has provided compensation to around 9,300 workers and their families, at a cost of approximately £83.4 million.

On employer liability: if the employer still exists, it is important to remember that the employer remains liable for the employee if the exposure to asbestos occurred as a result of that employment. The employee can therefore bring a civil case against his or her employer if the exposure to asbestos and the development of an asbestos-related condition were caused through employment with that employer.

**Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): My hon. Friend will be aware that only very small amounts are payable under the scheme when an employer cannot be traced. Will she consider how the scheme may be run? For example, would it be possible to consider including the insurance industry in the scheme to make the lump sums a little better? I accept that, generally, people who have asbestosis or mesothelioma cancer also have a disablement assessment; nevertheless, the lump sums paid under the scheme are very small, and that needs to be considered.

**Miss Johnson:** I cannot give my hon. Friend an undertaking on that this evening, but I will certainly consider the subject further as a result of his representations.

Of course, to be able safely to provide for their employees if one falls ill or is involved in an accident while working, employers regularly take out employers' liability insurance policies. Indeed, the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969 made it mandatory for certain firms to take out such policies. In return for a premium to an insurance company, such an insurance policy decreases the financial risk to employers of claims that may be made against them by their employees.

The easiest way to envisage that arrangement is to imagine two relationships—the first between the employer and the employee; the second between the employer and the insurance company. If the second relationship is broken as a result of the insolvency of an insurance company, the first relationship—between the employer and the employee—remains intact. The liability of the employer to the employee thus still exists, irrespective of whether the insurance company is insolvent. Hence the employer remains liable for any claims made against them by employees or former employees; that is the case for all employers, whether in the private or public sector.

The commercial compensation schemes provide protection in the form of a compensation scheme for policyholders whose insurance company remains insolvent. I shall now turn to the arrangements under that scheme—

**Mr. Hepburn:** I mean no disrespect to my hon. Friend, but what we want tonight are answers. Are these people going to be compensated? Are we actually going to get together with the insurance industry and threaten it with regulation unless they receive their money? They need their money; they understand that the insurance companies are to blame and that those companies should pay. Furthermore, will there be a full public inquiry to find out how that board of directors could set up that scam and put people in that position?

**Miss Johnson:** As I explained at the beginning of my speech, I shall come to that point in due course; I hope that my hon. Friend will be patient. I reiterate the comments of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland on the topic—the Government are making it clear to the insurance industry that it cannot merely walk away from this matter. I shall return to that point in a moment.

The Policyholders Protection Act 1975 was established to protect the interests of policyholders of insolvent insurance companies. For a few specific types of

*[Miss Johnson]*

insurance, including compulsory employers' liability insurance policies where the policyholder is the employer, the 1975 Act provides 100 per cent. protection for eligible claims, to the extent that the insolvent insurer is unable to meet the claim in full.

The costs of protection provided to such policyholders under the Act are met by a levy on the insurance industry, and are administered by the Policyholders Protection Board—set up under the 1975 Act. It is important to stress that if the employer no longer exists and the claim relates to a compulsory insurance policy, the individual who had a claim against the employer can take the claim to the insurer, or in this case, to the PPB direct.

It is in the context of the compensation available for those suffering from asbestos-related conditions that Chester Street has been raised by my hon. Friend. I shall not go into the history of Chester Street in too much detail—my hon. Friend has already touched on several aspects—but it was complicated, involving several subsidiaries.

By the 1980s, the company was subsidiary to the Iron Trades Employers Association. In the late 1980s, it was decided that it would be preferable to write all new policies in the subsidiary of the Iron Trades Employers Association. Those employers who had previously taken out policies with the association renewed their policies with the subsidiary. The association stopped writing new business but remained 100 per cent. owner of the subsidiary, with all profits accruing to the benefit of the policyholders of both the Iron Trades Employers Association and the Iron Trades Mutual Insurance Company. The subsidiary also took that opportunity to simplify its name to Iron Trades Insurance Company Ltd.

The change took effect from the start of 1990, and from that point onward I understand that the subsidiary made good progress, with two results. The first was that the subsidiary made profits and could pay dividends to the association. Secondly, as the business expanded, the value of the subsidiary as a fixed asset to the association also grew.

**Mr. Clapham:** My hon. Friend explains, in effect, that the scandal was created by Iron Trades dumping its asbestos liabilities in Chester Street Holdings, leaving insufficient assets to meet them. As my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) explained, those liabilities are in respect of the ordinary person who is the victim of asbestos from his workplace. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to ensure that that cannot happen again? It is clearly a scandal and, if we do not act, it is likely recur because insurers want to get rid of asbestos claims. That is precisely what Iron Trades did—it dumped its asbestos liabilities.

**Miss Johnson:** My hon. Friend is right to say that, as the pre-1990 claims matured, it was necessary to realise assets other than those from the profits accruing from the subsidiary. As that was the main fixed asset of the organisation, the value locked within it, in the form of existing policies and future profits, had to be realised. It was decided that the subsidiary should be sold on as a business to create liquid assets. As my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow said, that subsidiary was sold to QBE International Insurance Ltd. in early 2000. The money that was made was invested and could be used to meet claims. The names were changed as part of the deal when Iron Trades was sold to QBE, and the remaining holding company changed its name to Chester Street Insurance Holdings Ltd.

Earlier this year, information on developments in asbestos claims showed that, despite all the efforts and the preventive measures, Chester Street could no longer meet its liabilities. The directors announced insolvency and appointed provisional liquidators on 9 January. A scheme of arrangement was drawn up which was agreed unanimously at the creditors meeting on 5 February and sanctioned by the court. The role of a scheme of arrangement is to ensure that the assets of an insolvent insurance company are identified, maximised and protected for the benefit of all outstanding and future claims—in this case, against Chester Street. It is the responsibility of the scheme administrator to ensure that policyholders receive whatever they are due from the insurance company under the scheme of arrangement.

As for an inquiry into the reorganisation of the Iron Trades Employers Association, we are looking closely into the issues raised by Chester Street. Our priority is the plight of the individuals affected by its collapse. It is for those people that the time scales are the most demanding, and we are keen to resolve the issue as soon as possible. However, in the event that information comes to light as we examine the history and circumstances which would suggest impropriety of any sort, I assure the House that the Government will take it very seriously indeed.

The issue of individual claims by employees whose employer no longer exists and whose claim relates to a non-compulsory insurance policy held by their former employer was raised.

**Mr. Frank Cook** (Stockton, North): On the insurance company, does my hon. Friend concede that if Iron Trades is allowed to get away with its actions, that will give any insurance company carte blanche to offload its liability and move its assets wherever it wants? That is tantamount to the practice prevalent in the travel industry before the creation of the Association of British Travel Agents, with its reservoir funding for affected companies. Surely we need to impose something similar; we do not need to argue about that. We should engage the industry, in partnership, to establish a similar funding structure.

**Miss Johnson:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that the industry cannot stand by and let individuals suffer as a result of the collapse of Chester Street. However, he will appreciate that his remarks contain assumptions with which I cannot directly agree.

We are considering complex issues with regard to individual claimants. The Government are working with the insurance industry on Chester Street and the position of employees whose claims relate to a non-compulsory insurance policy held by a former employer who no longer exists.

We are currently awaiting further information from the insurance industry, but as I said, we have made it clear, as has my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, that it cannot walk way from Chester Street. We expect the industry to take a constructive approach to the issue. The Government recognise that this is a difficult issue that has to be resolved within demanding time

constraints, and I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow that all those involved are working very hard to resolve the issue as soon as possible.

I repeat that the Government understand the concerns expressed in the debate, especially of those who are suffering from asbestos-related diseases as a result of their exposure in the workplace, and of their families. We are monitoring the situation carefully, in the interests of all who are affected by the insurance company's insolvency. I thank my hon. Friends for their role in making sure that the issue is seriously considered and dealt with.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at ten minutes past Nine o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Tuesday 1 May 2001*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### Anti-Semitism (Middle East)

1. **Mrs. Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside): What recent representations he has made to Governments in the middle east about anti-Semitism. [158607]

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Brian Wilson):** We deplore anti-Semitism, as we deplore racism and xenophobia wherever they arise, and we condemn any incitement to hatred and violence. We have consistently called on all parties in the middle east to do everything possible to desist from such incitement and to curb extremism.

**Mrs. Ellman:** Will my hon. Friend condemn categorically the well-documented anti-Semitism that is emanating from the middle east? Specifically, will he condemn the article that appeared in the Egyptian state newspaper *Al Ahram* in November 2000? The article repeated the blood libel and stated that Arab children had been abducted by Jews who wanted to use their blood for baking Passover matzo. Will he also condemn Syria for the statements that appeared in *Tishreen*, the state-owned press, in January this year? The report condemned Zionists for trying

"to suffocate the voice of . . . David Irving, who proved the holocaust to be an illusion, the product of the Zionist imagination."

Does my hon. Friend agree that anti-Semitism in the Arab world, as elsewhere, is a barrier to achieving true justice for Palestinians and Israelis? Will he also condemn its ugly manifestations in this country, which include the attack on the Chief Rabbi and his wife as they made their way to celebrations of Israel's independence day last week?

**Mr. Wilson:** My hon. Friend makes some very good points. The point about racism that should always be borne in mind is that, in any form, it disfigures those who are responsible for it more than those against whom it is directed. In respect of the attacks that she mentioned, which we all deplore, it should also be borne in mind that anybody who uses the language of racism must assume that an audience is listening to what he or she is saying or writing and that that audience is subject to incitement. Such people therefore bear a heavy responsibility. I repeat my initial statement: we condemn anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia in all their forms.

**Sir Peter Tapsell** (Louth and Horncastle): As both the Arabs and the Jews are Semitic races, will the Minister try to persuade the Secretary of State that it would be more than usually fatuous of him to send a racist message to either of them, or even to pontificate to them about their national diet?

**Mr. Wilson:** I fear that we have just heard yet another bad example of the views of a senior member of the Tory party. The hon. Gentleman makes an unhelpful contribution. I would have thought that every hon. Member would agree that this a serious subject. I am not interested in dealing with semantics; I am being asked to speak about anti-Semitism. Let me make it clear again, without equivocation or any play upon words, that we condemn anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia, from whatever source they come—full stop, no fancy words and no messing about. One should condemn them and then live as one speaks.

**Mr. Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): I welcome my hon. Friend's comments about condemning racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism wherever they arise, as anti-Semitism affects both Arabs and Jews. Will he confirm the Government's view that discrimination should be tackled wherever it exists in the middle east? Does he agree that we must register concern about water supplies in the west bank, 90 per cent. of which are reserved for Israeli settlements? That is a matter of discrimination on which it is right for us to register our concern.

**Mr. Wilson:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We try to practise what we preach by telling both parties to the conflict in the middle east that the only way to advance is through dialogue and an end to violence. Part of that process must be an end to the abuses that are coming from all directions, against all parties. They must try to draw the line and get back to dialogue. In that way, we can go forward. The specific abuse to which he referred is, of course, wrong. The closures are wrong. We make these points, but I return to the original point: we condemn racism, prejudice and bigotry, from whatever source they come.

**Sir Peter Lloyd** (Fareham): Will the Minister also condemn those who try to brand as anti-Semitic people who criticise Israeli Government policy, especially people who deplore the cruel and excessive reaction of the Israeli authorities to the unrest that their illegal settlements inevitably provoke? Peace process or no peace process, those settlements are ever expanding, and young Palestinians see their homeland rapidly shrinking. Will the Minister acknowledge that such name calling is used by some to try to silence those who wish the Jewish people well, but realise that their policies on Palestine are futile for everybody in the middle east, not least the Israelis?

**Mr. Wilson:** I generally agree with the early part of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks. However, I am wary of giving a blanket endorsement to what he described as

inevitable provocation. Deeds should be judged on their merits; provocation should not be assumed to be inevitable.

The right hon. Gentleman is right that one can criticise Israel without being anti-Semitic. It is important to maintain a distinction. No one should attribute false motives to critics in order to protect themselves against legitimate political criticism. The more such debates are debased by the sort of language that we discussed earlier, the more difficult it becomes to maintain the distinction. However, its maintenance is important in the interests of dialogue, debate and decency. One can criticise Israel without being anti-Semitic and the Arabs without being racist. One can criticise hon. Members and other politicians not on the basis of race or religion, but genuine political belief.

## Visa Applications (Dhaka)

2. **Ms Oona King** (Bethnal Green and Bow): If he will make a statement on the waiting time for visa applications submitted to the British high commission in Dhaka. [158608]

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Brian Wilson):** I am pleased to report considerable improvement in recent months. All straightforward visit visa applications are resolved within 24 hours. Applicants for visit visas that require an in-depth interview currently wait eight days.

Current queues for settlement visa applications are: 18 weeks for right of abode and dependent relatives over 65; 26 weeks for spouses and dependent children; 18 weeks for fiancés and other settlement categories; and 38 weeks for reapplicants.

**Ms King:** I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I also wish to put on record my thanks to Adrian Loxton, the second secretary at the British high commission in Dhaka. He and his team have worked incredibly hard to reduce waiting times for settlement applications. Will the Minister reassure me that our post in Dhaka will receive the necessary resources so that applicants do not have to wait longer than people in any other part of the world? Will he also give us some idea of when the new visa section in Sylhet will open? If he does not have the information to hand, perhaps he will write to me about it because it is important to my constituents.

**Mr. Wilson:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments about the staff in Dhaka. I will ensure that her message, which will be much appreciated, is conveyed to them. Like me, they know of her long-standing interest in the matter.

The number of applications in Dhaka continues to increase. It is a busy post, and the first three months of the year show an increase of 36 per cent. in new applications. To some extent, that reflects the better service that is being provided. However, we are working on providing additional staff for Dhaka to improve matters further.

I assure my hon. Friend that plans for Sylhet are going ahead and that there is a close working relationship with Dhaka. Premises have been identified for the new office. The high commissioner has the seen the proposed premises and we hope to establish the section later this year. We will certainly do so according to the tightest timetable. I shall write to my hon. Friend with further information.

**Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): Will the Minister confirm that a new visa section will open in Sylhet? When will that happen? In the meantime, will the immigration advisory service be funded fairly for its invaluable work and advice in that part of Bangladesh?

**Mr. Wilson:** The function of the office in Sylhet is to provide advice and information to visa applicants in the region. The staff will be able to accept, check and forward applications to Dhaka for decision. However, the additional cost of posting UK-based entry clearance staff to Sylhet permanently would have been unacceptable.

**Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): The Minister reported figures that revealed that spouses and their children trying to join people here in Britain still have to wait six months in Bangladesh for an interview for entry clearance. We have made great progress in speeding up some of the queues, so will we soon be able to tell our constituents that they will not have to wait that long for their families to be reunited?

**Mr. Wilson:** My hon. Friend makes a fair point. The figures that I quoted show that two of the four categories are still falling short of their targets. In the case of spouses and dependent children, the target is 13 weeks and the actual figure is 26 weeks. I assure her that every effort will be made to reach the target figure and that the necessary investment and resources will be put into ensuring that that can happen. I hope that that is a positive message. Equally, I hope that it sends a positive message that so much has been done in recent months to improve the previous position.

## NATO

3. **Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): When he will next meet the United States Secretary of State to discuss the future of NATO; and if he will make a statement. [158609]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook):** I regularly speak by phone to Secretary of State Powell, most recently yesterday evening. We will next meet later this month at the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Budapest, when I expect that we will both discuss the future of NATO and confirm our continuing confidence in it.

**Mr. Fabricant:** Notwithstanding his telephone conversation last night, does the Foreign Secretary accept that there is growing disquiet in the United States about the relationship between the United States and Europe? Just two or three hours ago, the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* published an article following Gerhard Schröder's statement yesterday, which included the following quote from Reimund Seidelmann:

"There is a long tradition in German foreign policy of giving up sovereignty in order to increase, indirectly, Germany's influence over Europe . . . This has been the German recipe for increasing power ever since the end of World War II."

Whatever the truth of that statement, does not the Foreign Secretary accept that such disquiet exists? What can he do to allay the growing American Euroscepticism in Washington DC?

**Mr. Cook:** I must confess that I got slightly lost halfway through that question about the relevance of the quotation about Germany. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that there is a real danger of a rift between Washington and Berlin, I would have thought that that would confirm the strategy of this Government in making sure that we have respect in both places, so that we can go between them.

I find the presumption of Conservative Members quite extraordinary, in that they claim to interpret American public opinion better than those who are elected by American public opinion. Both Secretary of State Powell and the President of the United States of America have expressed confidence in their relations with Britain and in the European security initiative. The hon. Gentleman really should stop trying to upstage the President of the United States.

**Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity, in his exchanges with the Americans, to make the point that while many of us here recognise the United States' critical role in the leadership of NATO, its preparing, possibly unilaterally, to breach the anti-ballistic missile treaty by going ahead with the national missile defence system is not an agenda around which NATO will unite?

**Mr. Cook:** I am happy to tell my hon. Friend that the issues of national missile defence and President Bush's forthcoming speech were discussed by Secretary of State Powell and me last night. I welcome President Bush's commitment to early and senior consultation with his allies. That is what we asked for and we are glad that he has agreed to it. On the question of the anti-ballistic missile treaty, we have repeatedly said to our American friends that any step that they take should be in consultation and agreement with Russia. I am, therefore, glad that President Bush will be speaking to President Putin today.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell** (North-East Fife): Notwithstanding that answer, what assessment has the Secretary of State made of the impact on the cohesion of NATO if President Bush, as widely reported, announces later today that he proposes to depart from the anti-ballistic missile treaty of 1972 in spite of the reservations, both public and private, of all the European members of NATO? When the Foreign Secretary next meets Colin Powell, will he impress on him that the United Kingdom, like all the other European members of NATO, is strongly committed to a multilateral nuclear non-proliferation regime, and that any action that provokes an increase in existing nuclear arsenals or that undermines the existing strategic balance should be avoided at all costs?

**Mr. Cook:** I entirely agree with the last point. It is very important for us to take advantage of the change in international relations post-cold war to achieve deep cuts in nuclear arsenals. I also fully accept that such deep cuts would be of great value to us in containing nuclear proliferation. That is why I warmly welcome the passage in the speech that President Bush will deliver tonight in which he looks forward to working with Russia to make deep cuts in offensive nuclear systems.

**Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): The hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) referred to an article in the *Washington Post* about recent views expressed in Europe. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that American Administrations have frequently said in the past that European member states of NATO should shoulder a greater burden of defence? Does he not find it somewhat curious that Opposition Members are attacking the steps that European member states are taking to make their defence contribution to NATO more effective?

**Mr. Cook:** My hon. Friend is right: a strong theme in the present Administration is the wish to achieve fairer burden sharing in the military responsibility of securing crisis management in Europe. That is why President Bush has said that the European security defence project will make Europe a stronger, more capable partner. I find it strange that Opposition Members, having claimed to be the people who interpret the United States for us, should oppose a measure that will help us to shoulder that fairer share of the military burden in Europe.

**Mr. Francis Maude** (Horsham): The Prime Minister assured President Bush at Camp David that the European army would be "anchored within NATO". The Nice agreement obviously shows that that is not true, but it would help if DSACEUR, NATO's deputy commander in Europe, were to act as chairman of the EU's Military Committee. Did the Foreign Secretary propose that, or does he agree with France's chief of defence staff, General Kelche, who has said that NATO has nothing to do with this?

**Mr. Cook:** General Kelche said:

"Europeans are not building a force independent from NATO, they are simply trying to strengthen their capability to manage crisis situations".

I should have thought that Opposition Members, even including the right hon. Gentleman, would wish to share that objective.

As for the Nice documents, I wish the right hon. Gentleman would stop pretending that they are secret documents that we have managed to stop the Americans getting their hands on. They were widely circulated by NATO ambassadors, including the United States ambassador, and are widely available in Washington. By constantly pretending that President Bush has somehow been hoodwinked by the British Government into not reading them, the right hon. Gentleman is insulting not only the transparency of the British Government but the intelligence of President Bush.

**Mr. Maude:** It is increasingly clear that the Prime Minister's assurances to President Bush at Camp David are proving about as reliable as his promises to the British people.

In the light of the speech on missile defence that the President will make later today, will the Foreign Secretary now take the opportunity to make the Government's view absolutely clear? The Secretary of State for Defence said in March last year that he would look sympathetically at

requests for the upgrading of Fylingdales and Menwith Hill. Will he have the Foreign Secretary's support in that, or is the Foreign Secretary too keen to curry favour with the CND types on his Back Benches, who are dogmatically opposed to such a move?

**Mr. Cook:** If that is the best that the right hon. Gentleman can do, it really is time that we cleared the air for a fresh start by consulting the wider public in the election.

Of course any decision that we reach when we receive a request will be a collective decision. I fully understand the United States' concern about missile proliferation—we share that concern, and want to work with the United States against such proliferation.

## Kyoto Protocol

4. **Mr. Geraint Davies** (Croydon, Central): What role his Department is playing in negotiations with the United States in relation to the Kyoto protocol. [158610]

6. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths** (Edinburgh, South): What discussions he has had with his US counterparts on implementing the Kyoto protocol. [158613]

10. **Mrs. Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): What recent representations he has made to the President of the United States about his position on the Kyoto agreement on climate change; and if he will make a statement. [158617]

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. John Battle):** The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is playing a full role in Government discussions with the United States on the Kyoto protocol. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has discussed the issue on several occasions with his American counterpart, Secretary of State Colin Powell.

The Government are committed to tackling climate change through constructive engagement with the international community and, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has spelt out, we continue to believe that the Kyoto protocol provides the best framework for that. We will continue to discuss with the Americans their participation in international efforts to tackle climate change during their review of climate policy in Washington, and in the run-up to the resumed international negotiations in Bonn in July.

**Mr. Davies:** In 1998, the cost of weather-related insurance claims in the United States was $89 billion—more than the entire cost in the 1980s. Does my hon. Friend agree that the impact of climate change on the United States economy—tornadoes, floods, droughts and desert expansion—clearly illustrates that the Kyoto protocol is as much about economic sustainability as environmental sustainability? Will he impress upon the new United States Administration that saving the planet and world prosperity are two sides of the same coin?

**Mr. Battle:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point in stressing that sustainability, economic and environmental, is key in the long term. Doing nothing and leaving things as they are would have a negative impact. I like to be more positive. Cleaning up the environment and tackling pollution will develop new environmental industries that will design out pollution and generate new jobs. Tackling the challenges of the environment will produce new jobs. It is a good, positive, win-win story.

**Mr. Griffiths:** Can this and other European Governments be so powerless that George Bush, who bought the presidency and now wants to sell the world, can get away with murdering the environment? After Trieste, when Bush went along with Kyoto—he now repudiates it—can this Government, or any Government, trust anything that the American Administration say on any international subject?

**Mr. Battle:** My hon. Friend has highlighted the challenges that we face in ensuring that the Kyoto protocol is signed up to. On his campaign website, I noticed some scientific references to the latest international panel on climate change, spelling out the impact of climate change. There is more or less consensus among the world's best scientists that human activity has an impact and is causing global warming. It does not say on his website that that intergovernmental panel has been endorsed by the American Government. That gives us something to work with, but we should continue the conversation with the Americans to encourage them to accept that although they are part of the problem, producing 25 per cent. of $CO_2$ emissions in the world, they can also be a major part of the solution.

**Mrs. Gilroy:** Does my hon. Friend agree that, whatever the "W" in George W. Bush may stand for, he would do well to visit the WWW—the worldwide web? Will he urge him to look at the site www.kyoto-cola.org, where he would perhaps find that the only key that the world has to tackle climate change is the Kyoto protocol?

**Mr. Battle:** I cannot restate often enough that we believe that the Kyoto protocol will provide the best framework. We want and intend to work with it. It is important to add that we are prepared to ratify the Kyoto protocol without the United States if necessary, and will continue to work towards its entry into force in 2002, assuming that we can get an acceptable outcome at the resumed international negotiations in Bonn in July. Pulling all the countries of the world together is an international challenge, but it is important that the developed world provides the lead by example. I am glad to say that, under this Government, the United Kingdom has been doing that. We have exceeded the target commitments that we signed up to.

**Mr. Alasdair Morgan** (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): What will be the implications of United States policy for our stance in future trade negotiations at the World Trade Organisation and with America, given that, in the short term at least, American policy of ignoring the Kyoto protocol will mean that USA industry has a competitive advantage over our own?

**Mr. Battle:** Again, I would prefer to take things from where we are. The key point is to continue to engage and negotiate constructively with the Americans, saying that there is a consensus on the science and that we must find ways in which to bring about reductions in $CO_2$ emissions internationally. We are playing our part in Britain, we are

pressing others in Europe to do so and I think that we can go further than has been suggested recently by the Americans.

**Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): I hope that the Labour party will not use Kyoto as an excuse to knock President Bush or the United States of America. We all wish to see progress in reducing carbon emissions, but we must be realistic about the fact that President Bush says that he is not about to do anything, particularly with the downturn in the US economy, that will damage jobs or industry in the United States. Will the Minister therefore use the summit in Germany this summer as an opportunity to look at fresh ways of ensuring that the whole world plays its part in reducing pollution, including India and China?

**Mr. Battle:** The hon. Gentleman was a member of the previous Government who, I seem to recall, did not do much to introduce programmes for renewable energies or ideas for emissions trading as new and imaginative ways of hitting the target. We have not used the previous Government's argument that we can do nothing until we get the economy right—we have got the economy right and we are delivering on the environment as well. We will continue to campaign for that internationally.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): While we all share concerns over the American decision to abandon the Kyoto protocol on climate change, does the Minister consider the Deputy Prime Minister the right man to carry out sensitive discussions with the United States when the right hon. Gentleman was described at The Hague climate talks by the French Environment Minister, Dominique Voynet, as a male chauvinist pig who had lost his nerve and lost his cool? Before visiting the United States last month, the Deputy Prime Minister talked up a storm. He promised bilateral talks and even told GMTV that he would be arguing the case on Kyoto.

While my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) met the Vice President and other senior figures last month, did the Deputy Prime Minister meet anyone in the new Administration? Is it not the case that the right hon. Gentleman lost his nerve again and that in the United States, on Kyoto, he achieved nothing and influenced no one? After all, is that not what happens when we send a male chauvinist pig to do a diplomat's job?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I require temperate language in this House.

**Mr. Battle:** I was a little disappointed that the hon. Lady should reduce this discussion to petty personal remarks. We are talking about probably the greatest challenge of the 21st century. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister championed Kyoto and is widely respected for doing so. He was at the meeting in New York, where he strongly supported the Kyoto protocol, and he found support for Kyoto from all the other parties there. He met 35 colleagues, including representatives of the United States of America. He is widely respected for his campaigning on this matter. There was a notable absence of such campaigning when the previous Government were running the country.

**Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): Has my hon. Friend had the opportunity to discuss these matters with his counterparts in the Australian Government, who I understand have stated in the past few days that Kyoto is dead because of President Bush's decision? Does my hon. Friend accept that it is a question not simply of persuading the American Government to see sense, but of persuading all the countries that constitute the American bloc in the climate change conference? Although it is possible to ratify Kyoto without the support of the United States, it may not be possible to do so without the support of all the other countries in the American negotiating bloc.

**Mr. Battle:** I do not accept that Kyoto is dead, which is the term that has been used. The Kyoto protocol is the culmination of 10 years of international environmental diplomacy. It is the best framework available for taking action to tackle climate change, and I do not believe that we can back out now. There is strong international support for Kyoto, as was evident at the informal ministerial meeting in New York attended by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. Japan and Canada were negotiating with America, and they strongly support Kyoto.

All the key players are coming out in support of the agreement, and Britain and the EU remain committed to its ratification by 2002. There is some time to go, and there is hard work to be done to persuade those countries that have signed up to Kyoto that it is the realistic framework and option for taking action. I am confident that we can make progress, and we are campaigning at every level to achieve that. That contrasts with the way in which Opposition Members occasionally reduce the matter to petty personal comments.

### Commonwealth Monitoring Action Group

5. **Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): If he will make a statement on the Commonwealth monitoring action group mission to Zimbabwe. [158612]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook):** The Government of Zimbabwe continue to prevaricate on a date when they can receive the mission of Commonwealth Ministers to convey our concerns. I wrote last week to Don McKinnon, the Secretary General of the Commonwealth, to stress that it was now all the more urgent that the mission should go ahead.

Our own concerns are now even greater. The Minister of State with responsibility for Africa, my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), summoned the Zimbabwean high commissioner to the Foreign Office last week to protest at the war veterans' programme of intimidation and extortion against the business community, with which there is clear official connivance. The targets include businesses from half the countries of the European Union and a transit depot of EU humanitarian aid. I will be raising these attacks with my colleagues this weekend at the informal meeting of Foreign Ministers.

The worsening situation in Zimbabwe was fairly expressed by the International Bar Association, which warned last week that there was a growing culture of impunity among those who carried out intimidation, and that the rule of law was now in the gravest peril.

**Mr. Brazier:** For how much longer will the Government continue simply to wring their hands while Mugabe terrorises the Opposition, intimidates the courts, suppresses the press, stirs up racial hatred of the worst sort and even conspires in the murder of his own citizens? The Government supported the immediate suspension of Pakistan from the Commonwealth Council as soon as a coup took place in that country, even though the Government thus brought to power were much less unpleasant than the present Government in Zimbabwe. Why have not the Government supported Zimbabwe's immediate suspension from the Commonwealth, and economic sanctions?

**Mr. Cook:** First, I reject economic sanctions. It would be a grave mistake for the Government to apply such a sanction, which would deal a very grave blow to the innocent people of Zimbabwe. They have suffered enough already under the appalling economic mismanagement of President Mugabe. I do not think that it would be wise of Britain to volunteer to allow Mugabe to make us the scapegoat for his errors.

The hon. Gentleman must not underrate the enormous number of steps that the Government have taken already. We have imposed a complete arms embargo on Zimbabwe, halted the provision of Land Rovers to the police and cut aid to Zimbabwe by one third. All that is in complete contrast to the behaviour of the previous Conservative Government, who increased aid to Zimbabwe at the time of the Matabeleland massacres, when 10,000 people were killed.

This Government have also withdrawn the British military advisory training team from Zimbabwe. We have raised the question of Zimbabwe in the Commonwealth, the European Union and the United Nations, and we have received support in all of them. At last month's Question Time, I asked Conservative Members whether they could name one other organisation in the international community to which I could go to seek support. I said that I would seek that support, but I am still awaiting an answer.

**Mr. Donald Anderson** (Swansea, East): The activities of the so-called war veterans, in collusion with the Government of Zimbabwe, clearly affect the whole of southern Africa as well as the country itself, because they deal a blow to investor confidence. Investment in the region is already very scarce, and will suffer further as a result. Has my right hon. Friend seen any evidence of a change of position on the part of the South African President when it comes to leaning on Zimbabwe? Zimbabwe owes South Africa substantially, both politically and in terms of moneys given for energy and other matters.

**Mr. Cook:** I am pleased to be able to tell my right hon. Friend that I saw the South African Foreign Minister yesterday. We had a full discussion on Zimbabwe. She stressed to me the words used by President Mbeke at one of the international investment conferences, when he expressed South Africa's serious and growing concern about the situation in Zimbabwe.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Mr. Anderson) is right: the crisis in Zimbabwe is especially acute for the people of that country, but it is having a dramatic and serious economic effect on neighbouring countries such as South Africa and Mozambique. We are working with those countries to find out how we can together to achieve a change in Zimbabwe.

**Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the situation is no longer one in which Mugabe can possibly claim that his campaign is simply against white farmers? In Binga, for example, the local government offices have been closed—as far as one can tell, because 89 per cent. of the province voted for the Movement for Democratic Change. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that the public in this country realise that this is no longer a war against the commercial farms, but a war against Mugabe's own people?

**Mr. Cook:** I agree absolutely with the hon. Gentleman. In the past 10 days, more than 200 companies have been targeted by the war veterans within Zimbabwe, the majority of which, we believe, are Zimbabwean. They include a number that are part-owned by ZANU-PF, which are being invaded by the war veterans. We are not entirely clear whether it was understood that these were ZANU-PF companies, but the veterans were certainly acting against local companies and knew that they were doing so. At present, we are witnessing a concerted campaign of intimidation by President Mugabe, which is intended to silence political opposition and secure his re-election.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that perhaps the time has come to take stronger action than has been considered until now? Although we require no lectures from the Conservative party, is it not clear that the President of Zimbabwe is, like all political scoundrels, using the race card in every possible way to stay in power, and that the campaign that is being waged by the thugs has his every encouragement, which should be stated clearly? That is why some of us believe that the time has come for stronger action.

**Mr. Cook:** My hon. Friend is right about the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe and the President's wish to find a scapegoat. The economic situation in Zimbabwe has resulted in the majority of the population being unemployed, the total absence of foreign exchange, an inability to pay for essential imports such as energy and a very real danger later this year of food shortages. In those circumstances, President Mugabe is looking for someone other than himself to blame. We would not rule out any credible step that would be responsible and would have a realistic chance of changing opinion and policies in Zimbabwe. However, we should also ensure that any step we take is clearly consistent with our message to the people of Zimbabwe: that we are on their side and that we have a common enemy in Mugabe.

**Mr. Francis Maude** (Horsham): I strongly agree with what the Foreign Secretary just said. It is a regime that

has declared war on its own people in a cynical attempt to remain in power. It is important that any steps that we take are clearly directed against Mugabe and the wretched henchmen who sustain him in power. Given that he has now made it clear that he is unwilling to treat with the Commonwealth mission, which is attempting to go there to talk to him, is it not absolutely clear that the time for quiet diplomacy has long gone? Is it not intolerable that at this autumn's Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, Mugabe might be allowed the yet further propaganda coup that would follow from his being allowed to strut his stuff there? Is it not now urgent to take steps to begin the process of suspending his wretched regime from the Commonwealth?

**Mr. Cook:** I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's endorsement of what I just said, but I have said it every month for the past 12 months and I have said it not only here, but in Brussels, within the Commonwealth and in New York. That has certainly not been quiet diplomacy, as the right hon. Gentleman claimed.

On the Commonwealth, I warned when we gave our commitment to the mission last month that we would be preparing advice for the Commonwealth Heads of Government when we meet at the end of this year. That is the only body that can take a decision on the suspension of Zimbabwe. If Zimbabwe continues to isolate itself by refusing to deal with the mechanisms of the Commonwealth, the Heads of Government must take that factor into account this coming autumn.

As I said to the right hon. Gentleman at the previous Foreign Office Question Time, one of the most practical differences that we made during the past 12 months was to get Commonwealth observers into the parliamentary election. They were warmly welcomed by the Zimbabwean Opposition for inhibiting the worst excesses of Mugabe's thugs. One consequence of suspending Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth would be that we would be unable to send Commonwealth observers for the presidential elections early next year—the only person in Zimbabwe who would welcome that is President Mugabe himself.

**Mr. Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): Today is May day. In Zimbabwe, the trade unions are trying to celebrate international workers' day. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is deplorable that peaceful trade union activity in Zimbabwe is subject to intimidation and threat by forces supporting the Government of President Mugabe?

**Mr. Cook:** I totally agree with my hon. Friend. The trade union movement is one of the areas where there is strength of criticism of President Mugabe and it has, therefore, attracted violent intimidation in recent weeks. I say to the Government of Zimbabwe, to President Mugabe and to all the other Ministers—especially the Minister of Justice—that we shall all be watching closely the trial of Morgan Tsvangirai when he appears before the court.

## Macedonia

8. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): If he will make a statement on the situation in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. [158615]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook):** I visited Macedonia last month, where I met the President, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister. I also visited Tetevo, where I met the leaders of the Albanian parties. I raised Macedonia during my visit last week to Kosovo, where I received assurances from the leaders of all political parties of their support for the integrity of the borders of Macedonia.

We fully support Macedonia as a multi-ethnic democracy, and we congratulate it on being the first country in the region to sign a stabilisation agreement with the European Union. However, we continue to press the Government of Macedonia further to strengthen their society by tackling the discrimination that is felt by the Albanian minority.

The whole House will wish to deplore the recent ambush that killed eight Macedonian soldiers and to express our condolences to their families. We are determined to work with the Government of Macedonia to defeat both the terrorists and their poisonous message that Albanians and Slavs cannot live at peace in the same single state.

**Mr. Heath:** I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his reply. Is it not critical that the international community does everything that it can to prevent the importation of terrorism and instability to Macedonia? To that end, will he reconsider the point that I put to him on 27 March: that there is a need for some sort of force similar to UNPREDEP to protect the borders of Macedonia? Secondly, will he give the House his assessment of the consistency and coherence of different elements of KFOR in their approach to disarming the former KLA, and when does he think that that process will be completed?

**Mr. Cook:** While I was in Kosovo, I discussed the proposals for new anti-terrorist laws made by UNMIK. I am pleased to say that those proposals are now well developed. I hope that they will be in place soon and that they will provide a basis for longer detention of the type that the hon. Gentleman seeks.

On the question of Macedonia, I stress to the hon. Gentleman and to the House that we are doing a lot on the Kosovo side of the border. Indeed, British troops have been involved, interdicting terrorists and trying to make sure that we stop those who return from Macedonia having carried out terrorism. We remain committed to ensuring that that task continues and that there is a strong intelligence link-up with the army of Macedonia to make sure that together we are successful in beating the terrorists.

**Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): Is not the real agenda for those KLA terrorists a greater Albania? It has nothing to do with the extension of the Albanian language. Having ethnically cleansed Kosovo of almost all the minorities, the KLA's murderous extension into Macedonia is the real threat to peace in the Balkans. When will the Government and the west stop having tea with the likes of Thaci and Agim Ceku and start arresting them? They are the ringleaders, and until they go there will be no peace in the Balkans.

**Mr. Cook:** I would repeat to my hon. Friend what I told the House last month, when I made a statement on

Macedonia: in the Balkans, we have managed to halt any plans to achieve a greater Croatia or a greater Serbia, and there is no place on the map of the Balkans for a greater Albania either. That is the message that I firmly expressed in Kosovo and Macedonia, where I said that the borders of Kosovo had been set and that the era in which borders can be redrawn in the Balkans in blood is gone and past. However, I tell my hon. Friend that if we had not acted in the way that we did in Kosovo—if we had allowed Milosevic to emerge a hero and a victor from Kosovo—Milosevic would still be in power, not, as he currently is, in prison.

**Sir David Madel** (South-West Bedfordshire): Is it the Government's view that more NATO troops are now needed properly to police the Macedonia-Kosovo border?

**Mr. Cook:** No, that is not the Government's view. We have always made it clear that if we receive a request from NATO on a decision in which we have participated, we will, of course, consider it, but we are urging all members of the KFOR team to show the same flexibility as the British contribution in being willing to go where the command of KFOR believes there is a requirement for them.

## EU (Enlargement)

9. **Mr. Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire): When he next plans to meet representatives of the Government of Belgium to discuss their plans for the enlargement of the EU. [158616]

13. **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): If he will make statement on the development of the agenda for the forthcoming Belgian presidency of the European Council with regard to enlargement. [158620]

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook):** The Belgian Foreign Minister will be in London next month for talks on the forthcoming Belgian presidency.

We are pleased with the new momentum in the enlargement process under the Swedish presidency. I warmly welcome the commitment of the Belgian Prime Minister in Budapest that enlargement will remain at the top of the agenda during the Belgian presidency.

Britain is widely recognised throughout the candidate countries as a champion of their membership. That is why we are keen to ratify the treaty of Nice. We would be able to do so more quickly if the official Opposition also agreed to ratify a treaty without which enlargement cannot happen.

**Mr. Paterson:** Enlargement cannot happen without effective, radical reform of the common agricultural policy. It was a humiliating indictment of the Foreign Secretary that that issue was not even discussed at Nice. When he meets the Belgians next month, what are the chances of his persuading them seriously to discuss radical reform of the CAP and its completion during their presidency?

**Mr. Cook:** As you, Mr. Speaker, will recall, we have been up and down this red herring so many times that I weary the House by repeating it. The fact of the matter is that we did carry through a reform of the CAP in Berlin—a much more far-reaching reform than was ever secured by Opposition Members—which has saved every British household £94 a year on its food bill. Yes, we would like to go further—of course, we would, but that does not require a treaty change; it requires the policy change that the EU will be obliged to face up to when we consider the next financial setting.

The hon. Gentleman has to come clean. He is, I understand, a leading member of the British-Czech and Slovak group. Next time he meets those who come from the Czech Republic or from Slovakia, he will have to be honest with them about whether he will stand in the way of a treaty that is essential to their membership of the EU, and it would be helpful to them if he were to tell the House now. Will he or will he not back the treaty that they want to be passed?

**Mr. Waterson:** Is there not a real danger that, with the integrationist agenda of the Belgian Government, enlargement will take second place under their presidency? Is not that concern added to by the latest plans of the German Chancellor for a European Government? Is not it as plain as a pikestaff to everyone except the Government that an enlarged Europe needs more flexibility, not closer political integration?

**Mr. Cook:** On the views of the Prime Minister of Belgium, I can only refer the hon. Gentleman to what the Prime Minister said in Budapest—that enlargement will be at the top of our agenda. I would rather listen to what the Prime Minister of Belgium says about his priorities than to the hon. Gentleman.

On the paper from the SPD, which was endorsed by Chancellor Schröder, if the hon. Gentleman ever gets round to reading it, he will find much in it with which he agrees, such as the commitment to combat the creeping transfer of competencies to the EU, or the need to repatriate the competencies that are better exercised by national Governments. Of course, there are some things in it with which neither he nor I would agree, but we cannot call for a wide-ranging Europe-wide debate and then insist that everything said in it is something that we agree with.

**Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): Does the Secretary of State agree that enlargement of the EU will genuinely be impossible without the endorsement of the Nice treaty? The Conservative party simultaneously tries to argue against the Nice treaty and to support enlargement, but is not the reality that Conservative Members know that they will not have to resolve that contradiction because they will not be in government for the foreseeable future?

**Mr. Cook:** I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend's comment about the centrality of the treaty of Nice to enlargement. Indeed, the Foreign Minister of Poland, Mr. Bartoszewski, and I wrote a joint article that was published here and in Poland. It says:

"The treaty is a precondition for enlargement—unless it is ratified, enlargement cannot happen."

Those are not just my views; they are the views of the Foreign Minister of Poland. I am sure that, when the time comes, many Polish communities around Britain will weigh those words carefully at the ballot box.

**Mr. Denzil Davies** (Llanelli): When the Government come to consider the five economic tests on whether to join the single currency, is my right hon. Friend able to tell the House whether the effect of enlargement on the euro area and, in particular, on the value of the single currency will be taken into account?

**Mr. Cook:** Of course, all factors will be taken into account. However, I do not anticipate any of the current candidates being within the eurozone in the time scale that his question requires.

**Mr. John Redwood** (Wokingham): Is the Foreign Secretary seriously suggesting that there needs to be no further reform of the CAP for enlargement to take place? Is not the truth of the matter that it would break the bank if enlargement proceeded on the current basis? When will he debate proper reform of the CAP, and when will he announce how much extra it will cost to bring in the new member states? When will he reform the CAP to provide better animal welfare than we have seen in recent months in this country?

**Mr. Cook:** The right hon. Gentleman really should brush up on the history of the recent negotiations. If he does, he will find that the decision that we took at Berlin on the current financial perspective is explicit. Within it, sufficient room is provided for enlargement to go ahead. Before he shakes his head, when he claims that we cannot afford enlargement, he should remember that he supports all the forces of reaction on the continent that want to oppose it. The money is there and we should not pretend that it is not.

**Ann Clwyd** (Cynon Valley): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that he has repeatedly said in the Chamber that Turkey's membership of the EU is conditional on the improvement of human rights in that country? Will he comment on the fact that 20 hunger strikers have died in the past few weeks, that hundreds of other prisoners are on hunger strike and that Turkish MPs, such as Leyla Zana, are serving 15 years in prison for using a few words of the Kurdish language? Will he encourage the EU presidency to be tough on these issues so as to help people in the Turkish Government and the Turkish prison service who are attempting to improve the situation?

**Mr. Cook:** I have no problem at all in saying to my hon. Friend that political reform, improvement in human rights and respect for ethnic minorities are conditions of Turkey proceeding with its application for membership of the European Union. Indeed, we explicitly agreed at Helsinki that negotiations would start only once Turkey had met the criteria on human rights and the treatment of ethnic minorities. I agree with my hon. Friend that Turkey has a long way to go, but those who are most active on human rights in Turkey also tend to be the very people who most want Turkey to continue with its integration in the European structures. They see that as the strongest lever for reform, and I do not suggest that we should take it away from those who are trying to improve human rights in Turkey.

**Mr. Richard Spring** (West Suffolk): When the right hon. Gentleman discusses enlargement, will he agree that the alienation of so many in the EU has much to do with the remoteness of its institutions and its lack of accountability? Does he not agree that the way to reinvigorate the relationship and make enlargement easier is not by further centralisation but by enhancing the role of democratically elected and accountable national Parliaments?

**Mr. Cook:** I am very pleased to have the hon. Gentleman's support for my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's proposals for an institutional link with national Parliaments, which would provide a second Chamber in the European Parliament. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's conversion to supporting my right hon. Friend's proposal. As I asked the hon. Gentleman last month—we still have had no reply—whether the Conservative party is really to pose as a supporter of enlargement, why can it not tell us that it will support the treaty of Nice, which is essential for enlargement to proceed?

## Conflict Diamonds

11. **Mr. Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): If he will report on developments in controlling the sale of conflict diamonds. [158618]

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Brian Wilson):** I am pleased to confirm that I led an Adjournment debate on behalf of the Government in the House on 26 April, reporting on national and international developments in controlling the sale of conflict diamonds. The United Kingdom has played a prominent role throughout in supporting the UN Security Council resolutions and the Kimberley process.

**Mr. White:** Given that the UN global policy forum produced a report last December that set out not only the smuggling routes, but the names of the brokers, dealers and cutters involved in the trade, will my hon. Friend assure me that the global certification scheme, on which the Government are working, will not get bogged down? Will he also give an idea of the time scale, because each day's delay means that more people die needlessly?

**Mr. Wilson:** I can assure my hon. Friend of the Government's complete commitment to see the process through to the end. Useful progress was made at meetings in Brussels last week. It is vital to involve Governments in the producer states as well as the industry and countries such as Britain, which are central to the trade. Everyone is working together to produce a scheme. At the same time, it is important to remember that only 3 or 4 per cent. of diamonds come through illegal channels. Nothing should be done to damage the legal trade because diamonds are very important to producer countries, especially in southern Africa.

## Points of Order

3.31 pm

**Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, of which I have given you prior notice. You will no doubt have seen early-day motion 619 and press reports about the proposed merger of the Halifax bank and the Bank of Scotland. If those reports are to be believed, the Halifax headquarters will move to Edinburgh, even though it is a much larger bank. The Halifax is hugely important to my town, from which it takes its name. It is Yorkshire's premier financial institution and Britain's biggest mortgage lender. It would be a devastating blow for my town and the Yorkshire region if the headquarters were to relocate. Has a Minister from the Department of Trade and Industry notified you that a statement will be made on that important issue?

**Mr. Speaker:** I have had no approach from any Minister on that matter.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you know, there are a number of protests today, not only in London, but in more than 1,000 general practitioners' surgeries throughout the United Kingdom at the Government's inability to deliver their promises on health. Are you as surprised as I am that the Secretary of State for Health has not made a request—or perhaps he has—to make a statement to the House today?

**Mr. Speaker:** After 22 years in the House, I am never surprised.

**Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Given the revelation on this morning's edition of the "Today" programme that the Ministry of Defence is facing difficult choices between retaining our aircraft carrier programme or a large chunk of the Army, have you received an application to make a statement on that matter?

**Mr. Speaker:** I have had no approach from any Minister.

**Mr. Nicholas Soames** (Mid-Sussex): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do you agree that the serious issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) is worthy of further consideration? The revelation has been lent some credibility by the response of the Minister for the Armed Forces earlier today, who confirmed that difficult decisions have to be made. Given that there is not another session of Defence questions before the general election, is it not appropriate for a Defence Minister to be called to the House?

**Mr. Speaker:** I do not know when the general election will be announced.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You said in response to the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) that no Minister has contacted you to make a statement on the possible merger of the Bank of Scotland and the Halifax Group plc—in which, by the way, I have a small investment.

**Hon. Members:** Oh!

**Mr. Soames:** In which one?

**Mr. Winterton:** The Halifax.

The hon. Lady made an important point. Bearing in mind that thousands of jobs could be at stake at the Halifax and in Yorkshire, and that the Government send Ministers to this place to make statements when jobs are at risk, are you, Mr. Speaker, able to bring pressure on them to make a statement on a matter that is crucial to Halifax, Yorkshire, England and Scotland?

**Mr. Speaker:** I have no desire to see anyone lose his job, but it is not a matter for the Chair. The hon. Members for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) know their way around the Order Paper, and they know how to get a Minister to the Dispatch Box to give an account of his or her stewardship of the matter.

## Transport of Farm Animals

3.35 pm

**Dr. Nick Palmer** (Broxtowe): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to limit the distance that farm animals may be transported in any one-week period.

The Bill will do three things: it will reduce animal suffering, it will lower the risk of epidemics and it will restore the market for local abattoirs. A few weeks ago, a senior official of the National Farmers Union in Nottinghamshire said to me that not only politicians but even farmers have learned a great deal about the farming industry in recent weeks. One of the most startling facts that we have all learned is that more than 1 million sheep movements were made, many right across the country, in the days after the first infection of foot and mouth disease. Why so many, and why so far?

The first reason is retailers' insistence that farmers use specified abattoirs. It is not generally realised that many of Britain's big retailers require suppliers to use specific abattoirs, even if they are on the opposite side of the country. If farmers wish to sell to them, they are forced to transport their animals the necessary distance for the convenience of the retailer.

Secondly, there is a large number of middlemen who buy animals speculatively at markets and move them from one market to another, looking for a better price. We can imagine the stress of animals packed into transporters for day after day as the dealer hunts his profit. I am not against profit, but we can reasonably ask ourselves whether that activity, with its cost in animal suffering and human risk, is producing anything worth while. Thirdly, price competition lures farmers into sending their animals across the country to make a marginal saving, even when a local abattoir is still available.

The Bill will empower the Secretary of State to limit the total frequency, time or distance that each animal can travel in any one week. The effects would be to inhibit the trade of middlemen who repeatedly move the same animals and to prevent the longest journeys to abattoirs. Local abattoirs would regain their natural markets, the stress to animals would be substantially reduced and the danger of new epidemics would be lessened. Similar proposals have been made by the Swedish and German Governments at European Union level following studies showing that 10 per cent. of animals transported across Europe are dead on arrival from stress or other causes. I hope that the Bill will promote a readiness in Britain to welcome such moves.

We have a great tradition in Britain of cheap food, and that has done a great deal to promote the interests of the people of the country. However, it is time to consider whether that is necessary in its current absolute form. What is the real price that we are paying? It is an increased risk of epidemics that cost Britain billions when they occur and the suffering of animals, which consumers, when asked, say that they are not seriously willing to accept. The real price is too high.

We must accept that the Bill would increase the price of meat—I estimate that it would do so by 5 per cent. A piece of meat now costing £2 would therefore cost an extra 10p. I have a 10p with me—the price of saving it is a great deal of suffering for animals and an increased risk of epidemics that cost all of us billions of pounds. With the Bill, I should like to invest that 10p in higher standards for the animals' sake and for Britain's sake. I commend the Bill to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Dr. Nick Palmer, Mr. Ian Cawsey, Sir Teddy Taylor, Mr. Vernon Coaker, Mr. David Winnick, Jane Griffiths and Mr. Mark Todd.

TRANSPORT OF FARM ANIMALS

Dr. Nick Palmer accordingly presented a Bill to limit the distance that farm animals may be transported in any one-week period: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 8 June, and to be printed [Bill 90].

## Business of the House

3.41 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Graham Stringer):** I beg to move,

That—

(1) at the sitting on 2nd May the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on any Motion in the name of Margaret Beckett relating to Regulatory Reform not later than Seven o'clock, and such Questions shall include the Questions on any amendment selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; and

(2) if proceedings on any such Motion have not been completed before Seven o'clock, the Private Business set down by direction of the Chairman of Ways and Means for consideration at that hour may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours after it has been entered upon.

The motion is self-explanatory and provides that the draft Standing Orders cannot be talked out by requiring that the Question be put at seven o'clock. It protects the rights of the House by ensuring that amendments selected by the Speaker can be put at the end of debate and that if Divisions occur after 7 pm, the time for private business is not reduced.

Such business motions have been standard under this Administration and the previous one. The debate on the first Standing Orders on deregulation orders was similarly limited to their concluding

"not later than two hours after their commencement"

by the previous Administration in 1994. The fact that the business will be followed by private business, which should start at 7 pm, or shortly after, makes such a formulation inappropriate on this occasion.

3.42 pm

**Mr. Andrew Lansley** (South Cambridgeshire): First, so far as I am aware, there was no ostensible reason for Ministers to resort to the necessity of constraining debate tomorrow on that basis.

Tomorrow's debate is important and I shall not prejudge any issues that may arise then. However, as the Minister knows perfectly well, the comparison with orders made under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 is not comprehensive, as that Act dealt with exceptional powers, and the super-affirmative procedure was intended for a particular purpose. By contrast, the Regulatory Reform Act 2001, as we can already see—and as we shall no doubt discuss tomorrow—provides a power that has a much wider application and that can be used in a far greater range of circumstances. Clearly, Ministers are seeking to use that legislative procedure in a range of circumstances, as shown by the consultation papers that have already been issued.

It is important that the House should examine the procedure under which such orders are to be scrutinised. I must confess that I am surprised by the Minister's contention that the motion is necessary to avoid such debate being talked out. I share entirely the Minister's view that it is important to protect the subsequent private business tomorrow, but I have no reason to suppose that my hon. Friends in the Opposition do not intend to see it through.

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): I could be wrong, but it is my understanding that if the motion had not been moved, we would have the debate on regulatory reform, which would be interrupted at 7 o'clock. Private business would take place from 7 o'clock to 10 o'clock, and we would then resume debate on regulatory reform. There is no question of that debate being at risk; as I understand it, it is protected by the existing procedures of the House.

**Mr. Lansley:** I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend. As always, I should have deferred to him in such matters of parliamentary procedure, and I am sure that he is right. There is no question of the subsequent private business being imperilled. However, it may prove necessary for debate to continue in order to scrutinise the procedure, which is different from that which applies to orders made under the 1994 Act, and a range of additional factors will have to be taken into account by the relevant Committee.

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mr. Lansley:** Yes, but then I must make my remaining one or two points.

**Mr. Bercow:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, because he is, I imagine, being his usual restrained and gentlemanly self. Will he nevertheless confirm that the Government's intended circumscription of debate on the orders represents nothing more than a fig-leaf to cover their embarrassment about the fact that they were woefully short of Back Benchers who were ready to speak on the Bill?

**Mr. Lansley:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. As many hon. Members will recall, he was an assiduous attender in the House during consideration of the 2001 Act on Report and Third Reading. He knows that there was a signal lack of support expressed in speeches from the Government side, although I suspect that, in at least one example, the amendments that we tabled would have been widely supported by Labour Members had they had the chance and the discretion to provide such support.

As we are so close to consideration of tomorrow's business, I am surprised that the Minister did not take the opportunity to assure the House that the time specified on the Order Paper will not be further reduced by the making of ministerial statements, which would have a bearing on the time available for discussing the orders. Therefore, we are considering the motion despite being ignorant of the extent to which time will genuinely be available, and I regret that the Minister did not further inform us on that point.

3.47 pm

**Mr. Douglas Hogg** (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I rise to express my concern about the motion, which, as I understand it, will have two consequences: first, debate on the motion in the name of the Leader of the House must be concluded by 7 o'clock and, secondly, debate on the private business will be limited to three hours. I regret that the motion will impose such restrictions on both items of business.

I begin by discussing the Deregulation Committee, which is the matter that the Leader of the House will deal with tomorrow. We must deal with whether the motion before us provides the House with sufficient time to discuss that business. I do not believe that it does.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) made an important point about business statements and other interruptions. If the Question has to be put at 7 o'clock, as I understand it has, and if there are one or more statements, as there may well be, time will be taken up and the period available for debate will be extraordinarily limited. In some examples, that does not matter, but in the example of the business to be discussed tomorrow, it does, because we are to set up a Select Committee.

It is a good thing that we are establishing a Select Committee. However, whenever one is involved in such a matter, questions both particular and general have to be addressed, and it is right that there should be proper time available in which to address them. First, who will be responsible for selecting its members? It could take a long time properly to debate that matter, because my hon. and right hon. Friends may want to point out that Members of the House more generally should be involved in that selection.

There is absolutely no merit in choosing members of a Select Committee if the exercise of that choice is confined to the usual channels. While the hands may be safe, they may not reflect majority opinion, and we need ample time in which to express our anxieties about the way in which Select Committee members are chosen. There will be an opportunity for us to do so tomorrow, so I am extremely sorry that we are confining the debate and that hon. Members from all parties will have only a limited opportunity to express their anxieties about the way in which Select Committees are chosen.

The chairmanship of Select Committees is also a concern. I want them to be as free as possible of party manipulation, so that they can enhance the independence of the House. I think that we need ample time tomorrow to discuss in detail how we can choose Chairmen who fully and properly reflect the House, who are not to be regarded by the Government as safe pairs of hands and who will supervise the Executive.

The Select Committee reports are a further issue. The motion to be discussed tomorrow sets out requirements on such reports, but I cannot find in it any obligation for the Government to provide time in the House to discuss them. I suspect that that is a matter of concern not only to me, but to other hon. Members who want to ensure that the reports are fully and properly debated. Tomorrow's motion provides an opportunity to raise and ventilate those matters, so I very much regret that time is to be constricted.

The private business is protected in the sense that three hours will be devoted to it. That is good news as far as it goes, but that is not very far. The City of London (Ward Elections) Bill is a private Bill that has been brought before the House on many occasions, and its progress has been frustrated many times by Labour Members. I do not complain about that, as hon. Members are perfectly entitled to express their opposition to such Bills. I have done so myself and I make no complaint about it. However, if we confine a debate on a Bill that is of considerable importance to the City of London, we must bear in mind that that will prevent it from ever being enacted.

I think that the House needs a greater opportunity to discuss and consider private business. The motion should provide more than three hours of debate. I regret that it does not do so, because that time is not nearly long enough. If we confine the debate, the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill will never make progress. Let us be clear: its passage will have been frustrated by Labour Members. I do not object to the process, provided that we know that it is happening and that no hypocrisy is involved.

**Mr. Bercow:** I do not cavil at anything that my right hon. and learned Friend says, but does he agree that the proposed truncation of debate is especially inappropriate and, I would go so far as to say, tasteless, as we have just had an Easter recess, as we are about to take Monday off for ourselves and as another event is likely to intercede before long? Should not hon. Members be prepared to do a little work?

**Mr. Hogg:** That is a telling intervention, but I am entitled to make another comment: this Parliament could run for another year. We could take all the time in the world to discuss the business, but for particular reasons—I am bound to say that I think that they have nothing to do with national interests—the Prime Minister has decided to call a general election 12 months early. We are entitled to ask why. I strongly suspect that he thinks that his electoral lead—if he has one—will be frittered away. That does him no credit and it tells us an awful lot about the way in which the Government operate.

I know that the motion is not earth shattering, but by confining the debate the Government are shutting out the House from an ability properly to discuss important questions about Select Committees, both in particular—I refer to the Select Committee on Deregulation—and in general, and are ensuring that important private business will not make progress. I regret both of those things.

3.54 pm

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): I echo the comments of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg). As the debate progresses, the motion appears increasingly otiose. As I said in my intervention, in the normal course of events, we would first discuss the motion. If our discussion did not conclude, it would be interrupted at 7 pm. Private business would be tackled between 7 pm and 10 pm, and we would resume the debate on the motion after 10 pm. That gives us an inkling of what the Government are up to and what they fear.

The Government are paranoid about the House of Commons doing anything after 10 pm. I understand that; the delicate babes on the Labour Benches do not want to be here late. They find it difficult to concentrate for long and objectionable to be here after 10 pm. A debate on that should properly be held at another time. By tabling the motion, the Government aim for the usual regrettable combination of truncating debate and dismissing hon. Members as early as possible, thus minimising Government embarrassment. As long as we recognise that, we can take a proper view of the matter.

By restricting time for the debate on the Standing Orders to the Regulatory Reform Act 2001, we will not only limit the possibility of debating my modest amendments, if they are selected. Such action has wider implications. For example, should we simply endorse the existence of a Select Committee, albeit in a slightly different form? Is not it time to debate whether the number of Select Committees is already excessive?

*[Mr. Eric Forth]*

There are far too many Committees, and the number only increases. I cannot remember when we last did away with a Select Committee. In our eagerness to create more chairmanships and travelling opportunities for colleagues, we miss the point of Select Committees, which are supposed to be focused, serious and serve some parliamentary or wider purpose. The Government, as ever nowadays, are trying to restrict the amount of time for debate. You, Mr. Speaker, and other occupants of the Chair would not deny us the opportunity to make the odd passing reference to the number of Committees and whether they are appropriate. I appreciate that the motion does not increase that number, but endorses and slightly changes the number.

The motion states that you, Mr. Speaker,

"shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on any Motion in the name of Margaret Beckett".

I do not know whether that is a broad hint that the Leader of the House might slip a few more motions on to the Order Paper between now and tomorrow. The motion allows for that. If that happens, we are being asked to endorse limited debating time without knowing the total business before us. That is disturbing.

Is the Parliamentary Secretary prepared to guarantee that no further motions in the name of the Leader of the House will be tabled for tomorrow? I cannot understand the reason for the wording unless it is to allow some dubious business to be surreptitiously slipped in at the last minute and encompassed by the restricted time that has been allowed for the business.

The motion bears the hallmarks of the Government and their attitude to the House. It is necessary only if one accepts two propositions, which I shall outline. First, it is desirable, nay, essential to restrict debate on all matters so that the Government are embarrassed as little as possible and their delicate supporters get to go home early. Secondly, good, long-standing arrangements that are well understood in the House must be disturbed. The Parliamentary Secretary has not explained the reason for that.

We are left with a dilemma: do we accept unnecessary nonsense and roll over yet again?

**Mr. Bercow:** In the absence of any helpful response from the Parliamentary Secretary on the Government's intentions tomorrow, would not it be instructive for the House to hear either from its Deputy Leader, the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office, or from the Deputy Chief Whip, either of whom would be in an ideal position to advise the House as to exactly what the Government have got up their sleeve?

**Mr. Forth:** If this debate were to allow the Government Deputy Chief Whip the opportunity to come and enlighten us as to the darkest innermost thoughts of the Government, that would be a breakthrough indeed. I am not overly optimistic that that will happen, although the right hon. Gentleman looks remarkably relaxed and cheerful about the prospects surrounding the motion. He obviously feels that he has the situation under control as well he might.

The difficulty here—as my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), with his usual perception, readily identified—is that the Government are tightening their grip on the House and on parliamentary procedure in such a way as to make meaningful debate, meaningful opposition and meaningful holding of the Government to account and questioning of their actions next to impossible. This is yet another small but significant example of that phenomenon.

All in all, this is another sad little moment for the House and for Parliament. I somewhat regret that my hon. Friends on the Conservative Front Bench do not seem inclined to oppose the motion or divide the House on it. At this stage, there is probably not much point in doing that, although I regret to say that. As we seem to be heading towards an unnecessarily early general election, it would appear that fewer and fewer people are concerned about what happens here. However, those of us who continue to be concerned will continue to have our tuppence worth whenever possible, and await events.

4.2 pm

**Mr. Stringer:** I shall be extremely brief, Mr. Speaker. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) took the debate much wider than the terms on the Order Paper.

**Mr. Bercow:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** I think that I know what the hon. Gentleman's point of order will be, but I shall let him speak.

**Mr. Bercow:** I just want to be sure. I might have misheard what the Parliamentary Secretary said, but I understood him distinctly, at the start of his oration, to say that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham had gone well beyond the terms of the motion. That, of course, is impossible, is it not, Mr. Speaker? Had they done so, you would have been on your feet rebuking them.

**Mr. Speaker:** I think that the Minister was expressing an opinion. The best thing to say about the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst and the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham is that they were borderline cases.

**Mr. Stringer:** Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker.

I was surprised when the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) said that there would be insufficient time to deal with the change from a Deregulation Committee to a Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee. He will remember from the many debates that we had during the passage of the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 that we recognised that the debate on the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 had been very contentious and highly emotional. It was opposed by the Labour party on three-line Whips. At the end of that process, when a similar debate to today's arose in the House, Conservative Members, who then formed the Government, allowed a full two hours debate for a brand new procedure—the super-affirmative procedure—which has now become accepted by both sides of the House as a procedure that works on consensus.

The Government are proposing that the terms of reference for the Select Committee be changed along the lines originally given for the Deregulation Committee, to take account of the fact that we now have a Regulatory Reform Act. That is changing something in detail. Indeed, there is a wider power in that Act, but there are also greater hurdles to be overcome before a regulatory reform order is passed.

**Mr. Hogg:** Will the Minister please respond to the question that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) asked him? It related to the fact that the motion is drawn in such terms as to apply to any motion relating to regulatory reform that might be before the House. Will the Minister be good enough to give a guarantee that the only motion relating to regulatory reform to be discussed will be the one now on the Order Paper?

**Mr. Stringer:** The motion will clearly relate to the Regulatory Reform Act and the establishment of a new Select Committee with extended terms of reference.

I ask the House to support the motion.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Ordered,*

That—

(1) at the sitting on 2nd May the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on any Motion in the name of Margaret Beckett relating to Regulatory Reform not later than Seven o'clock, and such Questions shall include the Questions on any amendment selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; and

(2) if proceedings on any such Motion have not been completed before Seven o'clock, the Private Business set down by direction of the Chairman of Ways and Means for consideration at that hour may be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours after it has been entered upon

# Orders of the Day

## Social Security Fraud Bill

*As amended in the Committee, considered.*

**The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Jeff Rooker):** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Before we begin proceedings on the Bill, may I extend orally an apology that I gave the House yesterday in a written answer? I repeated an error in a written answer at Question Time, on the Floor of the House, and I feel that I should correct both answers.

I gave a written answer yesterday, which can be found in column 518W of *Hansard*, relating to departmental advertising. Towards the end of the answer, I corrected a written answer that I had given on 7 March to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts), which can be found in column 233W. I have also written a long letter to the hon. Gentleman, explaining how that came about. The letter, which is long and convoluted, has been placed in the Library.

During Social Security questions on 2 April—this can be found in column 11—I effectively repeated the same error relating to advertising expenditure. It is only proper, according to the terms of the code of conduct, for the error to be corrected and apologised for in both written and oral form, and I do so now. There was certainly no intention to mislead the House; I am as annoyed about this as anyone else, and I am glad to have been able to set the record straight both in writing and orally.

**Mr. Speaker:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman.

### New Clause 2

DISCLOSURE OF BENEFIT DETAILS

'The Secretary of State may require, by amending any benefit application form, that all benefit applicants shall give consent in writing, as a condition of receiving benefit, to the provision of some or all of their benefit details by an authorised officer to—

(a) any person falling within section 109B(2A) of the Administration Act; and

(b) any other person whose principal duty is to counter fraud;

provided that the benefit recipient has a conviction for fraud or the officer has reasonable grounds for belief that the benefit recipient may be committing, or intending to commit, fraud.'.

*Brought up, and read the First Time.*

4.6 pm

**Mr. Frank Field** (Birkenhead): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second Time.

The new clause is billed as "Disclosure of benefit details", but it could have been entitled "Joining CIFAS"—or indeed, given its genesis, termed the "wish list" of the Minister of State, who has expressed the wish that the Government could join the credit industry fraud avoidance system.

Although I doubt that any Member present does not know what CIFAS is and who belongs to it, I shall say a brief word about it before trying to explain what the new clause does. CIFAS is a fraud avoidance system, which, as I shall demonstrate later, has proved effective. As we all now know that we can wear glasses safely, I shall put

*[Mr. Frank Field]*

mine on—they are not as expensive as some people's, but I hope that they are as effective—and read a list of the organisations that have voluntarily united to try to counter the fraud that their firms and other bodies suffer. The membership of CIFAS includes banks, building societies, insurance companies, credit card companies, share dealers and finance houses. The roll call includes more than just representatives of what we normally think of as the traditional finance industry.

The aim of CIFAS is to build up a register of those suspected of, or known to be, committing fraud against members and, therefore, against their customers and shareholders. What we must ask today is, "If this works so well for the private sector, do we not want the public sector to be fully involved in it?" CIFAS is about beating fraud and spreading the good practice that arises from attempts to beat it. Its latest press release could have been taken from any of the Green Papers that have been published during this Parliament on how best to go about protecting taxpayers' money.

Although in a previous debate on the Bill there was some questioning of the extent of social security fraud and how the total was arrived at, CIFAS has no problem working out what is saved in countering fraud. At its annual general meeting last week, it was able to register that about £203 million had been saved by member organisations as a result of their collective action—action not merely to protect each organisation itself from fraud, but to share information with other organisations, so that they are best equipped to counter fraud against them. Those who have had e-mails about last week's AGM or were there themselves know that the members reported that the fastest growing form of fraud is giving false identities. The position that the Department faces cannot be dissimilar.

In its response to the Bill, the private sector has welcomed the Government's attempt to get a better grip on countering fraud, but has expressed considerable dissatisfaction with the way in which they are approaching the issue. Although the Government talk about data sharing, the private sector views it as data raiding. The Government are not doing any sharing at all. They ask CIFAS and other organisations for information on what is known and on membership but return nothing in its place.

CIFAS and its members—the private sector—argue that while the Bill may be effective in shifting fraud around, it will be ineffective in countering fraud. The more successful the Government are in protecting taxpayers' money—something that we all wish to be pursued as effectively as possible—the greater the chance that the Bill will just push the fraudster out of the public sector and into the private sector.

There are costs for the private sector. The costs are, as required, listed in the Bill, although no one in the private sector believes that the cost will be limited to that level. New clause 2 attempts to fulfil the wish that the Minister expressed in a previous debate: that if we could join CIFAS, we would. The new clause would allow the Government to do precisely that.

One of the arguments that came up in that debate—it may or may not be advanced today—was that there was a difference between people claiming benefit and, for example, people opening a bank account: people are free to open a bank account, but, if they are eligible, and particularly if they are poor, there is no freedom about drawing benefit. I wonder whether that argument holds because the Government are intent on moving benefit payments to banks. The checking that banks will do to ensure that they are not enrolling known fraudsters will involve all the people who currently do not have bank accounts, but whom the Government wish to persuade to open them, so that benefit payments can be made much more efficiently, cheaply and, we hope, with much less fraud. The major argument for there being something special—something ring-fenced—about drawing benefit that separates it from other activities that people voluntarily undertake and prevents the Government, on behalf of taxpayers, from joining CIFAS therefore falls to the ground.

I hope that when we have had our debate and the Minister replies, we will all be delighted and hear not only that he wishes to join, but that he has now, with the help of his colleagues, found a way of doing precisely that. It is clear to those of us who have visited CIFAS members—I know that he has been to some of those that I have visited to see how they operate—that they probably already have in place a more effective way of countering fraud or preventing fraudsters from entering the system than the Department has. That is not to denigrate the importance of what the Department does, but CIFAS membership would be another effective string to the Government's bow in helping to counter fraud. Given that the new clause has support on both sides of the House, I hope that the Government, who are serious about dealing with fraud, will take this opportunity—late as it is in the Bill's proceedings—to ensure that after the general election whoever forms the next Government will become a full member of CIFAS.

We should use CIFAS's techniques alongside our own in protecting taxpayers' money and show that we are not merely about raiding the private sector for information or trying to shift fraud from the public to the private sector. We should also demonstrate that we do not wish merely to shift fraud around, but to limit the amount of fraud committed.

4.15 pm

**Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Beckenham): It gives me great pleasure to support new clause 2, tabled by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). I also thank the Minister of State for his fulsome apology, which was much appreciated.

In previous debates on the Bill in both Houses, an issue that arose time and again was the need to reduce fraud while ensuring that people's privacy is protected as much as possible. In fact, Conservatives regularly cited the concern of organisations such as Liberty, which many people would not expect from us. We did not raise CIFAS in Committee, partly because it had been raised in the other place. We were also told that one of the problems that the Government had with CIFAS was the potential for footprints to be left in the private sector's records. That appeared to be a good reason not to pursue the issue, and there were other fears, which may be further expressed later, that the broad nature of the inquiries that the public sector would need to make of the private sector would be invidious for the individual.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead explained the work of CIFAS so effectively that I need only say that I agree wholeheartedly with his comments. It is a most effective organisation. It was the first in the world to be set up to try to eliminate private sector fraud in the financial sector in its broadest definition. From information supplied to me by CIFAS, it appears that in February the number of cases with which it had dealt had increased by 50 per cent. over the year before, so it is clearly gaining force as an effective organisation.

The right hon. Gentleman also mentioned that CIFAS had its annual general meeting last week at which a question was put to the Data Protection Commissioner, Mrs. France, that made me feel able to support the new clause. Mr. Peter Hurst, the executive director of CIFAS, told me that at the AGM, in response to a question from a senior executive in the insurance industry about why the Department of Social Security could not share information about identified frauds with members of CIFAS, Mrs. France said that she considered that to be possible, provided that it was approached in the right way—possibly making use of section 29 of the Data Protection Act 1998. That section exempts crime prevention and prosecution of offenders. She went on to offer CIFAS members the assistance and involvement of her staff in any discussions about sharing such information to prevent fraud. I went so far as to track down section 29 of the 1998 Act and, as a non-lawyer, I would not challenge Mrs. France's conclusions.

There seems to be a good case for the Government to join CIFAS, having dealt with the concerns about footprints. We certainly support the right hon. Gentleman's new clause. As we did not debate it in Committee because of our concerns about footprints, we wish to have a vote so that it is on record that the official Opposition support the proposal for the Government to join CIFAS.

**Mr. Steve Webb** (Northavon): This is one of those rare occasions when one listens with an open mind to the reasons for accepting a new clause. However, so far, I am not convinced about adding new clause 2 to the Bill. Perhaps I can describe my reactions to the new clause, and if I have misunderstood its purpose, I would be grateful for clarification.

My understanding is that under new clause 2, the Secretary of State could change all benefit forms and require, as a condition of payment of benefit, the person applying to give permission in writing. The permission would say that henceforth, whatever information had gone on that form—which could be very personal, such as income, who was living in the household and how many children they had—could be passed to anyone falling within section 109B(2A) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992. That, as we know from the Bill, applies to a range of private sector organisations such as banks, the student loan company, the gas board, the water board, and so on. Do we want information that people put on their benefit forms—some of it sensitive—to be passed to those organisations?

**Mr. Field:** As I am anxious that no one in the coming general election campaign accuses the Liberal Democrats of being soft on fraud and soft on the causes of fraud, I should like to answer the question. One would have to have grounds to suspect that there was fraud. Names would not necessarily be checked, because of false identities, but there would be a check on whether the address was being used.

If the hon. Gentleman has not yet had a chance to visit any of the organisations that are part of CIFAS, I hope that he will do so after the election. They would not have time to exchange all the information to which he refers. They want to know whether they have to be careful with a customer and whether they have to ask more questions. They merely check whether other organisations have also marked out that person. They have to think that there is something fishy about a claim and then check on the name and address. It is not a case of sharing all personal information. The system would collapse if all that information were transferred.

**Mr. Webb:** I am grateful for that intervention, although I am not entirely reassured by it. However, I shall pursue my point and will happily give way later.

The amendment refers to an authorised officer providing information to external organisations. In general, in the Bill, the authorised officers come from the Department of Social Security or the Benefits Agency. That is what I assumed was meant in this case.

I am puzzled about the sequence of events that would give rise to the exercise of the new clause. It says that the authorised officer—the person in the DSS—can give information to the third party provided, for example, that the benefit recipient has a conviction for fraud or the officer thinks that they might be intending to commit fraud.

Let us suppose that a bank is considering a loan application from someone. It would not know that that person was the subject, for example, of a fraud investigation by the DSS. Are we to assume that the authorised officer would initiate contact with these third parties? The bank could not make fishing telephone calls, to use our analogy, and would not know that there was a question mark over that person. Is the right hon. Member for Birkenhead proposing that when a bank has vague misgivings about a person applying for a loan it should ring DSS offices to ascertain whether an authorised officer has a concern about the person? If so, I am not clear how that process would work in practice.

If there is a reasonable suspicion that a person claiming benefit is committing fraud, what that person has put on the claim form can, in principle, be passed to external organisations. The right hon. Gentleman says that there is no need for information on the benefit form to be passed on, but that would happen the second that there were reasonable grounds for suspicion that a person had committed fraud. The information would cease to be confidential in the Department, and would be available to all the external organisations with which an applicant might have dealings. Even if an applicant were proven to be completely innocent, his or her personal details would already have been passed to the external organisations.

In the event that an applicant were convicted of fraud—and conviction is only one of the three categories specified in the new clause—it is perhaps arguable that other organisations would have a right to know details of a person's circumstances, as they would need to prevent any possibility of fraud against themselves. However, I do not see why suspicion of fraud should be a sufficient reason for people to lose their right to privacy. My worry

*[Mr. Webb]*

is that such provisions risk breaching the principle that people are innocent until proven guilty. People suffer when privacy and confidentiality are lost. Passing on personal information is almost a punishment in itself, even if people are eventually found to be innocent.

**Mr. Field:** Part of me wishes that officers in the DSS had time to undertake such activities. I fear that life is much more pressured than that. I give the hon. Gentleman the example of a benefits applicant who puts on the benefits claim form a false national insurance number. In such circumstances, it is reasonable to check into that person a little more to ascertain whether there is a history of wrongdoing in other areas. The question is whether it is worth pursuing such matters with the private sector to eliminate possible frauds.

**Mr. Webb:** I apologise for being slightly dense, but the right hon. Gentleman gave the example of a person who puts a dodgy national insurance number on a benefits claim form. Is he saying that that would alert the authorities to the possibility that the person could not be trusted, and that the Benefits Agency should be proactive in contacting all the categories of people or organisation with whom the person might have had dealings? I presume that the agency would tell those people and organisations, "We've got a dodgy one here, keep an eye out," or, "If you've had any dealings with this applicant you might be about to get stitched up."

**Mr. Field:** Liberal Democrat Members may vote against the new clause, but the wish of the House is that the Government should have the power to get that information from the private sector. The new clause proposes that, to some extent, relevant information might move in the opposite direction.

**Mr. Webb:** The Government certainly can get information from the private sector to establish whether a person is committing benefit fraud, if there are reasonable grounds for that suspicion. Under the Bill, authorised officers of the Benefits Agency may obtain that information to verify—or otherwise—any suspicion that they might have about a claim. Under the new clause, authorised officers would not use information gained in that way only for internal purposes, but would pass it on to interested external organisations. Those organisations could not initiate the transfer of information, as they would not know that there was a suspicion of fraud.

I shall not drag this matter out. If a person has been successfully prosecuted, there might be a case for alerting other organisations to the fact. However, I am worried about alerting other organisations before anything is proved, especially if the person involved is found to be innocent in the end. I believe that private information given to the state should remain private, unless there is a good reason why it should not, and that suspicion is not a good enough reason. That is where I would draw the line.

4.30 pm

I mention in passing that in a written answer earlier this week the Minister of State told me that 15 per cent. of benefit recipients will not have their money paid into a bank account even when the Government have finished the move to automated credit transfer. The Government's target is 85 per cent., not 100 per cent. Therefore, one in six benefit recipients will still not be subject to the sort of checks to which the Minister referred. It will not be universal that, in applying for a benefit, one is subject to all those checks. For a certain category of person, there would be additional checks, beyond those that they face at present.

While I understand the view of the private sector that the traffic is one way, the role of the public sector is special. The relationship between the individual and the state is different from that between the individual and the private sector. The information that we provide to the state should be treated with respect and privacy. For that reason, I cannot support the new clause.

**Mr. Rooker:** First, I shall respond to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), without the benefit of my written notes. The Government's objective is to pay all benefits by automated credit transfer. My written answer made it clear that in our public service agreement, by which we will be measured by 2005, the initial hurdle is 85 per cent. That does not mean that we will stop there, or that we expect to achieve only 85 per cent. Our objective will be to achieve more, but at that point in time the public service agreement that the Department has with the Treasury is to meet that benchmark. The transfer is taking place between 2003 and 2005 and it would be unreasonable to expect us to achieve 100 per cent. by 2005 in terms of that agreement. I do not want people to run away with the idea that we are writing off 15 per cent. of benefit claimants as regards ACT—far from it.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) will know from what I said on Second Reading and in Committee that, by and large, we are sympathetic to sharing information that we are able to share with the private sector to do a better job to help both sectors root out fraud. Fraud in the private sector is as bad as fraud in the public sector and it is important that the two sectors work in partnership.

The Government are taking statutory powers in the Bill to obtain information from the private sector. We cannot reciprocate by being members of CIFAS—the credit industry fraud avoidance system—for reasons that I have explained. I am not sure whether we could get the legal authority of the House to join CIFAS in a clause with the wording in my right hon. Friend's new clause 2.

The clause would give the Department carte blanche to release any information that it holds about claimants who are convicted or reasonably suspected of fraud. There is no restriction. Obviously, there has been correspondence and there have been parliamentary questions on the matter since the Bill was put before the House. I shall reiterate some of the issues and refer to the annual meeting of CIFAS, which has been mentioned.

We are constantly examining the data that may be released to the private sector and we are holding—and have held—discussions with that sector. However, there are legal considerations. I listened to the exchange between my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead and the hon. Member for Northavon. We need to distinguish between the bulk transfer of information and giving information on a case-by-case basis. Different rules apply, as will be apparent from my remarks. It is important to take on board that distinction.

We have never envisaged a complete exchange of information. The Department's legal advice remains that making entitlement to benefits conditional on claimants consenting to the release of their personal data would not constitute genuine consent because there is nowhere else to get the benefits if one does not consent and, therefore, we would have real trouble with the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998, let alone human rights legislation. Claimants have no choice but to claim from the Department of Social Security.

We are trying to be helpful: by sharing with the private sector information that would be useful to it, but also by protecting information gathered about people who have no choice but to use the DSS. We have to strike a balance—the Bill is the striking of that balance. It is a modest step—although it could be seen as a major encroachment in some ways, so we are being extremely careful about its content. There will be no fishing expeditions and reasonable grounds will have to be given if it is thought that fraud might be being committed. That is crucial. All those checks and balances have been included, so in this Bill the new clause would be a step much, much too far.

We have to protect individuals and we want to assist the private sector. We take our data protection responsibilities very seriously indeed. We are discussing with the financial sector what information we can divulge without breaching those responsibilities. For example, we have been considering items such as information on people who have died. That is a matter of public record; if we have the information, we have stopped paying their pension. Sometimes the private sector does not know that a person has died and carries on paying an occupational pension, in which case fraud is obviously committed by other people.

We are looking at whether we can help with the verification of addresses when the DSS requires people to open a bank account. Information on stolen blank birth, marriage and death certificates is also under consideration, as are details of people convicted under the "two strikes" provisions. That matter was raised in Committee and we may debate it briefly later on.

The provisions are a deterrent that will not affect more than 500 people a year. "Two strikes" mean convictions in a court of law—in a public place; the proceedings are not secret and are not held behind closed doors, yet according to the legal advice that I have received, it is not currently possible for the DSS, which would know the names and addresses of the 500 people affected by "Two strikes and you're out", to pass that information to the private sector. That would not be possible and we have legal advice to that effect, yet the information is clearly in the public sector—diffused around the country—in various courts. However, the mere act of the DSS gathering such information and handing it over to a third party breaches the legal framework under which we operate and we are, therefore, still holding discussions on that.

We expect and hope to resolve outstanding legal and operational issues about information that we can share with the private sector by the end of this month—so the matter should not be dragged out. We do not want to drag it out because there is no incentive to do so. In any case, we need the good will of the private sector, even though we are taking statutory powers. Where we have the legal authority to share information, we want to do so. Thus, it is in everybody's interest that we get on with that as quickly as possible.

**Mrs. Lait:** The right hon. Gentleman will recall that when the Bill was published, the Data Protection Commissioner expressed significant reservations about it, although the right hon. Gentleman told us in Committee that she had subsequently withdrawn them. Was CIFAS part of the negotiations? Are the right hon. Gentleman or his officials holding discussions with the commissioner about section 29 of the Data Protection Act 1998? The commissioner has given us to understand that that section covers the points made by the right hon. Gentleman and the legal advice that he has taken.

**Mr. Rooker:** The answer to the hon. Lady's first question is—to the best of my knowledge—no. There were no prior discussions with the commissioner when the Bill was being planned. That has now changed because, given that we have only heard reports of what was said at the annual meeting of CIFAS by the information commissioner, we have written to her to sound her out more fully on what she said and on the legal advice underpinning it. It is crucial that such legal advice is correct.

Obviously, I cannot state categorically what the commissioner said last week, because I was not present. I understand, via her office, that she was answering a question, but that she was referring to cases in which the private sector prosecutes an individual. In such a case, there may be scope for the DSS to give relevant information to the company concerned. We are happy to discuss that further with the commissioner, but she seems to be talking about providing information on a case-by-case basis, which is a wholly different matter from the bulk transfer of DSS information to the private sector.

We have discussed with the industry only information routinely issued in bulk, for which we have not found a legally workable solution, but I understand that the commissioner was discussing information provided on a case-by-case basis. So as long as there is no breach of the legal framework within which we work, such as the data protection legislation and other relevant statutes, clearly, we would seek to provide such information. However, we are seeking further and better particulars from my learned friends and others and to open a conversation with the data protection commissioner.

There is good will on both sides; we want to work in partnership with the private sector. This is not a criticism of the drafting of new clause 2, but it would represent a step too far if included in the Bill. Nevertheless, in the fight against fraud, the more we can transfer information, compatible with the protection of privacy and data protection legislation, the better for everyone all round. Therefore, I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead will not press new clause 2 to a Division.

**Mr. Field:** Even if I do not press new clause 2 to a Division, it appears that others may well do so. I am still slightly puzzled about what is meant by the quantity of information being exchanged. No one thinks that anyone is asking for bucket loads of information to come from the DSS into the private sector arbitrarily, without relating to any real problems. We are trying to locate information

*[Mr. Field]*

on people who may be committing fraud against the taxpayer, who are probably committing fraud against the private sector as well. Indeed, we have said in previous debates that it is inconceivable that the biggest of all Government budgets is somehow immune from attack by fraudsters, as we know that smaller budgets are under attack in the private sector.

I do not wish, at this late hour, to wind up the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb)—the Liberal Democrat in this debate—but I shall provide the House with the information that, on 30 April of this year, the Government gave in their press release, headed, "DSS Assists in the Fight Against Crime", on the agreement that they have drawn up with the police. It states:

"The revised DSS policy on disclosure is that all personal information held in social security records will continue to be regarded as confidential. Information will not normally be disclosed to third parties without the consent of the person concerned."

Then comes the key point:

"However, information may be disclosed without consent to assist in the prevention or detection of crime or to aid the apprehension or prosecution of offenders."

The notes to editors in the press release state that that would be done in trying to prevent vandalism. New clause 2 is about whether we are striking the right balance.

**Mr. Rooker:** I do not want to protract the debate, but we were talking about information given to the police. The memorandum of understanding between the Association of Chief Police Officers, the DSS and the Home Office deals with information given to the police, not to the private sector.

**Mr. Field:** I merely quoted the press release because the Liberal Democrats were understandably concerned that the information that must be supplied to claim benefits may be needed and could be handed over. The new clause is about trying to strike a balance in exchanging the information that would be of real value to the private and the public sectors. At present, the private sector feels that all the demands will be made one way, that it will bear most of the costs and that a major opportunity is being lost, not merely because, by sharing information, we could stop people moving from the public to the private side of fraud.

4.45 pm

Let us think ahead to the next Parliament and consider how we shall draw up measures to be more effective in countering fraud and other forms of unacceptable behaviour. Surely, there is a need to establish a means of exchanging information about criminal records, fraud against the Department of Social Security and fraud in the private sector. Once someone begins to behave in a way that is unacceptable to the community, all parts of the community should be able to pool their information to determine what sort of charge sheet should be drawn up against that individual.

Earlier in this Parliament, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister suggested that police should have the powers to apprehend yobbos, take them to cashpoints and make them hand over a fine. If a yobbo were apprehended for bad behaviour in Birkenhead, one might find that that person had also committed credit card fraud, mortgage fraud, housing benefit fraud and a few other frauds. Therefore, the different groups involved might wish to pursue collectively in the courts their case against that individual.

Once a person has behaved unacceptably, a general check should be available. Information could be collected and a collective charge—with the costs being shared between the public and private sectors—could be pursued. Although we cannot pursue that aim through an amendment to the Bill, my new clause is a modest measure that is designed to fulfil the wish of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State. As the Opposition say that they will press the new clause to a Division, I will join them because it stands in my name.

*Question put,* That the clause be read a Second time:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 133, Noes 312.

**Division No. 200]** **[4.46 pm**

**AYES**

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John

Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Robert
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Keith Simpson and**
**Mr. James Gray.**

**NOES**

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis

Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverhton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. David Clelland and**
**Mr. Don Touhig.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

## Clause 1

ADDITIONAL POWERS TO OBTAIN INFORMATION

**Mrs. Lait:** I beg to move amendment No. 11A, in page 2, line 26, at end insert—

'(2BB) Prior to the exercise of the power conferred on an authorised officer to obtain information under this section, that officer shall obtain in writing the consent to carry out an investigation.

(2BC) Consent must be granted in writing or (if not in writing) in a manner that produces a record of its having been granted; and it must—

(a) describe the conduct and data in relation to which it is authorised; and

(b) specify the office, rank or position held by the person granting the authorisation.'.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal):** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 12, in page 2, line 26, at end insert—

'(2BD) Requests for information made by authorised officers to any of the bodies falling within subsection (2A) shall be made through a central organisation, and a notice requiring data to be disclosed or to be obtained and disclosed—

(a) must be given in writing or (if not in writing) must be given in a manner that produces a record of its having been given;

(b) must describe the data to be obtained or disclosed under the notice;

(c) must specify the office, rank or position held by the person giving it; and

(d) must specify the manner in which any disclosure required by the notice is to be made.'.

No. 15, in page 3, line 14, at end insert—

'(2G) A person to whom a notice is given under subsection (2A) above may, by notice in writing given to the authorised officer within thirty days after the date of the notice under that subsection, object to that notice on the ground that it would be onerous for him to comply with it; and if the matter is not resolved by agreement, it shall be referred to an official of seniority within the relevant department, who may confirm, vary or cancel that notice.'.

No. 16, in page 3, line 14, at end insert—

'(2H) An authorised officer who gives a notice to a person under subsection (2A) above shall also give to that person a written summary of his reasons for applying for consent to the giving of the notice.'.

No. 19, in clause 2, page 6, line 48, at end insert—

'(8) In this section and in sections 109B and 109BA an 'authorised officer' means an individual holding such offices, ranks or positions with relevant public authorities as are prescribed for the purposes of this subsection by an order made by the Secretary of State who is designated by the Secretary of State as an authorised officer.'.

**Mrs. Lait:** The amendments all deal with outstanding concerns about the Department's power to acquire information under the Bill. A number of amendments tabled in the House of Lords addressed some of the concerns that many organisations and companies have expressed, but concerns still remain about certain issues relating to fundamental aspects of the Bill. Amendment No. 11A deals with the lack of independent scrutiny of authorised officers' requests for information. From the outset, organisations as diverse as the British Bankers Association and Liberty have, for obvious reasons, expressed concern about the lack of independent consent from a higher authority to requests for information.

The BBA feels that an officer could convince himself that he had reasonable grounds when, in fact, he was acting on gut instinct or worse, as the system is used more, as a matter of routine. Liberty believes that the provision means that a rogue investigator cannot make inquiries about all and sundry. Therefore, there are still concerns about the lack of an independent check, which are strengthened by the existence in the Taxes Management Act 1970 of a procedure, similar to our proposals, to ensure independent scrutiny. As there is an exchange of information across government—with which we do not have any problems—we are anxious that there should be a consistent system and level of approval of requests for information.

Although the Government do not believe it, the development of social security benefits depends partly on the introduction of tax credits—including, of course, the working families tax credit, which replaced family credit. Already, there appear to be a number of problems with fraud in respect of the working families tax credit, and I understand that the extent of fraud in the Canadian working income supplement system is so great that Canada is moving back to a benefits-based system. In other parts of the world, therefore, tax credits seem to be prone to fraud, and the difficulty that we all face is that the system of checking is different as between the Department of Social Security and the Treasury and the Inland Revenue. That is why we want to achieve a much greater strengthening of the independent scrutiny.

Amendments Nos. 12, 15 and 16 are linked to what we all know as a single point of contact and the potential for trawling or fishing. We seem to have been hung up on the

fishing industry in many of our debates. Amendment No. 12 would limit the number of bodies from which an organisation could receive a request for information. As the Bill covers local government and Departments such as the DSS, many people could contact an organisation for information about a possible fraud.

Amendment No. 15 provides that, because of the sheer number of people who could make contact, organisations should have a specific point of contact through which the Government should channel requests. There is no single point of contact in the Government or in local authorities, but the code of practice might be amended to make it easier for companies to be made aware of the fact that they will be dealing with fewer people.

I understand that, following debates in Committee, negotiations have been taking place between the DSS and affected organisations in the private sector. It has been agreed that requests for information will be addressed to a nominated single point of contact, where one has been specified. To try to tighten up on the unknown number of requests that could be made by the public sector, it will make requests only in writing by post, fax, e-mail or electronic password-controlled database access. Telephone contact will be made only by arrangement and only to clarify or query information already provided under a written request. Authorised officers will not make inquiries by means of a personal visit to any corporate premises. That provides reassurance, but I would be grateful if the Minister of State confirmed it. It is important that we are able to reassure the private sector.

I understand from the telecoms fraud group that there are still issues outstanding. The DSS has agreed that only a proportion of DSS officers authorised to use the information powers in the Bill will be allowed to contact telecoms companies. However, that does not apply to the local authorities, of which there are 409. I agree with the group that the Government tend to ignore the sheer number of local authorities and concentrate on their own offices. That is understandable, but it makes it more difficult for the private sector to know with whom it is dealing.

**Mr. Webb:** May I take the hon. Lady back to amendment No. 11A? I apologise for interrupting her flow of thought and for not intervening sooner. The amendment states:

"Prior to the exercise of the power . . . an authorised officer . . . shall obtain in writing the consent to carry out an investigation."

Authorised officers will be empowered by the Bill to carry out searches and they are deemed senior enough do so, but it is not clear from whom they would get that consent. Of whom is consent being asked?

**Mrs. Lait:** In order to build in an element of independent scrutiny, we seek to involve somebody further up the system who will not necessarily be part of the organisation from which the investigating or authorising officer comes. If we persuade the Government to accept the amendment, I shall obviously be happy to negotiate on the correct language. We want to build in a firebreak that can pull people up short and make them ask whether they need the information and, if so, why they need it.

Amendment No. 19 has a similar purpose, as it seeks to ensure standardisation across Government in respect of those who can make inquiries. We want to explore the issue of the authorised officer and the need to meet the same standards as the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, which most of us probably know as RIPA. The acronym sounds more like a river than an Act of Parliament, but never mind. We are also concerned that there are difficulties in paragraphs 3.5 and 3.6 of the draft code of practice, which outlines the Government's proposed system of authorisation. The authorised officers are of executive officer grade, and, despite many debates in Committee, the Government have not changed that arrangement.

British Telecom, which is significantly affected by RIPA, has pointed out that the grade of authorisation is at variance with the higher grade of management controls that are expected to be introduced under subsections (2) and (3) of section 25 of RIPA for exactly the same type of communications data. Telecommunications companies will be dealing with two levels of officers across government in respect of similar information. BT remains very concerned and continues to hope that the government can deal with its anxieties. We have heard on many occasions about the Minister of State's view that training will deal with that discrepancy in the seniority of the authorised officers, but the problem is more fundamental, as it concerns the provision across companies of similar, sensitive data to very different levels of authority.

We feel strongly about the amendments and believe that the Government still need to negotiate with the companies and organisations that are involved. I would be grateful to hear about the progress that is being made, as I hope that the outstanding concerns will be addressed and that those companies and organisations will get some comfort from the Government.

**Mr. Webb:** I have much sympathy with the spirit of the amendments, which reflect many of the concerns that the Liberal Democrats have expressed about the lack of independent scrutiny, the advantages of a single point of contact and the seniority of the authorised officers. I am, however, anxious about some of the specifics. As I mentioned in an intervention, amendment No. 11A is problematic. It states that the officer needs written consent, but it says nothing about the people who should provide that consent or their seniority. Interestingly, it was suggested that such people could come from outside the organisation, but if the amendment is to achieve its desired goal, it should be much more explicit. One can imagine implementation through forms of written permission by another authorised officer. I am not sure where that would lead us.

5.15 pm

I am sympathetic to the idea of a single point of contact, partly for the convenience of those from whom information is obtained and partly because of the concept of an audit trail. If matters go wrong, and there is some suggestion of abuse of the powers, we need thorough records of their use. The amendments try to achieve that.

Amendment No. 19 seeks consistency about seniority. That is sensible. The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) made a good point about a telecommunications company being contacted by different Government officials under different Acts, which require different levels

*[Mr. Webb]*

of seniority. There is no good reason for that. I am therefore sympathetic to the amendments, but worried about aspects of their implementation.

**Mr. Peter Atkinson** (Hexham): Perhaps the Minister of State is about to shoot my fox and say that, unknown to me, progress has already been made on reaching agreement with banks and others who will receive calls from Benefits Agency or Department of Social Security staff.

I especially support amendment No. 12, which proposes a central point of control. That could be the only method of preventing the system from spreading to the extent of allowing officials to go on fishing expeditions to find material about individuals. It would therefore be sensible to route all calls through one control centre to an appointed person in the banks or utility companies who understood the system.

People who work in banks or utility companies are busy. If a phone rings and the caller claims to be Joe Bloggs from the Benefits Agency, the person who replies is more than likely to look up the details on the computer and provide the answer without checking the caller's precise identity. Private detectives and similar individuals can be extremely clever at passing themselves off as officials when trying to glean information. Providing for a central point of contact is therefore sensible. I am interested in finding out whether the Minister of State has made progress with the industry on that.

We are slightly ill at ease because we have reached the final stages of considering the Bill, yet one or two matters do not appear to have been resolved to our complete satisfaction. They raise serious questions about individual liberty and privacy. It was ever thus with such measures and we must ultimately rely on Ministers to hatch the best deal possible and hope that it works. However, I share my hon. Friends' anxieties. We remain ill at ease about the clause.

**Mr. Rooker:** I remind hon. Members that we have a draft code of practice, and we have said that after Royal Assent it will be issued for full-scale consultation with the industry and all other relevant bodies. By full consultation, I mean a normal three-month consultation with all interested parties. The code will be quotable in courts of law and govern the use of powers in the Bill. I emphasise that passing the Bill this week is not the end of the matter. The guidelines for its powers will be governed by a code of practice about which we will fully consult. If Members in both Houses wish, they can use the time available to debate the matter. The code is not subject to affirmative or, indeed, negative procedures, but there is nothing to stop issues relating to the consultation or the code being debated in the House.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) mentioned various agreements, but I did not make a list of them. The note that I have tells me that all the points that she raised have been agreed with the private sector. I also remind her that they were agreed with the private sector at the time we issued the present draft code of practice. Since the Standing Committee, there has been nothing new for me to report back to the House.

We have dealt with the hon. Lady's list of points. I shall deal with the amendments in chronological order in a moment, but I want to get a further point out of the way so that I do not forget about it. The hon. Lady raised the issue—this was a theme in Committee as well—of comparing the grades of the civil servants authorised to operate under the terms of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 with those who will operate under the Bill. Those who operate under the Act are authorised to obtain traffic data from telecommunications companies. Department of Social Security officers will not be interested in traffic data; they will be interested in who pays the bills, for example, or who lives at the address to which the bills are sent. They will be limited to obtaining that kind of information; they will not be interested in who spoke to whom. There will be no authority for DSS officers to check on traffic data. We are not interested in that. With respect, therefore, it is not fair to compare the civil servants operating under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act with those who will operate under the powers of the Bill.

I shall briefly go through the amendments in order. I promise the House, by the way, that I shall not use all the notes available, of which I have 21 pages. Amendment No. 11A would create an unnecessary further layer of bureaucracy, and we do not want to do that because it would incur extra cost and time. We have already explained at some length in Committee why we do not think it necessary for officers to obtain consent before making inquiries, but let me spell it out again, because it is important so far as the staff in my Department are concerned.

The Bill already provides safeguards to prevent the powers to obtain information from being abused. The powers may be used only when their use is reasonable for purposes set out in the legislation. Secondly, the officers who use the powers will not have the responsibility for making decisions about benefit entitlement, or about whether fraud has been committed. So, already, on the second of my seven points, we have reached a further check up the hierarchy.

I noticed that the hon. Lady gave a quaint definition of "independent" by saying that it would refer to someone else in the Department. I thought that "independent" meant independent, as in outside the Department. Perhaps I have misunderstood. The fact is that the people making the inquiries under these powers will not be the people who decide whether someone is entitled to benefit. That is important: they will be removed from the decision-making process. That should give the House confidence that the officers conducting the inquiries will take an objective view when doing so.

Furthermore, one cannot just dismiss the fact that I have said that the officers will be trained by saying, "Oh, they are going to be trained. Well, that doesn't matter; we are not interested in that." The Department is training more officers in anti-fraud and security than ever before, and they are obtaining professional qualifications accredited by outside bodies. The testimony to the quality of the training in the DSS now is that the private sector advertises for PINS—professionalism in security—trained and qualified staff. The private sector is seeking to poach my Department's trained staff because it knows that they have gained a qualification through quality professional training.

The officers will have to record the details of why the inquiries were made. It will not be possible for them to make inquiries without making such records. Also, if they abuse the powers, they will be found out and punished.

That could involve a prison sentence. If DSS officers were to go trawling through computer systems with no good reason, perhaps because a friend or family member had asked them to look into what someone was getting, or to find out where someone was living—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) is trying to say something from a sedentary position.

**Mr. Eric Pickles** (Brentwood and Ongar): I merely wondered how common this was. Does it happen a lot? How many prosecutions take place each year?

**Mr. Rooker:** I am trying to be as helpful as I can. What I am saying is that these things happen, and have happened in the past. The numbers involved are small but we catch them, because we police the system. No system is perfect, and people must be confident that officers using the powers in the Bill will be checked out.

In 2000—I believe that I gave these figures in Committee—there were 18 prosecutions, three downgrades, 21 resignations and 30 dismissals among 80,000 staff in the Benefits Agency. Those are small numbers, but I am not suggesting that the situation is not serious: there have, after all, been prosecutions, resignations and dismissals. We are policing what our staff are doing in using their powers, which may be intrusive in terms of access to personal information. We have the Computer Misuse Act 1990, the Social Security Administration Act 1992 and the Data Protection Acts. Prison sentences may be imposed following prosecutions carried out successfully under those Acts. Before the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar asks me, however, let me say that I do not know how many people were sent to prison last year.

The number of authorised officers will, as we have said, be limited. We do not expect the Secretary of State to need more than 300 officers, and we propose to authorise only 175 initially. The Benefits Agency has 80,000 staff, fewer than 0.5 per cent. of whom will be authorised to use the powers in the Bill.

The work of authorised officers will be supervised, and subject to regular management checks. We are talking about normal operational factors and arrangements, and about people who are undoubtedly highly trained specialists, with managers who are also trained specialists. We do not want more checks and red tape than we have already. It could be argued that we have gone too far now, but we need this provision because we are dealing with sensitive information.

I remind the hon. Member for Beckenham that it was the previous Government who consolidated provisions into the Social Security Administration Act 1992. It was also the previous Government who extended those powers and made them available to local authorities in the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act 1997. I am not making a major point about that; I am merely expressing the hope that there is some consensus.

It may be said—although this is a banal way of putting it—that the same group of officials advised both Governments, and that both Governments have soaked up what they said. We have not soaked it up, however; we have subjected it to our own questioning. When planning the Bill, we removed a lot of material that existed in early drafts. My ministerial colleagues and I asked ourselves whether we could stand at the Dispatch Box and feel comfortable about saying that we were satisfied that we were doing only what we considered necessary to police the system further, and that there would be no fishing expeditions and no intrusion on people just because they were claiming benefit. As a result, the Bill has been pared down to become a modest technical adjustment to combat fraud.

Amendment No. 12 relates to centralisation. I know that the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) has raised the issue before, and I do not criticise him. Ours is a large Department, responsible for spending—I think—a third of all Government money. Our budget for benefits is £100 billion a year—£2 billion a week. That is big money, and a good many people are needed to manage the operation successfully—there are some 600 offices around the country. We have said, however, that all inquiries related to the Bill will be routed through the 13 administrative areas over which the Benefits Agency is spread, in addition to the headquarters of the national intelligence unit, which deals with organised fraud. Therefore, we have cut the number of sites from 600 to 14. I honestly think that that is reasonable. It is not reasonable to route all inquiries through one central office.

5.30 pm

We will limit the number of authorised officers to 175 to start with. Ministers—other Ministers; not me—will be subject to questions on how the Bill is working. The code of practice will guide the way in which it operates. The House can revisit the matter any time it chooses if issues are raised that do not conform with the promises and commitments that we have given during the passage of the Bill.

**Mrs. Lait:** The right hon. Gentleman mentions that inquiries will be routed through only 14 DSS sites, but there are 409 local authorities. Will it continue to be 409 local authorities?

**Mr. Rooker:** I certainly hope not. It is worse than that because there are 409 local authorities and each of them probably has more than a dozen departments, but Ministers at the centre cannot dictate to local authority chief executives how they organise their affairs. In Committee, I gave examples of good practice, particularly in Gloucester, where all inquiries are routed through one department. There is nothing to stop local authorities—it would be good practice—from making a combined effort on anti-fraud measures; regions, or local authorities that are grouped together could combine. They could share anti-fraud measures and activity. There could be a central point for one or more local authorities, but we cannot—it is just not possible—tell chief executives how they will organise.

I accept that that may look like a cop-out. Time will tell whether local authorities are sensible in the way they operate the powers. As I have said, they are not completely analogous with those of the Government. They will not have online access to data in the private sector unless they have specific sanction and authority from the Secretary of State. They are not being given that authority. We are not prepared to say that we have that much confidence in local authorities that we are prepared to make their powers analogous to those of the Government from day one—far from it; we will not do that.

*[Mr. Rooker]*

There are excellent local authorities that are efficient, that are good value for money and that have good anti-fraud operations. Other local authorities are at the other end of the spectrum. We well appreciate that there are different practices, but we cannot give an absolute commitment on the basis of all 409 authorities.

Amendment No. 15 provides that organisations can object to a request for information on the ground that it is too onerous. May I briefly remind the House of the position? Businesses expressed concerns that inquiries should be centralised. I have already said that we will get the number down to 14 units from 600. Businesses expressed concerns that they would be asked for information that they did not normally collect. We have made it clear that we will not ask for such information. They expressed concern that they would have to develop new software and new ways of storing information, and to store information for longer. We have given reassurances on all those points. They will not be required to buy new software and to change the way they keep information. At every turn, we have made it clear that we are concerned to keep burdens to a minimum; we have made many commitments to do that. I repeat them on the Floor of the House today.

We have made it clear at paragraph 1.7 of the code of practice that businesses may contact authorised officers if there are problems in meeting a particular request. The code makes it clear that the authorised officer must consider the organisation's objections and amend the request where that would be reasonable. There must be a test of reasonableness. It will not be done on the basis of a hunch or a whim. The code is admissible in court proceedings. That is a further back-up.

I am a little surprised about amendment No. 16. If authorised officers had to give their background reasons for making a request or even a summary, that would let the cat out of the bag. The request might involve a collusive employer, yet the request would be made to the employer. It may be a bank or a financial institution. I am sure that the Opposition are not really serious about amendment No. 16 and therefore I will not spend any more time on it.

In some ways, I touched on the subject of amendment No. 19 when I referred to the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act and the rank and position of officers. It is not for the private sector to decide which rank of civil servant it is prepared to deal with when the civil servant is exercising powers conferred by statute and agreed by this House. We will not be told that by the private sector, because the law decides that issue, and Government management will decide the rest through executive responsibility. However, we will not be unreasonable. Executive officers cover a range of management in the Department and we are satisfied with the way in which they operate their present powers, which they have used since 1948, to contact companies every day across the country.

I do not accept the telecommunications industry's point about inconsistency between the grades of officers. The nature of the information required is different: we will not be looking for traffic information. It will be made crystal clear that the inquiries made using the powers in the Bill will be made under social security legislation and exclusively for social security purposes, by a named authorised officer working for a DSS intelligence unit or a local authority. Information providers will have a duty to check that the inquiry is from a source known to them as being an authorised officer. They will not hand out information about their customers willy-nilly, because they are not stupid. Companies know that it would be bad public relations, because one bad case could lose hundreds, if not thousands, of customers if they think that their information is not being properly looked after.

I have not used all my notes, and I hope that the House will not invite me to do so, because we debated the issues in Committee. However, that is no reason why they should not come back to the Floor of the House and, in some ways, it has been a useful exercise. I hope that I have been able to put on record a summary of the commitments that we have already given, so that the private sector knows that we seek to work with it and not against it.

**Mrs. Lait:** I was interested in the Minister's comments, some of which—like our comments—have been made before. I am reassured that the code of practice is genuinely open for consultation and, I hope, negotiation. I hope that problems will be negotiated, rather than solutions being imposed at the end of the consultation, because it is in the Government's interests—not to mention those of taxpayers—to ensure that the system works well and effectively. If difficulties arose between the private sector and the public sector, including the 409 local authorities, it would make it difficult to ensure that the legislation worked effectively.

I hope that the consultation on the code of practice will include all 409 local authorities, and will give rise to suggestions on how they can reduce the number of points of contact. It would be horrendous to try to keep records up to date for so many local authorities.

**Mr. Rooker** *indicated assent.*

**Mrs. Lait:** I see that the Minister shares my concerns. Although he unfortunately will not be with us in the next Parliament, we will be able to call in aid his words.

**Mr. Rooker:** In that case, and without the benefit of advice, it would be my view that the consultation should include every concerned body, including local authorities. As a result, the code of practice might include advice on how even local authorities use their powers under the Bill. Given that the Government have reduced the number of units from 600 to 14, it is not unreasonable to ask local authorities to designate one point of contact, and if neighbouring authorities can combine their fraud work, so much the better. I shall watch with interest to see whether my words have any effect.

**Mrs. Lait:** I just hope that the Minister's words are not informed by a touch of demob happiness. We will also watch the situation closely and keep in touch with those organisations that have expressed concerns. I hope that we will hear that those concerns have been addressed, and I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

**Mr. Webb:** I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 2, line 31, leave out "has committed,".

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 13, in page 2, line 37, leave out—

'who is an official of a Government department and'.

No. 14, in page 3, line 1, leave out "or described".

**Mr. Webb:** Amendment No. 11 might seem a minor amendment to tidy up the Bill's drafting, but there is an issue of substance behind it. Under clause 1, an authorised officer cannot require information

"unless it appears to that officer that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the identified person to whom it relates is—

(a) a person who has committed, is committing or intends to commit a benefit offence".

Let us suppose that the criteria did not include the phrase:

"is committing or intends to commit"

and that the House had simply decided that these powers could be exercised only in the case of people with a conviction for benefit fraud. There is no way that the clause would have been drafted in that way, because removing that phrase would mean that the clause read that the officer had reasonable grounds for believing that the person had committed such an offence.

The test of reasonableness cannot apply to history. People have either committed an offence or they have not. So it is odd, and no more than that, that the test of reasonableness in the Bill is applied to three things—whether a person has committed, is committing or intends to commit a benefit offence—because on one of those criteria there is no test of reasonableness. That is what first alerted me to wonder what was going on with regard to inclusion of the words "has committed".

When I queried this in Committee, the initial response of the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), was to tell me to go back and read the Bill—which I did—where it says that an officer must have "reasonable grounds for believing" that the person has committed fraud and is about to commit fraud again. That is not what the Bill says—it says:

"has committed, is committing or intends to commit"

fraud. So the Minister's remarks were not, in my judgment, accurate. The condition is that once someone has committed fraud, they fall within the scope of clause 1, whether or not they are committing or intend to commit an offence.

The Minister went on to say, and this offered me some reassurance:

"If an authorised officer was dealing with a case in which a claimant had previously committed fraud, he could not make inquiries unless he had reasonable grounds to believe that fraud was about to be committed."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 3 April 2001; c. 28.]

It was spelled out in Committee that not only must someone have committed an offence but they must be about to commit one. That contradicts the Bill, which refers to someone who has committed, is committing or intends to commit an offence.

If the Bill should read "and intends", why does it not do so? If having merely committed an offence is not a sufficient condition, why is it mentioned at all? That is the nub of the amendment. The phrase "has committed" adds nothing to the Bill if the Minister's assurances are correct. If "has committed" is not a sufficient condition and there must be reasonable grounds for thinking that someone is committing or will commit an offence, the phrase "has committed" does not need to be included.

It could be argued that if the phrase is not doing anything it does not matter whether it is taken out or left in. My worry is that leaving it in provides scope for authorised people to say, when challenged, that the Bill allows them to use these powers because someone has committed fraud. If that is not the Government's intention—and the Minister has made it quite clear that it is not—why are they giving themselves that power?

The wording of new clause 2 is better than that of clause 1. New clause 2 refers to a benefit recipient having a conviction for fraud or the officer having reasonable grounds for believing that the recipient is committing or will commit an offence. In the light of our debate in Committee, it has become apparent that if we were to write such a provision from scratch we would probably use the wording in new clause 2 rather than that in the Bill. In new clause 2, the test of reasonableness does not apply to the past, but only to the present and future.

5.45 pm

I do not want to be accused of nit-picking, as my intention is to do more than that. As drafted, the Bill does not make much sense. The test of reasonableness cannot be applied to something that happened in the past, but I am worried that that poor drafting leaves open a possibility that the Government say that they did not intend. The Government say that the fact that a person did something in the past does not give an authorised officer an automatic right to seek that information. However, the fact that the Bill uses the word "or" rather than "and" means that it will be sufficient for a person to have done something in the past.

If the Government agree that that is not what they intend, they should accept the amendment. An authorised officer could take the phrase "has committed" as one of the considerations for deciding whether a person was likely to commit a fraud, but the distinction that I want to make, through the amendment, is that that would not be a sufficient consideration.

The amendment would help the Government achieve what the Under-Secretary assured me in Committee was their intention. The present wording of the Bill would not achieve that.

**Mrs. Lait:** Amendments Nos. 13 and 14 are very different from the amendment moved by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb).

Amendment No. 13 would ensure the efficient transmission of data between the Government and local authorities. Both have authorised officers, and clause 1(2)(d) enables them to detect more types of fraud. However, there is a limitation on the exchange of information between the Government and local authorities. The Local Government Association has said that it has

"been advised verbally that it is the intention of the Department to cross check against benefit records and to provide information"

*[Mrs. Lait]*

to the Benefits Agency and local authorities. It also states that it

"welcomes that clarification of how the Government intends to make use of the power to obtain bulk information from utilities".

However, the Bill maintains the Government's ability to obtain bulk information from utilities, and that has given rise to continuing concern about trawling. The LGA states that it would be

"grateful for confirmation that the results from the data matching process will be made available to local authorities free of charge where there are grounds for considering whether a claim is fraudulent."

However, if the Government's express aim is to use the transfer of information to aid the fight against fraud associated with property addresses, it would be most beneficial if that information were readily available to those at the heart of the system—after all, it is local authorities that deal with housing benefit. Although the extent of housing benefit fraud may be the subject of debate, there is agreement across the House that there is a lot of it. Part of the Bill's purpose is to tackle that problem. Amendment No. 13 would allow authorised officers in local authorities to source the information direct.

Amendment No. 14 is also related to trawling. It would ensure that any information sourced from the utilities related to a specific address or location. The amendment would tighten the provisions in the Bill, whereas amendment No. 13 would widen them somewhat. The purpose of both amendments is to tease out from the Government their thinking on these matters.

We are still concerned that access to bulk data from utilities will be based on addresses rather than individuals.

The Under-Secretary said in Committee that the intention was to look for evidence such as high or lower use of utility services. The search is on not individual names but addresses. We accept that. However, the Minister of State focused our concern by pointing out that there are 27 million dwellings in the country. The thought of trawling through 27 million addresses just in case one might find someone committing fraud gives everyone cause for concern. We want to hear from the Government that that is not how they envisage their requirement of "reasonable grounds" as specified in clause 1, subsection (2C). I seek reassurance.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Social Security (Angela Eagle):** I am somewhat perplexed by the reading of the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) of the wording in the Bill. We had an interesting exchange in Committee on that very matter. However, what he thinks of as a modest change—to take out "has committed" from section (2C) as part of the definition of those people on whom we will be allowed to check up—would blow a gaping hole in current powers to check on those who commit benefit fraud. It would make the powers that we seek the permission of the House to take in the Bill useless. What would seem to be a pernickety, or even nit-picking amendment, as he called it, would have serious practical consequences if it were agreed. I hope that our exchanges will reassure him and leave him satisfied that the present wording of the Bill does not do as he fears.

The hon. Gentleman fears that the Bill would allow any authorised officer to look at the record of any benefit claimant and, if they had ever committed fraud, to use that as the grounds to search for information on an individual basis. Whatever his interpretation of the Bill, I can assure him that it would not allow that to happen without further tests that would protect the individual.

The best way to explain it is to describe the consequences of the hon. Gentleman's amendment for present powers. He is concerned that the words "has committed" mean that we would be able to make those inquiries and that we would need no further justification. I hope that I can reassure him.

First, I will explain why the words "has committed" are crucial. It is not necessarily the case that the frauds that we investigate are current. For example, at the first sign of interest from the Department—even if it is only a routine review of a claim—a fraudster may sign off benefit. He then goes from committing a fraud to being someone who has committed a fraud, which means that we would not be entitled to continue to investigate the unsolved fraud that we had suspected. That is why the phrase "has committed" is in the Bill.

For example, with jobseeker's allowance, it is a requirement to sign every two weeks to say that one is available for and actively seeking work. If one is not in that situation, one is committing a fraud when one signs to say that. As soon as someone has finished signing, the offence is in the past.

The words "has committed" ensure that we can pick up people who are in the process of committing a fraud and who may realise that we are interested and so allow the benefit claim to lapse or who make other arrangements to put what they have done into the past tense. If the hon. Gentleman's version of the Bill became law, it would stop us investigating any individual who went from committing to having committed an offence by signing off.

I shall attempt to explain why the powers about which he is concerned cannot be interpreted as he suggests. The test of reasonableness that he said did not apply, does apply because we are talking about the same claim—it is not necessarily a claim that is way in the past, as the individual may have let it lapse because he has realised that we are on to him. An authorised officer must be satisfied before using the powers in section (2C) that the tests apply. It must appear to him that he has reasonable grounds for believing that the person about whom he is inquiring has committed—perhaps only a day ago—is committing or intends to commit a benefits offence or is a family member of such a person.

Secondly—this is where the Social Security Administration Act 1992 powers come in—he must be satisfied that his inquiry is reasonable for explicitly set-out purposes. I will not go into those as they have been an obvious part of benefit-related powers for some time.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that the amendment would damage our present powers and that the powers that we are considering allow us only to make inquiries about individuals whom we suspect—not any individual in the country who may have committed benefit fraud 20 years ago, but someone whom we suspect of being involved in something in the two areas that the authorised officer has to consider. That has to be done reasonably.

If the hon. Gentleman needs further assurances, he should reflect on the fact that the terminology used in the Bill is not new. The words "has committed" appear in all the legislation and have always been interpreted as I have outlined rather than in the way he suggested. I hope that he will accept that the law has tended to support my interpretation rather than his worries. In other words, the words simply refer to the fact that there is an unresolved crime that is under investigation. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would check out section 20C of the Taxes Management Act 1970, which states that there must be reasonable grounds for suspecting that an offence involving serious fraud

"is being, has been or is about to be committed".

The same considerations apply. Obviously, the offence is the one that is under investigation. With those assurances, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will withdraw the amendment.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) mentioned two issues when speaking to amendments Nos. 13 and 14. I hope that I can reassure her about those. First, I suspect that there has been some misunderstanding—she mentioned this—on the part of the local authorities about whether they would be allowed access to the data matching work that may be done for housing benefit purposes. I repeat my assurance that the way in which that works is that we do the matching and pass the information on to them, free of charge.

Amendment No.13 would bring about a less efficient method. We would not pass the information to local authorities—they would have to make their own arrangements to do their own data matching for housing benefit, which would be costly and less efficient. We have records of all those claiming social security benefits and that includes housing benefits. We will do the bulk utility data matching against housing benefit records as well as our social security records and we will pass details of inconsistencies to officers in the Benefits Agency and to authorised officers in local authorities for further investigation.

That means that local authorities do not need a power to obtain the bulk data themselves because we shall do it on their behalf. It explains the drafting of the provision, which limits those powers to officers from Departments. However, I reassure the hon. Lady that we shall not keep to ourselves the results of such data matching in respect of housing benefit. We shall pass it to the appropriate local authorities and—I am happy to confirm—it will be free of charge. I hope that disposes of the need for further action on amendment No. 13.

6 pm

We had some discussion in Committee about how we might use the powers under amendment No. 14 for data matching on addresses. As I said then, the first step will be to conduct a pilot exercise. We have not yet held detailed discussions about the pilot, but I suspect that it will not involve all 27 million dwellings in the UK—I think we should want to begin with something smaller.

Our experience of data matching within Departments is that it throws up inconsistencies. That does not necessarily mean that fraud is going on, but such inconsistencies have to be further investigated. For example, in utility bulk data matching, we may find an address at which there is minimal use of electricity, water or gas, yet our records show that housing benefit is being claimed and that six people are supposed to live at the address, so there is an inconsistency. There could be a perfectly innocent explanation for that inconsistency, but it could be sought out only by further investigation. That is what we need to do—to throw up a series of inconsistencies and pass them to investigating officers so that they can check why they might have occurred.

I confirm to the hon. Member for Beckenham that we shall treat sensitively any matches that are revealed by the pilots. If little electricity had been consumed, that might have been because someone had been in hospital for a long time, so we should not send fraud squad people crashing in to break down the door. We would check our records to find out whether there were innocent explanations and, if there were not, we would investigate further to discover whether fraud was being committed.

We have five or six years' experience of general matching across our system in the DSS, which has successfully saved £314 million of benefit expenditure. We have seen how that works and we want to try out a pilot scheme. The phraseology in the Bill allows us the maximum leeway in conducting a pilot to try to establish abnormally high or low utility use. That is why I hope that the hon. Lady will be reassured and will not press her amendment.

**Mr. Webb:** I may take the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security by surprise when I say that I found her response generally helpful. My understanding of "has committed" in this context is that it refers to people who have, for example, been convicted of an offence. Clearly, I have no intention of preventing the Department from pursuing a past fraud even though it is no longer current.

When the Under-Secretary responded to my intervention in Committee, she said that it was not enough that people had committed fraud and that they must also be suspected of committing it—there was an "and". However, it turns out that there is no "and"; people merely need to "have committed" the offence, so that further confused me.

None the less, the hon. Lady's comments this afternoon are convincing so I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

**Clause 4**

ARRANGEMENTS FOR PAYMENTS IN RESPECT OF INFORMATION

**Mrs. Lait:** I beg to move amendment No. 20, in page 8, line 21, at end insert—

"(g) *any* person not falling within paragraphs (a) to (f) above but who falls within one of the categories of section 109B(2A) of the Administration Act.".

The amendment relates to payment for compliance with obligations to provide information. Throughout our debates on the measure, the Government have constantly underplayed its potential cost to business. The Secretary of State for Social Security said that he thought that the annual cost of providing information to a bank was estimated as just over one hour of its profits. Indeed, that was reiterated in Committee by the Minister of State. That was a rather light-hearted approach to a serious problem.

*[Mrs. Lait]*

The provisions on payment for the supply of information are that the Secretary of State may make payments for information obtained from credit reference agencies. It is a shame that the provision will not include CIFAS, but we may get around to that. There is discretion to make payments to telecommunications providers in cases where they will be asked to perform a unique processing service. Payments may also be made to utility companies for bulk information—they are the only organisations that will be required to provide such information.

There is also a provision whereby the Secretary of State may make payments where he considers that reasonable, but need not do so if he considers such payments inappropriate. Several organisations have expressed concerns to us about that provision—some of which relate to estimates of the actual costs that they are likely to face. The British Bankers Association stated:

"Banks found it possible to scope the cost of performing individual searches".

That is a ghastly use of the word "scope"; I always thought that it was a noun. The association notes that the cost

"would depend on the quality, the accuracy and the amount of information provided by the DSS. One bank estimated . . . in excess of £500,000."

There are signs that the DSS and local authorities will enter negotiations with telecom service providers to decide when payment is appropriate and how much will be paid. We welcome that. However, there is still concern in the telecoms industry that payments to reimburse the cost of providing information manually have yet to be agreed. That remains a worry to many small and medium-sized telecoms companies. I should appreciate reassurance that the Government have taken that point on board.

Amendment No. 20 tries to provide a system whereby any business or organisation that may be required to provide information can claim financial redress.

**Mr. Webb:** I support the amendment. The categories of information provider to whom payment may be made seem somewhat arbitrary. Reasons have been given, but seem to have been plucked from the air. It is reasonable that people who help the Government by providing information should receive compensation for the cost of doing so, especially if there is little reciprocal flow of information—although there may be more than we expect. The hon. Lady has picked up an unfortunate omission in the Bill, for which no good excuse has been offered, so I support her proposal.

**Angela Eagle:** We debated this issue in Committee, so it may not surprise Opposition Members to hear that we have not changed our mind about it. Obviously, we keep an open mind, and after the Committee debate we re-examined extensively all our thinking on the matter but, funnily enough, we came to the same conclusion that we reached when the Bill was drawn up.

I understand the worries of organisations about Government-imposed costs, but we need to put the provision into perspective. For some of the largest banks, the estimated cost is £7.6 million—that is less than an hour's profit for one of them. There are some reasons for banks to co-operate with us regardless of whether they are reimbursed.

First, they need to demonstrate that they are good corporate citizens. That is certainly a good thing for them to do, given their profits and public image. Secondly, all companies benefit from operating in a well-regulated society, with the rule of law, where obligations are placed on organisations. I should have thought that, today of all days, it is important for us and the banks to make that point.

It is in everyone's interest as taxpayers—corporations pay taxes, as well as individuals—to take responsibility for ensuring that we minimise the chances of fraudsters being successful in their attempts to rip off the private sector or the public sector. We all have an interest in ensuring that loopholes are closed and that circumstances are created in which we can chase the fraudsters as effectively as possible.

We shall not ask for unreasonable amounts of data. I hope that we have reassured organisations that we will not make unreasonable demands. We shall seek to make our inquiries in such a way as to minimise their costs. We have given commitments that businesses will not be required to invest in special software, except in the extraction of bulk information on the utilities, where we shall meet the cost. They will not be required to obtain information especially to meet inquiries, or to store information differently or for longer than they do already.

I should like to reassure businesses that they need not fear the powers and to emphasise that it is right and proper for businesses that enjoy the advantages of trading in this country to help to defend taxpayers' money and to assist us in our fight against fraud, which may spill over from the public sector to the private sector.

**Mrs. Lait:** Will the reimbursement for information inquiries be covered in the consultation on the code of practice?

**Angela Eagle:** The Bill states that there are circumstances in which we shall pay. For example, we shall pay when we require information from organisations, such as credit reference agencies, that exist to sell that information. However, as my right hon. Friend the Minister of State has said, we have been able since the 1940s to require information in certain cases, and have never paid. We will always listen to those organisations that want to make representations to us, and they can clearly do so as part of the consultation on the code of practice.

I hope that, throughout the debates on the Bill, we have explained how we envisage the system of payments for information. Basically, we shall pay those who sell the information that we require. However, we do not expect to pay those from whom we have received information—for example, on collusive employers—in the past, nor do we expect to pay for information from banks, but we shall not make unreasonable demands of them or increase their costs by the way in which we operate the system. Of course, we are always happy to listen to the arguments and observations of those in the private sector with whom we wish to co-operate.

**Mrs. Lait:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her assurance that those who still have concerns about the cost

of compliance can include them in the discussions. I am somewhat concerned that the Government think that they should not pay for the extra burdens that they have put on business, but that is typical of this Government. One of the main complaints that I receive from businesses in my constituency is about the increase in the burden of red tape and the costs of compliance. However, on the ground that they will have the opportunity to be consulted and, I hope, to negotiate a solution to the problems, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

**Clause 5**

EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION WITH OVERSEAS AUTHORITIES

6.15 pm

**Mrs. Lait:** I beg to move amendment No. 17, in page 9, line 9, at end insert—

'(1A) It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to maintain and publish a list of countries with whom there are arrangements in force for the exchange of relevant information under this section.'.

We decided to table this amendment, under which a list of countries with whom the Government are prepared to exchange information would be published, largely because the Under-Secretary gave us a complicated and unclear answer in Committee, which is most uncharacteristic. She started by saying that the countries with which the Government would wish to exchange information would comply with the

"European convention on human rights and a European Union data protection directive, which govern what can be done with information held by a Government".

She also said that the Secretary of State would

"be satisfied that the other country is subject to the ECHR and the directive or to similar enactments . . . We would also consider other factors such as whether the other country has a stable, democratic system of government...We would not transfer information to a police state or a country with a bad human rights record".

That all sounds reasonable and sensible, but it represents a blanket acceptance of countries.

The Under-Secretary went on to mention:

"The only country with which we have a bilateral agreement is Ireland, as our social security systems are similar".

We do not argue about that; it is absolutely correct. However, she then went to say:

"Arrangements would not be considered with countries that have bad human rights records and inadequate protections for the privacy of the individual, or which lack agreements in law that largely conform to the European convention on human rights and the data protection legislation".

Finally, towards the end of her contribution, she said:

"We intend matters to develop bilaterally from country to country as we pick up particular problems in our anti-fraud work."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 9 April 2001; c. 66-69.]

I am afraid that I became confused at that stage because we had gone from a blanket acceptance provided that everyone had signed up to the ECHR and the EU data protection directive, through the bilateral agreement with Ireland, to each country having a bilateral agreement. I thought that it would be more sensible if the Government were to publish a list of countries with which they were prepared to share information.

I dug out the list of countries that have ratified the ECHR and its consequential protocols. I noticed that, interestingly, countries such as Belgium, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Portugal and, indeed, the United Kingdom have not signed protocol 7, so will we share information with them? However, Albania has signed all the protocols. Turkey, which is applying to join the EU, has ratified only the original convention and protocol 1. Russia has signed the convention, but not protocol 6. Macedonia, Romania and Ukraine have signed the entire convention and protocols. Poland has not signed protocol 7.

Czechoslovakia has signed them all, as has Hungary. Czechoslovakia is applying to join the EU and Turkey is on the list of applicants. *[Interruption.]* I apologise; I mean the Czech Republic. I deliberately did not refer to the Slovak Republic and Slovenia for obvious reasons. However, the Czech Republic has signed the convention and all its protocols and is applying to the EU for membership, as are Poland and Hungary. I hope that if the Under-Secretary is suggesting that we shall automatically exchange information with Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and, indeed, Turkey, the Secretary of State will carefully investigate the robustness of the information that they supply.

To reduce my confusion, it would be useful if the Minister could agree to our suggestion—she does not have to accept the amendment—that a list of countries with which the Government are prepared to share information is produced. That would reassure us that it is unlikely that private information will get into the hands of people who should not receive it.

**Mr. David Wilshire** (Spelthorne): I made a very modest contribution in Committee and I have followed these proceedings with care and interest. I notice that we still have three and a half hours in which to debate the Bill and that gives me an opportunity to develop some thoughts on this amendment. As those on the Government Benches showed great enthusiasm about learning which countries signed the European convention on human rights, I would be very happy to go through all 40-plus signatories and give them the full details if that is what they would like. I suspect, however, that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would not let me go that far.

**Angela Eagle:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way so early in his contribution. I hope that he will be very reassured by what I shall say in response to the speech of the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) and to the amendment. A mistake has been made. Signing the European convention on human rights is not the only condition that must be met if we are to share information. Before the hon. Gentleman lists all 40 countries, I hope to reassure him on that point. Clearly, I will go into much more detail when it is my time to reply.

**Mr. Wilshire:** I am grateful to the Minister, and I assure her that I will allow her a few moments before 10 o'clock in which to respond to some of the points that I will make.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) said, the amendment seeks to clarify an issue that was left vague in Committee. We also need to examine the subjective judgments that were outlined in Committee, because I worry greatly when subjective tests are applied to who should or who should not receive sensitive information.

The Government and the Opposition accept that sensitive information can be passed only to those foreign countries that have adequate safeguards. There is no

*[Mr. Wilshire]*

dispute between us on the need to have such safeguards to prevent the misuse of information. Although the Minister will be helpful in her reply—she has been in the past—she will find it difficult to provide an exhaustive list of the safeguards and to list the countries that possess them. I accept her point that there is more than one safeguard and, in Committee, the Government offered two factual tests that could apply. However, they then added some subjective views on issues such as stable government.

The first test with which the Government appear to be happy—I do not object to it in principle—relates to the European Court of Human Rights. In the Committee's third sitting, the Minister said:

"For it to appear to a Secretary of State that the other country has adequate safeguards against abuse, he must therefore be satisfied that the other country is subject to the ECHR".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 9 April 2001; c. 66.]

Although the Minister said that that is not the only safeguard, she made it clear that it would be a fundamental test of what is an adequate safeguard.

We need to consider closely the ECHR and I think that I am able to do so because I serve on the parliamentary delegation to the Council of Europe. We meet representatives of the countries that have signed the convention and, at the last count, I believe that 41 had signed it and that two were in the process of doing so. However, the target is moveable and the numbers may have changed.

It is not just the convention itself that matters. Although 40-plus countries have signed the convention, as my hon. Friend said, it has been found necessary over time to create additional protocols. It seems to me that protocols 1, 4, 6 and 7 are relevant to providing the adequate safeguards that we need. Therefore, we must know not only whether a country has signed the convention itself, but which protocols it has signed.

If we use the protocols and the convention as criteria, we must be careful. If we say that a country must sign the convention and the relevant protocols, I am sorry to tell the House that that would rule out the United Kingdom. We have not signed all the protocols, so such an arrangement would put us in an awkward position. I am sure that the Government agree that the convention is not sufficient and that the protocols are necessary to provide an adequate safeguard. Therefore, we have to consider the matter country by country, as my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham did.

Let me explain why the convention is not adequate in itself. Just before Christmas, I was an election observer in Azerbaijan and it will not be long before Azerbaijan passes one of the Government's tests. In the past few weeks, it has been formally admitted to full membership of the Council of Europe, having ratified the convention. As an election observer, I saw at close quarters Azerbaijan's administrative system. I call it a "system" to be polite, but it would be better to call it an administrative shambles. I saw how it used computers to doctor election results, so heaven help us if we were to use the convention as a safeguard in the case of Azerbaijan and its administrative system and computer safeguards. All that we shall have is a leaky sieve and information will go all over the place. Therefore, we cannot use just the convention.

As the Government rightly say, we must go at least one step further. In Committee, they made it quite clear that one of the tests would have to be compliance with the European data protection directive. That is sensible, provided that we know what the directive will do. When it was introduced in 1995—as is often the case with that thing over there in Brussels, which puts out paperwork saying how grand something will be—a press release said that the directive's purpose was:

"To prevent abuses of personal data and ensure that data subjects are informed of the existence of processing operations".

It went on in that vein saying how marvellous the directive would be.

I have done what I can to check whether the directive is being enforced in every country. I am something of a cynic when it comes to the European Union, its directives and how well they are enforced and, more often than not, I get the impression that this is the only country that enforces them properly. I will not digress but, if one examines the agricultural sector or any other issue that captures the headlines, one will discover that some members of the European Union look at directives, smile sweetly and put them in the wastepaper basket.

If that is what is happening to other directives, how can we be sure that this directive—which has been trumpeted as something that will protect British citizens from the misuse of information—will provide a proper safeguard? If it is enforced like the other directives, it will not be much good at all. I am certainly happy to support the Government in using the directive as one of the tests, but it would be helpful to know who checks that it has been enforced in this country and elsewhere. We need to know how rigorous the checks are, but how are we to do that? Is information on checking published anywhere? When my hon. Friend's list appears, information on whether the other countries of the European Union comply with the directive should perhaps be attached to it.

6.30 pm

It would also be helpful to have on the record an assurance that the provisions comply with the directive. I am not aware that that has been confirmed publicly, but I am sure that the Minister will put me right if I missed something. I look forward to her spelling out, beyond all doubt, that they have been checked against the European directive and that she is satisfied that they comply fully with it.

The Government also want us to accept that it is sensible to make subjective judgments to determine whether other countries are suitable. In Committee, the Minister said:

"We would also consider other factors such as whether the other country has a stable, democratic system of government. We would not transfer information to a police state or a country with a bad human rights record, where such information might be abused."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 9 April 2001; c.66.]

Again, I suspect that hon. Members would say "Amen" to all of that. It is a laudable comment. However, subjective terms need clarification. What is a stable Government? What would happen if a general election in this country produced a hung Parliament with a majority of one or two and we faced another election? *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) mutters "Austria", and I am grateful for that example. Is the Government of the Former Yugoslav

Republic of Macedonia considered to be stable in its current state? We must have tests and definitions of a stable Government; a bland assertion is not enough.

What is a democratic Government? That is another subjective test. *[Interruption.]* I am getting an enormous amount of help as my hon. Friends explain that this Government is not democratic. I shall let that pass because the debate has been friendly and I do not want to agitate hordes of Labour Members when they read about that in the morning.

There are questions about democracy, even among members of the Council of Europe. Would we want to exchange information with Romania and Albania, both of which would pass the other tests? Would we define their Governments as democratic? That is debatable. I do not want to pass slurs on those countries without knowing a great deal about them, but I am sure that we could question whether Romania has a democratic Government as we understand it in this part of Europe. Subjective judgments are not necessarily a good idea.

The Minister also said that we would not want to swap information with a police state. I have a huge admiration for the Metropolitan police, but tomorrow morning we will be able to get pictures from the television and photographs from the newspapers on what has taken place in London this afternoon that portray, even us, as operating a police state. Before I get a lot of letters about that, let me make it clear that I am not criticising the actions of the police or suggesting that that assertion is true, but if people want to make mischief, they can use a subjective test, such as a police state. We must make that definition clear so that someone does not drag in the actions of a police force, such as those seen today. It is not enough to say "a police state"; we want to know what that means.

The other test is a country with a bad human rights record. We would need to go beyond 10 o'clock to get to the bottom of what on earth that might be. However, the first test is that a country should be a signatory to the European convention on human rights. Turkey's position—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I need to remind him that this is not a stand part debate on clause 5. We are discussing an amendment that deals purely with whether the Secretary of State should maintain a list. The hon. Gentleman's remarks fall well outside the scope of that narrow amendment.

**Mr. Wilshire:** I am grateful for your forbearance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I understand your ruling.

I have a final concern, which is highly relevant to the amendment. The implication in Committee was that the Government should publish a list of independent sovereign foreign countries. If the Minister accepts the suggestion of my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham, she might want to reflect on whether the list should contain at least one organisation—Europol—in addition to the countries. Will the Government consider transferring information to Europol, which was established as the European Union's law enforcement organisation with a mission to help to combat organised crime? We need to transfer information because fraud is often serious organised crime.

Europol facilitates the exchange of information between member states. That is one of its jobs. We have a ready-made tool to help the Minister to achieve her aims. Have the Government considered using Europol and, if so, how? If the Minister accepts the amendment and agrees to publish a list, will she be prepared to put Europol on it? It should include not only those countries that are deemed to be suitable for the exchange of information, but the tests that were applied to them. That would allow us to know what decisions were made and to which countries the tests were applied. We would also know why it is considered safe and sensible to transfer information to them.

**Angela Eagle:** I am glad to be able to respond to the debate. It appears that by giving examples to assist the Committee, I gave the wrong impression and sent the Opposition off on a tangent that does not have much to do with how we intend to operate the powers in clause 5. I hope that I can make amends by explaining how they will work and the process by which we will reach individual bilateral agreements with countries.

The hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) was mistaken—it was probably my fault—when she assumed that being a signatory to the European convention on human rights would allow us to exchange bulk information with a particular country. Had that assumption been right, she and the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) would have pertinent points to make. However, the powers will not be used in that way. I hope that I can reassure Opposition Members about that.

We will facilitate bulk exchange of information on a bilateral basis. We will not do that in secret; there will be a list of the countries with which we have reached bilateral arrangements. As I take hon. Members through the process, I hope that I will cast more light on the powers and put their minds at rest. The list will be public knowledge, but I do not intend to accept the amendment because that does not need to be stated on the face of the Bill. However, I hope that hon. Members understand that we do not want to keep secret the countries involved in bilateral exchanges. That would not be appropriate.

Clause 5 is not an "open sesame" that will allow us immediately to start sharing a wide range of information with any overseas social security administration that takes our fancy. I said that in Committee. It is a three-stage process, and this is an enabling provision that begins that process. The clause says clearly that information sharing can take place only where

> "it appears to the Secretary of State . . . that there are arrangements in force for the exchange of relevant information between him and any authorities in a country outside the United Kingdom ('the overseas country'); and . . . that the arrangements and the law in force in the overseas country are such as to ensure that there are adequate safeguards in place against any improper use of information disclosed by the Secretary of State under this section."

Those arrangements are the second stage of the process. They mean that we would have a bilateral arrangement with any country with whom we were considering information sharing before any data changed hands, other than data that can already be exchanged under existing law. For example, we can exchange data for the administration of contributory benefits such as pensions. Indeed, this country exports nearly 1 million pensions overseas every year. However, that is wholly different from a bulk exchange.

*[Angela Eagle]*

That arrangement would take the form of a memorandum of understanding, and it would be detailed and specific about what information could be exchanged, when, for what purposes and with what safeguards. One bilateral arrangement may differ slightly from another. As I said in Committee, we have only one in place at the moment, and it is a specific memorandum of understanding with the Republic of Ireland signed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and his opposite number. To exchange any information under clause 5, therefore, a bilateral memorandum of understanding with the other country would be required. It should be obvious that the overseas Government and the UK would not go to the lengths of negotiating any such bilateral agreement unless there was value in it for both parties.

The aim of exchanging information in that manner is to combat transnational benefit fraud, so there would have to be cogent evidence, based on intelligence and research, that a problem existed between the two countries before we would set out on that road. Hon. Members may well conclude that any list of countries affected by the powers in clause 5 would be reasonably short.

In Committee, we were asked what we planned to do with countries that do not have satisfactory arrangements to protect human rights and to safeguard exchanged data. Clearly, we would not enter into a bilateral arrangement for a free and full exchange of information with such a country. However, there would be no impediment to our co-operation with the authorities in that country to obtain information on a case-specific basis. No new legislation is needed for that; it already happens. We would certainly not entertain the prospect of bulk exchange of information with such a country, and nor would clause 5 allow it.

Transnational benefit fraud is a problem that we need to take seriously. On 22 April 1999, the representatives of the Governments of the European Union member states, meeting in the European Council, passed a resolution on a code of conduct for improving co-operation between authorities of the member states in combating transnational social security benefit and contribution fraud, undeclared work and the transnational hiring out of workers. The problem is not peculiar to the United Kingdom. The German and Dutch authorities recently detected 30,000 offences of transnational working and claiming as a result of one data-matching exercise. There are gains to be made if we can come to the appropriate arrangements.

We issued a press release on the memorandum of understanding with the Government of Ireland last October when it was signed. When the list extends beyond one, we will maintain it and publish the details. I hope that I have reassured the hon. Member for Beckenham that this is a deliberate, staged process with proper safeguards.

The hon. Member for Spelthorne asked whether the provisions comply with the EU directive on data protection, and I take great delight in telling him that they do.

**Mrs. Lait:** We got almost as close as it is possible to get to having an amendment accepted. I am sorry that we will not have a published list, short though it might be. Obviously, by trawling through the House of Commons Library in due course we will all be able to work out with whom the Government have bilateral agreements. In fact, we may add to the cost to the public purse and table questions, which would probably be a more expensive way to get the answer. On the basis of the Minister's reassurance and clarification, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

## Clause 7

LOSS OF BENEFIT FOR COMMISSION OF BENEFIT OFFENCES

6.45 pm

**Mr. Webb:** I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 10, line 30, leave out clause 7.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in page 12, leave out line 20.

No. 18, in page 12, line 24, after "any", insert "state".

No. 4, in clause 8, page 13, line 3, leave out clause 8.

No. 5, in clause 9, page 14, line 8, leave out clause 9.

No. 6, in clause 10, page 15, line 18, leave out clause 10.

No. 7, in clause 11, page 15, line 36, leave out clause 11.

No. 8, in clause 12, page 16, line 18, leave out clause 12.

No. 9, in clause 13, page 17, line 1, leave out clause 13.

No. 1, in clause 20, page 23, line 11, at end insert—

'(1A) The Secretary of State may not make an order under subsection (1) to bring section 7 into force before a period of two years has elapsed from the date on which this Act is passed.'.

No. 10, in clause 21, page 23, line 20, leave out—

'7, 10, 11, 12(3), 13'.

**Mr. Webb:** I am grateful for the opportunity to debate the other main part of the Bill, which relates to benefit sanctions. It may appear that we have gone a little crazy in tabling amendments to delete clauses, but essentially we want to remove clause 7, and as it is referred to throughout the remainder of the Bill, it would not have made sense if we did not seek to delete the rest of the Bill too. Clause 7 is the nub of our concerns, as hon. Members present will know well.

I shall deal first with the amendments that make more modest changes. Amendment No. 2 is the most modest and deals with our desire to remove the threat of sanction from those who are successfully prosecuted twice for war pension fraud offences. Amendment No. 1 seeks to delay the implementation of clause 7 and, by implication, the remainder of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) will be hoping to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to speak to that amendment. Amendment No. 3 is obviously our preferred route, which is to remove clause 7 from the Bill altogether.

The House will be aware that we discussed briefly in Committee the matter dealt with in amendment No. 2. I expressed the concern, which had been voiced in the other place, that war pensions are on the list of benefits for which a fraud offence committed twice leads to a

sanction, but retirement pensions are not. When I raised that point on Second Reading, the Minister of State, who has kindly explained why he cannot be with us, chose to imply, tongue in cheek, that I wanted to bring retirement pensions within the scope of the clause. Of course I want war pensions to be removed, and that is what the amendment would do.

In our Committee deliberations on 9 April the Minister of State gave some information about war pension fraud that we had been unaware of, when he said:

> "I may be undermining my case, but I want to be as open and frank as possible: six cases of fraud were detected, but there were no prosecutions."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 9 April 2001; c. 79.]

Hardly anyone ever gets done for war pension fraud—there are only six cases in recent memory and none of those led to a prosecution. Yet the provision on war pensions would be enacted only if a person were prosecuted twice. Something that seems not to happen at all would have to happen twice if the provision were to come into force.

One might say that although such prosecutions never happen, it does no harm to have such a provision in the Bill, but it is clear that war pensioners' organisations took offence at the suggestion that there was war pension fraud. As the Bill includes war pensions but not retirement pensions, there is some suggestion that retirement pensioners are deemed to be above fraud but war pensioners are not. Our judgment is that if a provision gives offence to a group who deserve our respect and achieves no practical purpose whatsoever, it should not be included. It achieves nothing.

Ministers are fond of saying that such measures send signals, but it is far from clear to whom this provision sends a signal. Presumably, it sends a signal to the six people who have committed war pension fraud, although none of the cases was considered sufficiently serious for the person to be prosecuted. To give offence to a significant group to whom this country owes a great debt for the purpose of sending a signal to, at best, six people, none of whom would be affected by the provision anyway, seems absurd. I hope that, in an end-of-term spirit, the Minister will look sympathetically on this modest change, which is unlikely to have any effect on the Government's finances or on benefit fraud but which will remove a source of offence to Britain's war pensioner community.

Amendment No. 3 deals with the substantive issue, as it would delete clause 7 from the Bill; the other amendments follow from that. I do not want to go over old ground again and repeat the debate that we had in Committee. I shall, however, summarise the key distinction between us, the Government and, probably, the Conservatives. We are far from the position that the Minister of State sought to parody when he introduced the notion of benefit fraudsters as lovable rogues; we have not used that term, and would never use it. All three parties are united in the view that benefit fraud is serious and needs to be reduced and stamped out. Indeed, that is why we shall not oppose the Bill on Third Reading. There is no difference between us on that.

I hope, though, that we can have a mature debate in the House on sentencing policy. When different parties debating a home affairs Bill agree that something is a crime, but do not know how severe a sentence should be, I hope that nobody says that one party is a friend of the criminal just because it thinks it appropriate to have a longer or shorter sentence. It is a matter of appropriateness, and that is what we are debating now. We are not debating whether something is right or wrong; the question is: what is the appropriate sentence?

The Government believe that, in cases of two strikes—two convictions for benefit fraud—it is appropriate to deprive people of part of their income. The biggest problem with that, however, is that it impacts not just on the individuals themselves, but on their dependants, including their children. An unanswered question from our earlier deliberations concerns the fact that the Government have pledged to abolish child poverty. I submit that any child living in a sanctioned household is, at the very least, at risk of poverty. An innocent child, whom we do not hold responsible for the actions of his or her parents, will be living below the poverty line in such a household. How can the Government's stated aim of abolishing child poverty be consistent with putting a child's household below the poverty line? We have not had an answer to that point and I do not suppose that we will, as there is none.

The second problem is the effect of the sanction. The Under-Secretary will say that the Government do not really want to use the sanction because, in practice, there will probably be a few hundred cases. She will say that the Government want to send a signal; they do not want the sanction to be used. Clearly, however, it is envisaged that it will be used in, say, 500 cases. What effect will forcing people below the breadline have on their subsequent behaviour? Is it clear that it is in society's interests for people not to have enough money to make ends meet? If someone has already transgressed the law not once, but twice, what effect will it have if we then find them stealing or doing something like that to make ends meet? It is not clear that that form of punishment is in society's interests at all. We object to the clause for the way in which it affects those incidental to the crime.

**Mr. Pickles:** I read the hon. Gentleman's contribution in Committee and have listened to him most carefully. So that I am clear, will he say whether Liberal Democrat Members believe that everyone has a right to benefit, regardless of behaviour?

**Mr. Webb:** We believe that an appropriate punishment for misbehaviour should not deprive people of subsistence. Obviously, we do not oppose putting people in prison for serious offences, but when they are there, they should not be deprived of food, clothing and shelter. Indeed, prisons provide all those things. People can be deprived of their liberty for something extremely serious, but are granted food, clothing and shelter. It is therefore anomalous that, if they do something else that we object to, but which does not warrant a custodial sentence—or, at least, in many cases does not get one—we should think it appropriate to deprive them of money needed for basic subsistence.

As members of society, people have a right to basic subsistence. For society to punish people by depriving them of basic subsistence is inhumane; for their dependants, it is particularly inhumane. If, for example, community service were used to penalise repeat offenders, that would penalise individuals without penalising their dependants or forcing households below the poverty line.

*[Mr. Webb]*

If a custodial sentence were deemed appropriate for a serial offender, one could debate whether its effect on dependants was better or worse than getting by with no money. However, a humane society should not respond to what, admittedly, is serious crime by depriving people of the basics of life.

**Angela Eagle:** Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the only people who are going to commit benefit fraud are those with no money whatever?

**Mr. Webb:** No, of course not; that is an absurd suggestion. We are suggesting that the sanction policy will leave people below the breadline. In any given week, people already have fixed costs that they cannot avoid. For example, people have to pay their housing costs or else they lose their home, and they have to pay for their gas, electricity and so on. Once all those necessities have been paid for, the amount of discretionary spending may be extremely limited and it gets squeezed.

We have all heard stories of parents on a tight budget who forgo their meals to make sure that their children can eat. Basics such as food get squeezed because many household bills must be paid, come what may. I am therefore rather puzzled by the Under-Secretary's intervention. The intention of the policy is that people will be left below the benefit line, which—especially bearing in mind the children—is not an appropriate way for the state to punish people who transgress. Other forms of punishment are more humane and appropriate for that sort of offence.

In a moment, my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam will seek to explain our thinking in trying to delay the provisions—if that is possible—and will look at the effects of other sanctions in the benefit system. Naturally, our preference is for these measures not to be in the Bill at all, and we wish to persuade the Government that the offence given to war pensioners through the inclusion of the measure in the Bill achieves no useful purpose and only gives offence. It would be to everyone's benefit if it were removed.

**Mr. Pickles:** The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) said that very little would be achieved by clause 7, which was largely symbolic. That is the entire purpose of the Bill. I do not think for one moment that very much will be achieved by clause 7. The rhetoric of the Under-Secretary and the Minister of the State is quite different from the rhetoric that we heard when the Bill was first announced; the Prime Minister made great play of the clause and the policy of "two strikes and out". I recall that the departmental press release led with that item. However, the hard truth is that the provision is not likely to hit more than 500 people a year. Frankly, I doubt that the figures will ever reach that level, as the problem of reoffending is relatively small.

We support the clause on the basis of the assurances that the Under-Secretary has given. On Second Reading and in Committee, she was pressed on a number of occasions to say whether the provision conformed to the European convention on human rights. We are now a signatory to various ECHR protocols and it is part of our law. The Under-Secretary said consistently that we should put our trust in her; she had taken legal advice, and she could give us an assurance. The Opposition remain remarkably unconvinced by that argument. We do not believe that the provision will pass scrutiny in the courts, and we are worried about that because, in a few years' time, when we have been in government for a couple of years, we will get the rap. We will find ourselves having to go to the High Court to try to defend those systems. Those who introduced them will either have retired or be in opposition. We shall wait and see.

7 pm

I very much agree with the hon. Member for Northavon on war pensions. There is more than a tinge of post-modern irony in wishing to include them in the Bill. I cannot see the logic in applying the provisions to war pensioners and, frankly, it makes the Bill seem ridiculous. There is exactly the same logic in excluding war pensioners as there is in excluding state pensioners—very few of either category commit fraud. The hon. Member for Northavon said that there have been no prosecutions in the past six months and that there have been only six cases, but he did not say—out of charity, I suspect—that the Government do not know the figures.

The Under-Secretary has said that no study has been undertaken to ascertain the number of people involved, so let us assume that it is ludicrously low and that there is much more war pensions fraud than we think. Instead of six, the figure might be eight or nine, or it might even reach double figures. We are discussing not "one strike and you're out" cases, but repeat offenders whose involvement might run to 10 cases a year, although I doubt whether there would be even one. Why include the provision?

I doubt whether even the most low-brow television soap opera with flagging viewing figures would develop a story line suggesting as credible a repeat fraud offence by a war pensioner. There is no reason to include the provision, which demeans the Bill by its very presence, so I have a lot of sympathy with amendment No. 2, which has been tabled by the Liberals.

Our amendment, No. 18, would clarify the retirement pensions issue by inserting the word "state". I am sure that the measure is intended to cover state retirement pensions, but I would like an explanation of why that word is not included.

In reply to the question whether the Liberal Democrats support a universal right to benefit, the hon. Member for Northavon gave me a number of examples. In fairness, I think that he was saying yes. It does not seem to matter to the Liberal Democrats how the recipient has behaved or how much and how many times he has defrauded.

**Mr. Webb:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Pickles:** I am about to tell a rather good joke at the hon. Gentleman's expense.

**Mr. Webb** *rose—*

**Mr. Pickles:** I shall take the intervention first.

**Mr. Webb:** I do not want to ruin the hon. Gentleman's timing, but to clarify the point I should say that we are certainly not querying punishment for benefit fraud.

Indeed,
I referred to community service and imprisonment. Clearly, people who are in prison lose their benefit, so we are not saying that entitlement should be retained come what may, but we are questioning whether removing benefit from someone living in the community is the right penalty.

**Mr. Pickles:** That was most helpful. I read the exchanges in Committee between the hon. Gentleman and the Minister of State, which at times seemed a little bad tempered. The hon. Gentleman is a very reasonable man, so I cannot understand why the Minister of State was so beastly to him.

**Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe** (Bradford, South): I can.

**Mr. Pickles:** No doubt the Whip can, but I am a more tolerant chap.

I would not want to put words in the mouth of the Liberal Democrats, but they seem to be suggesting a strongly worded reprimand as a sanction—a cup of tea and an inquiry as to whether the recipient is getting enough benefit. In truth, I can see the *Focus* headline: "Liberal Democrats wag finger at fraudster", or "Fraudster told by top Lib Dem that he has been very, very naughty". Their response is wholly inappropriate.

I recall the hon. Member for Northavon quoting on Second Reading Mr. Paul Cavadino, director of policy at the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders. He was wise to do so, because those remarks sum up the objections to the Bill. The quote runs to only three sentences, so I shall read it into the record:

"Any change should be based on improving the likelihood of those on community sentences turning their back on crime and leading law-abiding lives. Withdrawing benefits from those not completing a community sentence order would be counter- productive. Without some other means of income, it is inevitable that some will fall back on crime to make ends meet."

There is nothing inevitable about people committing crime—that is the politics of Danegeld. Why offer bribes to fraudsters to prevent them from committing crime? We should not say, "Here's a nice handout. Take it, and please don't commit crime."

I see the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe) on the Government Front Bench. He and I know areas of the north of England that are racked with poverty, but we also know that people in those areas do not habitually commit crime. They do not commit crime because they have pride in their neighbourhoods, their lives and their families. Nobody is forced to commit crime; the Government are right that no one has an automatic right to benefits; and we agree with them that there is a contract between the state and the recipient.

For the sake of time, I shall risk oversimplifying the matter. Some people may seek work or offer continuing care as part of that contract, but riding through it all is an obligation to be honest in order to qualify for benefit. The argument about serious crime and providing clothing and food for murderers is spurious, and I do not accept that the measure represents double punishment.

If a person applied for a grant to defraud the taxpayer, we would rightly refuse it, so why should fraudsters have their life style rewarded with continued full benefit? After all, the measure will apply for only 13 weeks; it is only a part-provision and other measures exist. Allowing people to continue to receive benefits when they have openly defrauded the benefits system—not once, but twice—represents laughing in the face of that system.

The measure may be symbolic, it may not have vast effect and only a few people may be affected by it. Nevertheless, I believe that it will continue the establishment of an important principle: there is no automatic right to benefit and there is a contract between the citizen and the state in respect of honesty.

**Mr. Paul Burstow** (Sutton and Cheam): I shall speak briefly to amendment No. 1, but I must first pick up on a couple of comments made by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles). He referred to the exchanges in Committee on 9 April and, in particular, to the Minister of State's attempt to parody or caricature the position taken by the Liberal Democrats. The hon. Gentleman did his best to do the same.

We are not in the business of rewarding cheats. Like Labour and Conservative Members, Liberal Democrats believe that we have to bear down on benefit fraud, but we also believe that the punishment should be appropriate and targeted on the offender. It should not be so indiscriminate as to impact on the family, as if guilt by association justifies applying a sanction that will result in difficulties and hardship not only for the individual, who may deserve to face hardship, but for his relatives. We have therefore tabled amendment No. 1, although as my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) said, we would much prefer the clause not to see the light of day.

We believe that a delay is necessary because the Government should surely take time not only to reflect, but, better still, to gather the evidence on which they want to justify their policy. There is a lack of evidence to sustain the case that the measure represents an effective means not only of sending a signal, but of genuinely changing behaviour. There are questions, which my hon. Friend raised in Committee and on Second Reading, as to the knock-on, collateral damage that will be done to the families of benefit cheats. It is wrong that families and children should be made to suffer for the sins and omissions of parents who are tempted to defraud the system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Northavon referred in Committee to the limited research that has already been done on the matter by the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Social Security. That work is set out in research report No. 86, which evaluated jobseeker's allowance. I believe that Ministers have relied on that report at least as evidence to show that they have researched these matters, but the important thing is that it was based on a sample of only 30 people. That is the basis on which their policy is being built. When one considers what those 30 people said and the change of behaviour that was involved, one sees that the evidence does not support the Government's policy.

That is why we propose a novel idea to the House and to the Government: evidence-based policy. There should be some evidence before the Government act in a way that will do harm. That is why we are saying that they should delay the measure for two years. Why two years? We believe that, if the matter is to be investigated effectively, time will be needed to set up the necessary research and to track the impact of the policies and

*[Mr. Paul Burstow]*

sanctions that are already in place in respect of jobseeker's allowance and the Child Support Agency. We must track their impact over time to investigate their effects on families and so on. Finally, at the end of such a project, there must be a proper evaluation.

As I said, we believe that benefit cheats should be punished, but that the children, who will be innocent of the crime, should not be punished with their parents. That is why we have said that benefits sanctions are about seeking retribution. We do not believe that that is the role of the state, although we think that it does have a role in seeking restitution and rehabilitation. That is the proper balance, but the Bill is unbalanced and is unfair and unjust as a result. It is entirely right to demand that people who defraud the system should repay the money, pay fines and give community service, and to ensure that habitual fraudsters serve time; but it is wrong of the House to agree to an unfounded, unresearched and ill-conceived measure without even having the grace to pause and conduct proper research. I hope that the House will consider accepting amendment No. 1, even if it is minded to reject the other Liberal Democrat amendments.

**Angela Eagle:** The amendment would either remove the two-strikes provision or delay it for two years. In effect, the delay would be longer, because the two strikes must be built up. It is reasonable to assume that it would be unusual for somebody to receive two convictions for benefit fraud in a single year, so the amendment would delay the biting of the two-strikes sanctions even further, and it will not surprise the House to learn that the Government oppose it.

The hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) almost argued in his welcome last-ditch appearance in our proceedings that the Bill was modest. He seemed to hint that he wanted us to go further. However, the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) was almost apocalyptic about the poverty that the two-strikes sanction would cause to innocent members of the families of benefit fraudsters. I do not underestimate the effect of sanctions, and the hon. Gentleman might have had a point if the sanctions involved in the two-strikes process, which is set out from clause 7 onwards, removed all benefit, but they apply only to the personal elements of benefits and are designed specifically to operate alongside a hardship scheme, which ensures that innocent members of a family unit whose head has been involved in benefit fraud are appropriately protected. He was guilty of the grossest exaggeration in his portrayal of some of the effects of the two-strikes sanction.

7.15 pm

Last year, more than 22,000 people were sanctioned for cheating the benefit system, and almost half of them were subsequently convicted of benefit fraud. On the hard core of repeat offenders, the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar rightly referred to 500 people; indeed, about 500 people a year would fall under the two-strikes provisions. The intention of the provisions is to deter those who persist in repeat defrauding of the benefit system, but never come across any sort of sanction.

I can give some examples of the sort of cases that are involved, some of which are mind boggling. For example, one person was prosecuted for working while claiming and was then done for stealing and cashing a relative's child benefit book. Undeterred, that person was then prosecuted again for attempting to claim jobseeker's allowance to which he was not entitled. The people whom we are targeting steal vast sums of money that could be better spent elsewhere on more deserving causes such as the alleviation of child poverty.

Two people were recently convicted because of their part in a ring involving stolen girocheques, which caused an estimated loss to public funds of £670,000. In another case, a woman admitted making false benefit claims after 11 benefit order books and documentation relating to several other different identities were found at her address. The overpayment was calculated at more than £140,000.

At the other end of the scale, a man was recently convicted of stealing from a blind friend a disability living allowance order book and girocheques worth £1,200. In another case, a man who had previously been convicted of order book fraud admitted on arrest to obtaining his ex-partner's order books and advancing the dates on them. He also admitted to a series of irregularities covering a further seven order books and a girocheque.

**Mr. Pickles:** Those examples illustrate the utter callousness of people who defraud the state, but surely the Under-Secretary's remarks do not apply to war pensions. Is not it better to concentrate on fraudsters such as those whom she describes and not to establish powers for war pensions that have not been taken in relation to state pensions?

**Angela Eagle:** I shall deal with the war pensions aspect of the amendments in due course. I am happy to answer the hon. Gentleman's question, but I would prefer to do so when I am speaking about the relevant aspects of the amendments.

The Department does not prosecute in cases where there is no public interest in doing so. The people whom the sanction will hit are the cheats who systematically abuse the system for their own gain, not only once but again and again. It is intended not only to provide a deterrent, but to send a signal saying that such repeat behaviour will not be tolerated in the system. I hope that it works as a deterrent. Paradoxically, one of the signs that suggest that it might be working is that there are few repeat offenders. People realise that the game is up and that they cannot continue cruelly and callously to milk the system. They must realise that cheating the benefit system and stealing money from the most vulnerable people in society, who rely on the welfare system, ensures that there is less money to go round for those who are needy. That is why we must consider a viable deterrent. The Government believe that the two-strikes sanction is an appropriate way of dealing with the problem.

The hon. Member for Northavon expressed in exaggerated terms his worries about the effect on the families of people who have committed the offences. The Government intend that the sanctions should hit the people who were responsible for the fraud, rather than their innocent family members. The sanctions affect 40 per cent. of the personal allowance, or 20 per cent. of it if there are vulnerable people in the family, which is the case when the claimant or a family member is pregnant or seriously ill.

Those sanctions are not new; they have been a feature of the benefits system for a long time. However, we are extending them to those who systematically defraud. Housing and council tax benefits will be unaffected when the claimant has an underlying entitlement to income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance. If there is no such underlying entitlement, we intend to reduce housing and council tax benefits by an amount equivalent to 40 per cent. of a single person's allowance or 20 per cent. if the claimant or a family member is pregnant or seriously ill.

The opposition of the hon. Member for Northavon to sanctions is well known. I know that I will not persuade him to change his mind, but I should like him to consider and accept that child benefit will never be withdrawn, that housing and council tax benefits will continue to be paid even when jobseeker's allowance or income support is sanctioned, and that premiums payable for the family and children will not be reduced. Only the personal allowance will be affected. Free prescriptions and school meals will remain available even when a benefit is sanctioned. All those protections will ensure that innocent members of families, about whom the hon. Gentleman is so worried, will not suffer.

The hon. Gentleman must accept that benefit sanctions are designed to deter persistent defrauding of the system. They therefore need to be tough. However, I hope that he will also accept that we have attempted to strike a balance and provide protection by granting access to hardship schemes. Those affected will, after all, have been convicted twice. I expect us to revert to those matters in future, but I cannot accept amendments that would tear the Bill in half and remove the sanctions.

I expect us to repeat some of the discussions that we held in Committee on war pensions. However, the amendments would have the unintended effect of preventing war pensions from being a disqualifying benefit. That would mean that fraud against it would not count as a strike under the two-strikes provisions. The amendments would also stop war pensions being a sanctionable benefit. If that happened, people could target war pensions for fraud. I suspect that the hon. Member for Northavon did not intend that.

War pensioners are decent and law abiding, and the money that they receive reflects the debt that society owes them. I can therefore understand the reasons for some hon. Members' reservations about their inclusion in a fraud-related provision. However, we believe that it would be inappropriate to exclude them. Opposition Members will not agree with me, but I shall explain why we remain of that opinion.

In Committee, the hon. Member for Northavon argued that if there was a good case for excluding retirement pension on the ground that there is almost no evidence of fraud, that also applied to war pensions. However, we are considering not merely numbers but whether a benefit should be sanctionable or has the potential for fraud.

The retirement pension is not a sanctionable benefit, and the majority of war pensioners are now over pension age. However, there are big differences between the rules for the two benefits. Those for the retirement pension are simple. Anyone who is over a certain age and has paid contributions receives it. It is difficult for someone to commit fraud against it. However, that does not apply to war pensions, and entitlement depends on other issues, such as income.

**Mr. Burstow:** I am listening closely to the explanation for retaining war pensions in the measure. Have the Government considered using regulations instead of specifying war pensions in the Bill? Such an approach permits the addition of benefits over time. If the Minister accepts that there is little fraud against war pensions, why not consider using regulations and removing the provision? The Government would thus not insult war pensioners.

**Angela Eagle:** We are not insulting war pensioners by stating in a measure that it is possible to commit fraud against war pensions. I agree that only a trickle of war pensioners have committed fraud, none of which has been sanctioned. We have been open about the figures in our debates. We do not prosecute when it is against the public interest. However, it is possible to commit fraud against war pensions. Including that possibility in the measure does not mean that the Government claim that all war pensioners defraud the system.

**Mr. Pickles:** The Minister is right to say that the clause is symbolic and conveys a message. However, including war pensions conveys a bad message for the Government. I am confident that she has examined the figures, so will she answer a simple question? How many war pensioners in the past five years, or the past year, have committed the offence twice?

**Angela Eagle:** The hon. Gentleman asks a question to which, like those in referendums, he knows the answer. In the past year or so, there have been six cases of war pensioners defrauding the system. None has been prosecuted and none has so far repeated the offence. As I said earlier, we have been as open as possible about the figures. However, that does not mean that the provision should not be included in the Bill. I emphasise that the Government do not claim that war pensioners are fraudsters, but we want to allow the Bill to extend as far as necessary in case there is a problem in future.

Amendment No. 18 uses the term "state retirement pension". It is widely used but has no meaning in law. The reference to "any retirement pension" may appear too broad, and I suspect that that led to the amendment. However, it should be considered in the context of "disqualifying benefit" in clause 7(8). It defines sanctionable benefits as

"any disqualifying benefit other than"

and lists the exceptions, including "any retirement pension".

Subsection (8) defines a disqualifying benefit as

"any benefit under the Jobseekers Act 1995"

or its Northern Ireland equivalent, or

"any benefit under the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992",

its Northern Ireland equivalent or "any war pension". The Bill therefore refers to any retirement pension that is paid under the 1992 Act.

We commonly describe those pensions as "state retirement pensions". The phrase covers the basic pension, the new second-tier pension or the old state

*[Angela Eagle]*

earnings-related pension scheme. Other pensions, such as private and public sector occupational pensions, are not paid under the 1992 Act. There is therefore no need to tighten the definition because, perhaps despite appearances, the Bill makes the necessary provision.

We strongly believe that clause 7 and the two-strikes provision are important. We therefore oppose Liberal Democrat Members' attempts to remove them. The two-strikes requirement sends an important signal that we will not tolerate continued defrauding of the benefit system and that we will continue to search for methods of protecting public funds from people who believe that they can defraud the system indiscriminately. All the amendments are unacceptable and I hope that they will be withdrawn.

**Mr. Webb:** The Minister, with her usual prescience, guessed right: we are unconvinced by the responses. The best that the Government can do on war pensions, which united the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats, is to say that if we squeeze other parts of the system, pressure will be brought to bear on war pensions and that that will lead to a mysterious surge in serial, bogus war pension applications. That seems practically absurd. Regrettably, this is a case of a Department that, at this end of the building, does not accept amendments to its Bills—however flawed they may be—on principle, regardless of the merits of the arguments.

7.30 pm

On the question whether the sanctions provisions should be in the Bill at all, I am grateful to the Minister for making at least some attempt to respond to the question, "What about the children?" She mentioned hardship provisions, and said that the sanctions would affect only the personal allowance, not the other parts of the benefit. However, she seems to be holding two mutually inconsistent positions. The first is that the sanctions are going to hurt and will be a deterrent. She believes that they will put people off, because people will know that if they are bad boys, the sanctions will hurt. Then she says that they will not hurt the children because there will be hardship provisions.

Those two statements cannot simultaneously be true. Either the sanctions are not going to hurt, in which case everything that the Minister claims for the Bill will not work; or they will hurt, in which case they will also hurt the children. It seems to me that, within a benefit unit, when the only income coming in is being paid to the claimant, about whom we are arguing—

**Angela Eagle** *rose—*

**Mr. Webb:** This is very exciting; I give way to the Minister.

**Angela Eagle:** What I have tried to say is that there are protections for the children, and that there is also a balance to be struck between getting the deterrence right and indiscriminately hurting the innocent. The idea is that the provisions strike that balance, which is what I was attempting to get across to the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Webb:** The hon. Lady did, indeed, use the word "balance". However, the question is whether any diminution of the living standards of a child is acceptable. Can we go any way down that road when trying to strike a balance with the other things that we are trying to achieve? The rights and welfare of the child should be inviolate in these circumstances, and the punishment should not leave a household, or benefit unit, below the poverty line.

The Minister seemed to suggest that, because one part of the total amount of benefit was being sanctioned, it could somehow be ring-fenced and that the welfare of the child would not be prejudiced because the money intended for the adult would go down, but the money intended for the children would not. It is clearly an absurd notion that the flow of funds into a household can somehow be ring-fenced. Although one part of the money is nominally paid in respect of the adult and another part in respect of the children, in practice that money all goes into one pot in that household. As I said earlier, the first thing that happens is that the necessities are paid for. Necessities such as food and bills do not go away. What is left is then spent on what the household needs.

**Angela Eagle:** Given that, after a first conviction, an individual will receive plenty of warning not to do it again, and be told what will happen if he or she is convicted of a second offence, does the hon. Gentleman think that that individual should take any personal responsibility for his or her future actions and the effect that they may have on his or her children?

**Mr. Webb:** I absolutely think that they should take such responsibility. The question is if they breach that personal responsibility, who should suffer—the individual or the children? The Minister appears to be happy that the children would suffer as well as the parent. She has said precisely that. She has said that the appropriate penalty is a loss of income to the household. All the members of the household will suffer. They are not ring-fenced. A person who does something that we all agree is wrong, and who has committed the crime twice, is presumably not the kind of person to say, "Well, I'll keep the money for the kids and make sure that they are all right, while I take it on the chin." Indeed, the contrary would be the case.

**Angela Eagle:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for being so generous and giving way again.

All through the debate, the hon. Gentleman has said that he is happy for these people to go to prison. Does not he think that household incomes and children might suffer when that happens, probably in a far worse way than would be caused by a benefit sanction lasting 13 weeks?

**Mr. Webb:** So far as I am aware—the Minister may correct me on this point—the spouse and children of someone in prison retain full benefit entitlement proportionate to the size of the family that remains to be supported. *[Interruption.]* An intervention from a sedentary position suggests that prison would impose a bigger financial penalty.

Let us assume that a person—to make life simple, let us say a father—is in prison and has gone out of the household. The benefits system determines how much money the mother and children need to live on. Unless the Department of Social Security is saying that the benefit rate for what is left under the provisions is enough

for a family to live on, that family will have a better standard of living than if it had an extra mouth to feed and a less than proportionate increase in benefit. Hon. Members have not grasped the point that a family whose father is in prison will have one mouth fewer to feed, but under the provisions it will have lost the sanctionable part of the money. Materially, its living standards would, therefore, be higher in the former case.

Imprisonment is an extreme penalty. I mentioned community service. Assuming that we consider community service to be a penalty—there might be those on the Conservative Benches who do not—why would not it be an appropriate response? It would penalise only the person who had committed the crime, not their children.

The Government have said that they want to abolish child poverty: they want no children—zero—in poverty. The measures, applied to a sanctioned family, will leave it in poverty, below the benefit level. So long as the legislation remains on the statute book and is being applied to families with children, the Government will never achieve their stated goal of abolishing child poverty.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) suggested that we should delay the implementation of the provisions. In a slightly convoluted argument, the Minister suggested that a delay of two years would be a delay of more than two years because it would take time for things to get going. However, even if the Bill became law tomorrow, it would take time to get going, so my hon. Friend's proposal would entail implementation two years later than the Government's implementation and no longer. That time could be better used to examine the effect on children, for example, of sanctions that are already in place, before introducing any more.

The Government have cited one piece of research that they have carried out. There is no evidence that that research has informed the way in which the sanctions are structured. The Minister has not tried to argue that. The Government have done some research and, so far as I can see, ignored it. The evidence is that families, and particularly children, suffer in these circumstances.

There is clearly a fundamental difference of principle between ourselves and the other two parties. It would probably be fruitless to divide the House on this issue, but we shall certainly continue to campaign—in this Parliament and beyond—for the principle that punishing an innocent person for the guilt of another is not a humane punishment policy. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

*Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.*

*Order for Third Reading read.*

7.37 pm

**Mr. Rooker:** I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I apologise for my absence during the last part of the previous debate. I am sure that hon. Members will appreciate the reasons. I am grateful to the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), for dealing with the last group of amendments.

This is a short Bill, which I described earlier as a technical adjustment of the Government's anti-fraud measures. It is a modest measure, but a necessary one. Each year the Department loses at least £2 billion through benefit fraud. That is more than the cost of administration of the Benefits Agency, which is part of the Department of Social Security. Hon. Members on both sides of the House agree that that level of fraud is unacceptable. The Bill will definitely help to reduce those losses and help the Department to achieve its targets for reducing fraud and error.

The Bill contains a range of measures. It is not necessary to list them in great detail. The key measure will require banks, building societies and other institutions to provide information when there is a reasonable suspicion that a person has committed or intends to commit benefit fraud. The Bill contains strict safeguards to ensure that that power is not abused. The code of practice will be properly consulted on, as I said earlier. It will be the guiding light under which the powers in the Bill are operated and it will be able to be used in court cases.

As my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security said in the earlier debate, there is a balance to be struck. We could have left things as they were, although they were unacceptable, or we could have taken draconian measures. Instead, we have taken the modest measures in the Bill and will use our best endeavours to attack the level of fraud with which we have to cope.

The Bill also contains a power to exchange information with social security administrations in other countries to combat transnational benefit fraud. This is a limited, modest measure that will rightly be curtailed by proper Government-to-Government agreements. The Bill also introduces the "two strikes and you're out" sanction.

We make no great claims for the Bill, which is designed to be a deterrent. We do not think that it will affect more than 500 people a year. We do not know how many of those will have children, but the fact remains that it is designed to be a deterrent. We must be seen to be taking some measures, in the public interest, against the hard core of repeat benefit fraud offenders.

The Bill contains a power to apply civil penalties swiftly when an employer has colluded with an employee's benefit fraud. Such collusion is serious, but we want to be able to offer the employers concerned a quick civil penalty as an alternative to prosecution. We think that that will be in their interests, while also—we hope—acting as a deterrent. The amount of evidence must be the same, and the case will be dealt with by means of either prosecution or acceptance of the civil penalty. There is no question of there being no proper investigation of collusive employers.

We make no major claim for the Bill. We do not suggest that it will eliminate benefit fraud. As in all walks of life, there will always be crooks and fraudsters. We believe, however, that the Bill constitutes a reasonable attack on the current scale of benefit fraud in closing some of the more obvious loopholes that we have encountered in recent years. I hope that it will be given an unopposed Third Reading.

7.41 pm

**Mrs. Lait:** I was concerned for a moment, because I feared that we would not have a Third Reading speech from the Minister, and with it an opportunity to offer the ultimate valedictory wishes—or is it penultimate?

**Mr. Rooker:** Final.

**Mrs. Lait:** That means that there will be no social security questions on 14 May, which tells many of us many things. We are grateful to the Minister.

Discussion of this Bill has been interesting, easy and amiable. The cast of characters has been similar to that of previous debates. Perhaps the only moment of excitement occurred during debate on the last group of amendments, when the words "benefits unit" were used instead of "households", "people" or "individuals". It struck me then that the social policy professor, rather than the politician, was coming to the fore.

We have debated all the issues at some length. In one or two respects we shall still want reassurance in the form of Government action, although of course we never know: by 7 June it might be our action that is required rather than that of the present Government, in which event we might implement the Bill and ensure the provision of effective fraud prevention measures.

I have just noticed that, according to the television monitor, I should be talking about NHS appointments and political bias—in Westminster Hall, moreover. The monitor is clearly very confused. I do not plan to talk about political bias in NHS appointments, although it is obvious that it exists; I shall talk about the Social Security Fraud Bill, and the various matters that we shall monitor to ensure that the Government's intentions are implemented.

The Government have given me some reassurances about how closely they will listen to consultation, and about their negotiation—which we hope will take place—on the code of practice. As the Minister said, the code of practice is the key to many of the provisions relating to authorised officers, single points of contact, trawling and costs. We hope that a Government, or a Department, may be generous enough to produce a list of overseas countries with which contracts will be exchanged. We hope it might even be possible for the Government to see their way to becoming a member of CIFAS. We also hope very much that consultation will be productive, and that the fears and concerns expressed by various organisations will be dealt with. We trust that that will involve negotiation leading to agreement, rather than a stand-off.

The Bill makes a mockery of the programme motion system. It has gone through its stages largely as a result of agreement, although there may have been disagreement on certain points. There has been no trouble at all. The fact that we should have been debating Third Reading between 9 pm and 10 pm shows that the programme motion system is far too rigid, and that we would be better off with the old system.

I have no intention of opposing the Bill. We have supported its principles; we are just sad that it has taken the Government four years to produce them. We hope very much that, modest measure as it is—at this point I recall Winston Churchill's comment that Clement Attlee was a modest man with much to be modest about—the Bill will achieve what the Government want it to achieve.

7.45 pm

**Mr. Webb:** I am not sure that I can emulate the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) by being in two places at once, but I shall do my best.

I think I am right in saying that the Bill we are discussing now is identical—apart from the reference to privilege—to the Bill that we discussed on Second Reading. However, the House will be relieved to know that I will not repeat my Second Reading speech.

It is symptomatic and regrettable, as I said in Committee, that the Department's strategy on Bills does not involve seeing the contributions of Opposition parties as a chance to improve them. Once Bills have been to another place, where the Government are forced to listen to the other side, the strategy is to steamroller them through. Debates such as the one on war pensions illustrate the fact that this Bill could have been made better, even without the sacrifice of any great points of principle. It is a pity that the opportunity was not taken.

As I said earlier, the Liberal Democrats will not oppose Third Reading. Notwithstanding the parodies of our position that we have heard, we are as committed as anyone to the elimination of benefit fraud. As we see the passing of new powers for the Government, it strikes me that they have failed to use existing powers. The fact that they can use those powers to force local authorities to crack down on fraud but have done so only once in the past 12 months, in the case of Northampton borough council, suggests that when seeking new powers Governments might be asked to use the powers that they have rather more effectively. Why that has not happened in this case remains a mystery to me.

We hope that the obtaining of third-party information will help to identify fraud. We have yet to be convinced that the seeking of some three quarters of a million bits of information each year can be policed very effectively, even if only a limited number of people are doing it. If I were an authorised officer, I could cover my tracks fairly effectively in the midst of a blitz of requests for information, with one or two rogue ones. I am still not convinced that we shall not have to return to the supervision of authorised officers. Fresh in our minds is the debate about sanctions, which I will not rehearse but which constitutes our principal misgiving about the Bill.

My colleagues and I wish the Minister well in his retirement. I am sure that long before I was a Member he had contributed a great deal to the procedures of the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.*

## DELEGATED LEGISLATION

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),*

BROADCASTING

That the draft Broadcasting (Subtitling) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 3rd April, be approved.

INTERNATIONAL IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES

That the draft Advisory Centre on WTO Law (Immunities and Privileges) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 10th April, be approved.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 23rd April, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Financial Investigations (Northern Ireland) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 23rd April, be approved.

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 23rd April, be approved.

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) (Amendment) (No. 3) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 23rd April, be approved.

CRIMINAL LAW

That the draft Sex Offenders (Notice Requirements) (Foreign Travel) Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 23rd April, be approved.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 23rd April, be approved.

REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE

That the draft Representation of the People (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 2001, which were laid before this House on 23rd April, be approved.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

*Question agreed to.*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With permission, I shall put together the remaining motions relating to delegated legislation.

*Ordered,*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

That the Education Standards Fund (England) Regulations 2001 be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

That the Education (Student Support) Regulations 2001 be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

That the Financing of Maintained Schools (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2001 be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

## Motorway Construction (EU Policy)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

7.49 pm

**Mr. Anthony Steen** (Totnes): I am sure that the House will be pleased that this important Adjournment debate has begun so early. It is good to see that we have a quality Minister here to reply: I assure him that I shall give him plenty of time to respond.

I once secured an Adjournment debate on English wine, which began at 4 pm. It ran for six and a half hours, and I think that Members who were present learned quite a bit about English wine, including the wines on the House of Commons wine list. They come from various parts of the country, and some excellent wines come from my constituency.

This debate is a little later than the English wine debate, but there is plenty of time—I think that there are two and a half hours or more—to amplify on the extraordinary misfortunes of my constituent. I am sure that when the Minister hears about the case, he will wish to do all that he possibly can to help my constituent. More important, the debate raises national and international issues, on which he will perhaps need time to reflect in considering what steps the British Government can take: if not before the general election, we will have an opportunity after it to deal with some of the issues that I shall raise.

A well-established principle of British law is that, when a state sequestrates land or buildings through compulsory purchase or otherwise, it pays compensation to the affected party at market value. Everyone in this country accepts that, and rightly so. However, I am advised that in France, planning permissions go through very quickly when the state wishes to carry out major infrastructure works because it offers more than the market value in order to get cracking. Roads, airports, railways, reservoirs and the like get built in record time as landowners fall over themselves to encourage the development that the Government wish to have on their property.

The payment of compensation to those affected by state-funded enterprises does not work so well in all European Union countries, particularly in some Mediterranean ones. Portugal, Spain and Greece do not offer the same protection or compensation to residents affected by infrastructure programmes that the state wishes to carry out. The idea of restitution—putting the affected party in no worse a position in monetary terms than he was in before the development—is a well-established principle in Britain. If a Government choose to drive a motorway through someone's garden, they are committed to restoring not the garden but the value of the property to which the garden is attached, providing recompense to its unfortunate owner for giving up his property. I am not sure that there is quite the same arrangement in Roman-Dutch law, or in the current laws of Romania, the Czech Republic or Estonia, but they are all new entrant countries that will inevitably apply for large tranches of EU money to modernise their infrastructure when they join the EU.

This debate is about compensation for individuals adversely affected by EU-funded projects in other member states; whether it should be paid; if so, who should pay it; the level at which it should be paid; and the

*[Mr. Anthony Steen]*

method of claiming. In Britain and other developed EU countries, the assets of individuals are protected against state sequestration, either under compulsory purchase provisions or other legislation. When roads are built, under section 282 of the Highways Act 1980, the highway authorities are empowered to fund the construction of noise barriers. The Noise Insulation Regulations 1975 prescribe that residential properties exposed to levels of traffic noise in excess of 68 decibels as a result of the construction of new roads should be provided with noise insulation.

In Europe, EC directive 337/85 states that the environmental effects of public works such as new roads, including increased levels of noise, should be assessed and published as an environmental statement with legislative orders for schemes to allow public comment. I cite the case of my constituents, Mr. and Mrs. John Wood of South Brent in the Dartmoor national park, to illustrate how the EU has stood by and allowed EU nationals and British subjects to suffer damage and loss. They saw the value of their property in Portugal nearly halved without any compensation.

The way in which Mr. Wood conducted himself in making inquiries regarding the purchase of the property in Portugal in 1987 was exemplary. He carried out inquiries with the best possible firms and spent much time there. There were no plans for any motorways at that time. The house that he bought was known as Quinta da Madeira, a 100-year-old farm house in Portuguese style set in a peaceful and tranquil idyll with wonderful views to the south taking in the coast. It was a perfect spot to retire to. Today, Mr. Wood's property is positioned like one of those castles between England and Wales that the marcher lords built: it is high on the embankment directly over the motorway, with a sheer 100 ft drop to the carriageway below. He is very careful when he opens his front door.

In January 1991, Mr. Wood received a letter from the experienced agents that he employed, Abreu and Marques, in which the senior partner stated that no developments were planned regarding building a motorway. Two months later, the director of roads stated that the motorway was already under construction and mentioned something about lost correspondence.

The IP1 motorway, as it is now known, is constructed with pre-stressed concrete, which generates far more decibels than a Bakerloo line train coming into Piccadilly Circus. If you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, have ever been on a platform at Piccadilly Circus when a Bakerloo line train has come in, you will know that it is pretty noisy, but it is less noisy than the IP1 motorway when cars travel on the pre-stressed concrete, which went out with the ark in Britain. Hearing is believing: the noise is continuous and ever growing. I am told that, in Portugal, on warm summer evenings, as lorries pound over the surface at the speed limit or above, the noise can be heard 12 km away or more. The peace and tranquillity of the area have been shattered.

The failure of the Portuguese Government to choose an appropriate surface, such as porous asphalt—with which the Minister will be familiar—which dampens sound, or whisper concrete, as it is known, cries out for explanation. Was it to save money that they put that pre-stressed concrete down—the slabs of concrete that we saw on bypasses in the 1960s and 1970s? Did they take the European money and say, "We will use the money we have from Europe, but we will only top it up with very little more"?

In 1991-92, the Portuguese Government told residents that the motorway would be a garden highway. Perhaps the Portuguese have a different idea of gardens because there are no trees by the motorway, and no plants by its sides. There are no flowers. As there are no sound barriers, the garden highway gives off a piercing noise day and night.

After the motorway was constructed in 1994, the noise levels were so appalling that Mr. and Mrs. Wood decided to put the home on the market. Their haven of tranquillity had turned into an unmitigated nightmare. Quinta da Madeira is a most beautiful property by all accounts. It is just the place that any of us would love to retire to, but the sound from the motorway, which is directly underneath the house, was so great that the Woods, in their retirement, could not face the prospect of living there. Therefore, they approached Hamptons International—there is no better estate agent in that area—which said that it was

"a 100 year old property renovated in 1989 to a very high standard preserving many original features. Magnificent sea and country views"—

that was, of course, before the motorway had such a devastating effect.

During 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998, many people viewed the house, but not one person made an offer. In July 1999, a new agency was appointed, which placed the property on the market at the 1995 price. More than 25 people viewed the house and, in January this year, the Woods received their first and only offer. Before I reveal what it was, and to keep the Minister in suspense, I shall quote the agency's words. It is an exclusive property consultancy, known as Lifestyle Properties, affiliated to none other than Sotheby's International and it reached the following conclusion:

"all clients have a major reservation."—

the Minister will be able to guess what it is—

"The location right next to the IP1 motorway is definitely off putting as people with a desire for a home in the Algarve do not want to live next to a four lane motorway without any sound reducing elements. We have had around 15 clients that viewed your villa. The clients have been English, Dutch and German, but were all put off by the motorway location.

We still find the asking price of £395,000 very competitive in the current market, and as discussed . . . without the motorway, an asking price of around £500,000 would not have been unreasonable."

The price of the property has been reduced by about a third and, moreover, the property has been locked up because it cannot be used properly—unless one likes viewing cars on motorways from the top of a hill, like a marcher lord in his castle. It is the last place in which to seek peace and tranquillity.

For the past six or seven years, the property has been a dead investment. After seven years, the Woods calculated that they had lost some £250,000 of taxed earnings through no fault of their own, and despite having taken every precaution before they made the purchase. Apparently, there were some rumours in 1992 that the trans-European motorway would be built, and although it is not yet connected to Lisbon, that is the intention.

I am told that the motorway is only the first in a series of trans-European motorways, so this is a test case, and I am delighted to have plenty of time to explore it with the Minister. Such motorways will be built not only by Mediterranean European countries, but—no doubt—by all the countries that join the EU through enlargement. Mr. Wood is a victim of the process, and I am sure that the Government, in the dying days of this Parliament, will note his case as an issue that needs to be addressed.

The Government will be relieved to hear that I place no blame on them at this stage. However, they can use their influence as one of the most powerful members of the EU to see that the situation is rectified—if not for the past, then for the future.

When the Woods heard about the rumours of the planned motorway, they tried to find out its exact route from the Portuguese authorities. The EU insists on a consultation process, but in this case, apparently, it was a shabby affair and was not a consultation process as we would understand it. The conduct of the Woods could be used to illustrate a good practice manual, but the Portuguese authorities failed to consult or to listen to local residents.

The motorway will eventually stretch across the Algarve from Lisbon to Spain. The authorities were anxious to build it quickly for Expo '92, and the concrete was probably laid for that reason. Thousands of people, including British, German, Dutch and Swedish people, will have had their investments badly affected by the motorway, and noise nuisance will have taken millions of pounds off the value of the properties affected, for the Portuguese and many other EU nationals.

I have set out the problem, and I now wish to explore what can be done. It is irrelevant that the Woods are successful and attractive people, with many friends in both South Brent and the Algarve. They are popular and generous, and it is worth noting that they are not sharks or harsh—they just wanted a little place in the Algarve to which to retire.

What can be done? The Portuguese Government have been a net receiver of EU funds since 1974. I do not begrudge them that, because the money has been necessary. The EU has done a good job, and the Portuguese recognise that. However, I doubt whether the Portuguese would have embarked on the construction of the trans-European motorway but for the injection of EU funding. I visited Lisbon recently as a member of the European Scrutiny Committee, and we were well received by Portuguese Members of Parliament and officials. We were seen as a fair and popular country with which they would like to do business. That is why the Minister's reply, which will be beamed across the Algarve, will be of especial interest, as many people see Britain as fair in such cases.

I do not begrudge the Portuguese any EU money, because it has revolutionised—if that is the right term—that country. The Portuguese economy is now very strong, and I am advised that Portugal will soon become a net contributor to the EU. That is good news. However, in granting funds for the motorway in the 1990s, the European Commission must have been guilty of neglect, indifference or both. It must have failed to inquire about the materials that would be used in the construction or to satisfy itself that no individual would suffer financial loss as a result of the construction.

Did the Commission fail to ask the right questions of the Portuguese authorities? Did it also fail to take the necessary steps to ensure that the road surface would not infringe its objectives on noise and pollution? After all, those are buzz words for the EU and a series of rules, regulations and directives about noise have been introduced since 1970. The current EU legislation on noise deals with emissions at source, mainly cars, aircraft, generators, lawn mowers, food mixers and coffee grinders. A Green Paper was published last July that outlined the action that might be taken at Community level, and set out indicators and legislative proposals. A draft directive has since been published not on the question of compensation, but on noise. The Commission ducked the issue by saying that the matter had nothing to do with it, but clearly noise emanating from a motorway built with EU funds has an EU dimension and locus.

The argument may be that compensatory awards for the impact of major infrastructure works are a matter for the member state under the umbrella of the popular term "subsidiarity". Not many people know the meaning of the word, but it appears to translate as "the EU is not responsible". It is fair enough to argue that the member state was responsible, but the Commission was negligent in failing to satisfy itself that the Portuguese had appropriate legislation to cover the issue before it granted the funds. To ensure what is called a level playing field, EU grants should not be given to a member state that does not have legislative procedures to provide at least minimum compensation for those affected by infrastructure developments that are funded by EU money. However, it is not a level playing field and the money should not have been paid until the legislation was in place.

Once that condition had been satisfied, the trans-European motorway could have been constructed in Portugal, as the Commission would have been satisfied that no individual would be adversely affected financially by its construction without being able to claim compensation. The Commission has done that in other areas by attaching conditions to its grants, so why not here?

On 9 February 1990, an article in the *Algarve Resident*, a local newspaper, said:

"EC Suspends 10 million Destined for Trans-Algarve Highway".

This distinguished periodical goes on to say that Jacques Delors—that household name—

"president of the European Community Commission has confirmed that the commission has decided to suspend financial help for the construction of the Trans-Algarve highway.

The Commission had previously agreed to give money to the project, but this aid will be cut off because the Portuguese authorities responsible (i.e. the Ministry of Public Works) have 'infringed community rights in not having had sufficient regard for the likely impact of the work on the local environment.'

This Norm, (directive 337/85) should have been written into the Portuguese Legislature, but wasn't. Because of this there were no legal guidelines for questions such as expressways, airports, and industrial pollution in Portugal, and this has led to E.E.C."—

as it then was—

"intervention into this country's affairs."

In the words of the Minister of Public Works, Transport and Communications, there is "nothing for nobody" until Portugal complies with the directive.

Jacques Delors suspended the aid because Portugal did not have its house in order. Now matters have moved on, and he should not have allowed the motorway to be built

*[Mr. Anthony Steen]*

without recognising that there was a hole where the compensatory legislation ought to have been. I thought that the Minister would like to hear that interesting point.

As the EU relies on a difference basis of law from that which is applied in the United Kingdom, the Commission should have—and could still—take action in enlisting the first protocol of the European convention on human rights, to which Portugal is a signatory. The protocol deals specifically with the right of individuals to enjoy tranquillity and peace in their own property. I do not wish to limit the argument to the breach of the first protocol or to article 288/EC, which established that an individual could be successful when the Commission acted directly and caused him damage and loss as a result of its actions.

In the case of Mulder *v.* Council (1992) ECR 1-3061, milk producers in the Netherlands had agreed to stop milk production. As a result, the Council wrongly assumed that they had gone out of production and fixed a new levy scheme without taking them into account. There was a direct failure on the part of the Commission in that case, so compensation was paid. In this case, although the Commission is not directly responsible because it has channelled the money to Portugal, I argue that this is a question of the Commission not acting directly but employing agents—the Portuguese authorities—to act for it. Just as when our Government build roads they commission the county councils to carry out work on their behalf, I suggest that the Commission got the Portuguese authorities to act as its agent and gave them money to spend on a particular project. Although the Mulder case is not on all fours with this one, it indicates that when the Commission is found to be responsible for loss, as it was in the Mulder case, it pays what it should have paid in the first place.

I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that individuals in any member state should not find their lands or properties sequestrated or devalued by the actions of another member state using supranational funds. The Portuguese authorities siphoned off some of the superstate's funds to which member states had contributed. As matters stand, Mr. Wood has no way of being recompensed.

The Portuguese Government applied to the EU for money from our taxpayers. The Commission gave money from our taxpayers to the Portuguese to build a motorway. In so doing, and in not ensuring that the compensatory mechanisms were enshrined in Portuguese law, a British national has lost money that he invested in another member state. That has very serious ramifications for how the EU works and how it spends its money.

The Portuguese Government have thrown up their hands and said that it is nothing to do with them. The British Government, I am sure, will express similar sentiments, saying that they cannot look outside their own geographical boundaries. The EU, while recognising noise nuisance—and it was responsible for granting money to build a motorway in the first place—will no doubt deny its negligence, exalting the principle of subsidiarity in its defence. It cannot have it both ways. The EU can argue that this has nothing to do with it and that a member state is responsible, in which case it has a duty to ensure that by giving money the conditions should be in place that the compensatory powers exist in the member state. I am quite comfortable with the subsidiarity argument, but the alternative is for the EU to argue that it got it wrong and was directly responsible for this through its servants and agents and now has to make good the loss.

This debate raises major constitutional principles and questions of legal responsibility. It is not really fair on the Minister, at this time of night—early though it is—suddenly to land him with a matter that is probably more suitable for the Prime Minister. However, I have great ambitions for the hon. Gentleman, and I am sure that this is good training to see whether he can get out of this spot and deal with the matter as a future Prime Minister would. Clearly, he does not like to see injustice being done—he is a man of principle, well known for his sympathy and tolerance. I feel sure that now that I am raising a major constitutional principle, one of his first appointments tomorrow will be with the Prime Minister to say that in a fascinating Adjournment debate, matters of great concern were raised in a responsible, balanced and mature way.

In effect, the EU has raided its kitty—currently standing at £54 billion a year—because one member state wanted to accelerate the speed of its economic development without regard to the implications for the environment, noise emissions or individual properties. Surely it should do that only if the laws in the member state are up to speed in terms of pollution, noise management, environmental damage, accounting principles, value for money, public consultation procedures and the like. However, that can happen only if there is a new raft of officials, which I would be very reluctant to support. How can the EU enforce its rules and regulations unless it employs inspectors, enforcement officers and officials who are outside the responsibility of any member state?

We have a superstate giving out supranational funding to individual member states without sufficient monitoring. To have sufficient monitoring, the superstate would need inspection teams of supranational officials swarming around, checking, reporting, having endless meetings, occupying office buildings and administering budgets. That is what the British citizen was told would never happen, but it will happen if the case of Mr. Wood is to succeed.

If the EU is to avoid setting up another tier of bureaucracy, it has to use the bureaucracies of other countries, so that there is cross-border enforcement. Under that scheme, money given to the Portuguese would result in enforcement by the Germans, for example. Existing officials in member states could police each other. That would avoid having another layer of bureaucracy to enforce EU handouts.

There are two other possible ways to tackle the problem. First, a compensatory element could be included in all infrastructure grants to member states. That would cover claims made by individuals in member states affected by such developments. Once paid out by the member states, those sums would be recompensed by the EU, on receipt of proof of payment. A new EU law might be required to determine the levels of compensation available. However, whereas subsidiarity—under which member states pass their own laws—is delegation locally and regionally, power would be centralised if a compensatory element were added to the infrastructure grant. That compensation would then have to be accounted for.

I would go down the subsidiarity route, were it not for the fact that Mr. Wood has lost £200,000 or more. The relevant laws have not been passed. That option may be

available for the future, but what is to be done about Mr. Wood and his financial loss now? I should add that no additional money was added to the award from the EU for the motorway in Portugal, which was money only for its construction.

My second solution would be for Mr. Wood to go the whole hog: having lost as much as £250,000, why should he not lose the same amount again by resorting to the European Court of Human Rights? That is guaranteed to cost a lot of money, as top lawyers argue that his rights have been infringed.

Mr. Wood has recently retired, having sold a successful business—which, paradoxically, manufactures motorway signs, among other things—but I am not sure that Mr. Wood would want to throw good money after bad. That would no doubt be the result if he employed a fistful of lawyers to fight his case in Strasbourg.

What will the Government do? What can they do? No doubt, thousands of British nationals have been affected, or will be affected, by economic distortions resulting from EU intervention to fund public infrastructure works to be installed in a member state, which the member state could not fund without EU money.

Mr. Wood's case vividly demonstrates individuals' vulnerability against the superstate. As bureaucracy gets bigger, it will be harder and harder to pin down those responsible. Everyone will pass the buck, and the problem will be exacerbated by all the different languages involved.

I have given an example of an abuse perpetrated by the European superstate against an individual in one of its own member states. Britain is one of the richest countries in Europe, but we are ceding ever more authority to the supra-authority that the EU has become, and which is answerable to no one.

Last Friday, the National Audit Office reported on the level of bureaucratic waste and funding in the EU. The report should concern every taxpayer in the EU. Not only are we not getting value for money, but the supra-European state is failing to protect the interests of its individual constituents.

I am sure that the Minister will have read the main findings of the NAO report, which have been highlighted by NAO head Sir John Bourn. Those findings include significant weaknesses in the management of the budget and an unacceptably high rate of error in payment transactions—a rate similar to what had been found in previous years. There was also serious concern that little progress had been made since 1999. That huge bureaucratic monster has been allowed to deprive my constituent of the hard-earned cash that he had accumulated over the years to buy his retirement property. There is something very wrong about that.

Mr. Wood is not just a victim of the system. He is illustrative of the way in which assets can be sequestrated by state intervention, without anyone caring a toss about an individual's future welfare or health.

I lay down the gauntlet to the Government to take up Mr. Wood's case, and to make it a cause célèbre.

8.25 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on obtaining this debate on European Union policy as regards motorway construction and noise pollution, and on his highly informed—indeed exhaustively researched—speech. The debate gives me the opportunity to set out the United Kingdom's position on this important matter, and to show how the Government are taking forward the transport agenda in this country in a way that respects and protects the environment.

Needless to say, I shall make frequent reference to the application of European legislation, and our British experience may well have valuable lessons for the unfortunate case of Mr. Wood, which the hon. Member for Totnes described so graphically. The hon. Gentleman raised a number of wide-ranging concerns; not least among them were matters relating to the funding of infrastructure projects in the EU. Such matters are complex, and the hon. Gentleman has offered many novel solutions.

Specifically, the hon. Member for Totnes asked me to consider compensation arrangements in the EU in relation to motorway schemes. I undertake to do so, and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman about issues raised in the debate on which it might be appropriate for the Government to take further action in the EU. I also assure the hon. Gentleman that I am convinced that the important constitutional issues to which he has drawn the House's attention will be considered at the highest levels. However, the hon. Gentleman will understand that I cannot comment on the specific case in Portugal that he has set out.

We must not lose sight of the fact that well-developed and modern transport infrastructure is vital to the competitive strength of any economy. The hon. Member for Totnes does not dispute that, in western Europe, politicians have long recognised the need for an effective and efficient trans-European network. The demand for such a network comes from the citizens, as individuals and as economic agents. They wish to live and work in a sustainable economic environment that allows them to trade, communicate and travel throughout the EU, and into its neighbouring countries, as easily, quickly and cheaply as possible.

The importance that the EU attaches to good transport infrastructure is recognised in the very significant sums of money that it makes available to its development, particularly through the structural and cohesion funds. Such funding is a major element in the realisation of the key EU objectives of promoting economic and social progress and of gradually removing differences in living standards between the member states as well as between the regions. I note the progress that Portugal has made in that regard and, like the hon. Gentleman, I rejoice in that country's progress.

The European Union has also recognised growing concern about the adverse effects of new infrastructure. EU directive 85/337 made it a requirement for all member states to make public an assessment of the environmental impacts of major projects and their proposals for reducing the impacts. All EU member states are subject to the provisions of the environmental impact assessment. Annexe I to the directive lists those projects for which an environmental impact assessment is mandatory. Motorway construction is such a project. The 1997

*[Mr. Keith Hill]*

amendment to EC directive 85/337, among other things required that the determination on whether fully to assess smaller projects should be made public.

Before a decision on consent can be given for a proposed motorway, the developer is required to prepare an environmental statement containing detailed information about the proposal, its likely environmental effects, the proposed mitigation measures to offset any adverse effects and an outline of the main alternatives that have been studied. There must also be a summary of all that information in non-technical language. This is important because the environmental statement is made available not only to environmental and other bodies with an interest, but to the public, who may make representations accordingly.

Consent may not be granted until the environmental statement, and any representations made about it, have been taken into account, although I should make it clear that the environmental information does not itself determine whether the application is accepted or refused. Projects whose environmental effects are likely to be adverse may still be approved if there are other overriding considerations such as improvements to road safety.

I have set out the clear requirements in terms of European Union legislation, which I assume were applied—or ought to have been—in this case. It will be important for the hon. Gentleman to peruse the official record in some detail to advise his constituent, Mr. Wood, as to the possibilities for recourse set against the criteria laid down in European legislation that I described. I shall explain how we are handling these matters in the UK.

**Mr. Steen:** Before the Minister moves on, is he saying that Mr. Wood might have a stronger case if the Portuguese did not follow the procedures? They cannot do away with the motorway, nor would he suggest that. Is he more likely to be able to make a case for compensation if the procedures were not followed, or is that only a matter for regret?

**Mr. Hill:** The hon. Gentleman will understand that I am no lawyer. I am certainly no European Union lawyer—a particularly arcane area of study and pursuit. I am suggesting, however, that at least some of the provisions that I outlined would have been in place at the time that the motorway construction was undertaken and, therefore, might apply in this case; and that there were procedures that should certainly have been pursued according to European law. It would be very helpful if the hon. Gentleman and his constituent considered whether those procedures were applied, and then considered further action on the basis of that consideration. I will return to compensation later.

On the transport planning process in the United Kingdom, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, the Government published their White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" in July 1998. That document set out the way in which UK transport infrastructure projects were to be short-listed, decided upon and taken forward. The key element of planning transport was to get a regional approach to transport problems and their potential solutions. Regional planning guidance and regional transport strategies would look at where the problems were in the region and, after consultation with the relevant authorities and the public, put to the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions their proposals for transport infrastructure projects. If those were agreed by the Secretary of State, they would then come forward for funding either as part of the targeted programme of improvements on the trunk road network, in local transport plans, or as part of the infrastructure programme from Railtrack or the train operating companies. That is part of the way in which we deal with such matters in the UK.

We recognised that that process could take some time and so we put in hand so-called multimodal studies that examine areas where there are transport problems and the various ways in which those might best be solved. They involve wide consultation. We now have the first of those reports and other studies will be reporting in the next few years.

Part of the comparison of the alternative solutions will be made using the "New Approach to Appraisal", which is designed to help to assess the implications of investment proposals against five criteria—safety, economy, environment, accessibility and integration. It enables us to compare different options for solving the same transport problem. In a number of instances, the most effective solution to a transport problem may be new or improved road infrastructure.

What do we do when we are dealing with new road infrastructure? Before those road proposals agreed by the Secretary of State are translated into projects on the ground, they go through processes set down in the Highways Act 1980 and the Acquisition of Land Act 1981, which provide an opportunity for those affected to register objections. If those objections cannot be resolved, a public inquiry may be held. Where road construction necessitates acquisition of land or property, the procedures provide for payment of compensation to owners based on market values. If the value of a property is reduced by the opening of a nearby road scheme, the owner may claim compensation.

Alternatives are investigated and the viable options narrowed down as a basis for public consultation about the proposed route and its environmental effects.

**Mr. Steen:** The hon. Gentleman says that compensation may be payable. Does that relate to the value of the property before and after building? Is that the compensation value?

**Mr. Hill:** I can answer that technical question with a little more confidence: I think that the answer is certainly yes.

After all responses to the consultation have been considered, a preferred route is announced and safeguarded from development. For those intending to buy a property in the area, the intention to build a scheme will show up in local authority searches. The hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that there were rumours and whispers about the Algarve scheme—evidently they were not present in any local authority materials that Mr. Wood may or may not have considered.

The preliminary design is then worked up and draft statutory orders are published under the Highways Act 1980 and the Acquisition of Land Act 1981, together with

an environmental statement, as required by EU directive 85/337/EEC. Anyone directly affected by the proposals, and public bodies with legal responsibilities for protecting various aspects of the environment, have a statutory right of objection. If there are any unresolved statutory objections to the published draft orders, a local public inquiry will be held before an independent inspector. Once all objections, and the inspector's report if an inquiry was held, have been considered by the Secretary of State, a decision on the scheme is taken. The objectors are individually notified of the decision and a press notice is also issued. If the scheme proceeds, the land purchase orders are then made and the way is open for the construction contract to be awarded. That is the way we do it in this country. Clearly, EU directives impinge on our procedures—notably in respect of environmental impact.

I shall deal with noise policy and noise pollution—an issue of considerable concern in the case cited by the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Steen:** Before I mull over the points that the hon. Gentleman is about to make, I have some questions on environmental impact assessments. Are they not a bit of a red herring? I am familiar with them because a road at Slapton in my constituency was destroyed by the sea and, as it is a site of special scientific interest, an environmental impact assessment has to be carried out before a new road can be built. The assessment is a delaying tactic, is it not? It does not prevent anything from happening. The environmental impact statement is costly; it merely tells the Government, "You can go ahead, or you cannot go ahead". I may be wrong—I am not familiar with what such statements actually do. Can the Minister help me on that point?

**Mr. Hill:** In the House, the hon. Gentleman is famous as the hammer of bureaucracy and red tape—not least, of course, that which emanates from the European Union. However, I do not believe that he is right to describe environmental impact assessments as delaying tactics; sometimes, they are designed to meet precisely the type of problems that he outlines in the case of the unfortunate Mr. Wood—the question as to whether a proposed development will have an undesirable impact on the environment, not merely on flora and fauna, but on human beings as well.

**Mr. Steen:** I am all for them.

**Mr. Hill:** I am delighted to hear that my warm words have elicited the approbation of the hon. Gentleman. Obviously, he is pretty easy to persuade.

I shall say a few words about noise policy. Noise is one of the environmental issues to which we have given a great deal of thought. We recognised the benefit offered by quieter road surfaces—the hon. Gentleman spoke about those—and have promised that lower-noise surfacing will be used as a matter of course in all new infrastructure provision and maintenance work on the trunk road network. That means that lower-noise surfacing will be achieved without undue cost or disruption. In addition, we have undertaken to resurface all concrete roads within the next 10 years, including those that would not otherwise be due for resurfacing, because it is now recognised that such roads give rise to much greater concern about noise.

In total, we anticipate that more than 60 per cent. of the trunk road network will have been resurfaced by April 2011. *[Interruption.]* Again, I am glad that, from a sedentary position, the hon. Gentleman expresses his pleasure at that commitment, which is of significance to the A30, in an area not remote from his constituency. We have ensured that the Highways Agency will deal with particularly severe cases of noise arising from existing roads, where the road surface does not need early replacement, including the provision of noise barriers.

I turn now to compensation for noise. The adverse indirect effects of road construction, especially those built to motorway standards, on adjacent interests in land have been recognised for many years in this country. Before the 1970s, compensation was paid only in cases where land was compulsorily acquired for the construction. In the Land Compensation Act 1973, it was recognised that the noise, fumes and some other effects arising from traffic on a new road could have a significant effect on the value of properties some distance away.

There are inevitably some restrictions on the grounds for compensation. The adverse effects considered are noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke, artificial lighting and the discharge of any solid or liquid substance. The effects must be attributable to a newly constructed road, not to the increased use of an existing road. The claim is judged on the situation obtaining one year after the road has been open, assuming that all intended mitigation measures have been provided.

Claims can be lodged by owners, occupiers or long-term tenants only between one and seven years after the road has opened. The compensation may be reduced where some benefit is derived from the new development. Claims are normally settled by negotiation, but cases in which agreement cannot be reached may be referred to the independent Lands Tribunal.

I should add that the Land Compensation Act 1973 also requires highway authorities to take action to reduce the effect of excessive traffic noise on people's homes. It provided the Secretary of State with powers to prescribe, in the Noise Insulation Regulations 1975, the circumstances in which it is considered appropriate for residential properties to be insulated against traffic noise.

Highway authorities were given further powers under the Highways Act 1980 to provide measures in road construction schemes to mitigate their adverse effects on the surrounding countryside. That included the power to acquire extra land to create features screening properties from the sight and other effects of new roads.

Techniques for assessing the environmental impact of major road schemes developed in the 1970s and 1980s were published in the 1983 manual of environmental appraisal. That included an assessment of traffic noise, based on the methods used to determine whether properties were likely to need insulation. The assessment also allowed for the consideration of the adverse effects at greater distances, based on the significance of changes in the noise climate.

Those are the sorts of recourse available to property owners, such as Mr. Wood, if such a fate were to threaten them or, indeed, befall them in the United Kingdom. Again, there may be lessons from the British experience

*[Mr. Hill]*

of the involvement of European legislation in many aspects of our domestic arrangements that may be of assistance to Mr. Wood.

**Mr. Steen:** As the Minister may know, I have corresponded with Commissioner Kinnock, and he was extremely receptive and very anxious to find a way to deal with such matters, but unfortunately the officials got the better of him. Despite clear indications that he would like to find a solution, Commissioner Kinnock has failed. He does not like to fail, but he has, and I wonder whether the Minister thinks that there is another route that I can take—because my track record is not to fail for my constituents.

**Mr. Hill:** I am certainly aware of the hon. Gentleman's excellent track record on behalf of his constituents. I dare say that explains his extremely long tenure in the House. If I may say it in a totally non-partisan spirit, we all rejoice in that.

I take the hon. Gentleman's point about his correspondence with Commissioner Kinnock. However, representations in the Chamber are of incomparably greater significance than written exchanges, and the fact that the hon. Gentleman has raised this important matter in the Chamber will add to the force of his case. I have also undertaken to consider his proposals carefully, and I shall pursue them if I think that there is any mileage in them. I shall inform him of any appropriate actions that I might take.

I hope that I have assured the hon. Gentleman that the unfortunate problems faced by his constituent, Mr. Wood, in Portugal would be unlikely to have arisen in this country. We recognise that the infrastructure needed by a modern and efficient country may have some adverse effects on the people who live near it, but we believe that those people who suffer from the use of the infrastructure should be properly compensated.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Nine o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Wednesday 2 May 2001*

*The House met at half-past Two o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## PRIVATE BUSINESS

### STANDING ORDERS (PRIVATE BUSINESS)

*Ordered,*

That the Amendments to Standing Orders set out in the Schedule be made, with effect from 27th November 2001:—

### SCHEDULE

Standing Order 1, line 46, at end insert—

'the term "minister of the Crown" means the holder of an office in Her Majesty's government in the United Kingdom and includes the Treasury;'.

Standing Order 38, line 15, at end insert—

'(2A) The printed memorandum shall include a statement of opinion, by or on behalf of the promoters, as to the compatibility of the provisions of the bill with the Convention rights (as defined in the Human Rights Act 1998).'.

Standing Order 39, line 6, after 'Treasury', insert 'the Privy Council Office,'.

Standing Order 85, line 6, at end insert—

'(2) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (1) of this standing order, where in the case of a private bill which has been read a first time no report from a minister of the Crown has been presented to the House under Standing Order 169A, the Chairman of Ways and Means may, if he thinks fit, direct the attention of the House to that fact.'.

Standing Order 144, leave out lines 12 to 15.

Standing Order 158, line 16, at end insert—

'(by being deposited in the Private Bill Office)'.—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

*Ordered,*

That the following Standing Order be made, with effect from 27th November 2001:—

'*Reports concerning human rights.*

169A. In the case of a private bill originating in this House or brought from the House of Lords, a report from a minister of the Crown on the statement of opinion required by Standing Order 38(2A) shall be presented to the House (by being deposited in the Private Bill Office) not later than the second sitting day after that on which the bill was read a first time.'.—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## CABINET OFFICE

*The Minister was asked—*

### Rural-Urban Policy Co-ordination

1. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What recent reviews she has undertaken of the co-ordination of Government policy on rural and urban policy. [159095]

**The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Marjorie Mowlam):** As chair of the ministerial rural affairs group, I have been closely involved with the preparation and implementation of the rural White Paper. Urban policy is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, but we work closely together.

**Mr. Hughes:** The past few months have revealed considerable Government failings in co-ordinating rural policy. However, will the Minister, in her pivotal role, urgently examine urban policy with her colleagues? Will she try to ensure that, in future, instead of providing different sorts of funding, for which people apply by different means and at different times, there will be one commonly accessible one-stop shop so that people know what is available and can make bids? Local councils could then implement co-ordinated urban policy in their areas.

**Marjorie Mowlam:** Policies on, for example, drugs and rough sleeping were already co-ordinated across Departments. There is joined-up government on many policies. Urban and rural areas experience problems with health, education and jobs.

We have recently worked closely with local authorities and providers on neighbourhood regeneration schemes. Whatever the policy proposals, the same people are often involved in implementing them. Neighbourhood regeneration is the beginning of joining up government locally to avoid a cluster of policy announcements that people have to implement.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): As a start to policy co-ordination, should not we co-ordinate rural areas with each other so that they receive the same benefits? I am thinking of the effect of foot and mouth disease on tourism and the fact that some rural areas are not listed to receive rate benefits and other provisions. If the map was properly drawn, areas such as north-east Derbyshire might be able to get in on the act.

**Marjorie Mowlam:** As my hon. Friend knows, we have invested £6 million in advertising tourism, and we hope that tourists will return to urban and rural areas throughout the country. He mentioned rate benefits for shops, pubs, garages and small businesses in villages. They were drawn up according to specific criteria, which will be reviewed. I am sure that his point will be noted.

**Mr. Dafydd Wigley** (Caernarfon): In the wake of foot and mouth disease, which has hit rural areas so hard in recent weeks, does the Minister accept that one of the

co-ordination challenges is ensuring that people in urban areas realise that rural areas are open for visitors? Will she join me in welcoming the news that from Friday, access to Snowdon is likely to be reopened? She will shortly have more time at her disposal, and I invite her to visit and enjoy Snowdon, as we invite thousands of people from all parts of these islands.

**Marjorie Mowlam:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman very much. I shall come with the rest of my team, and we shall have an enjoyable day out.

I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we have been doing as much as we can to increase tourism and encourage people to visit rural areas. Ministers have visited different places, and we have spent an additional £6 million advertising the fact that rural areas are open. Approximately 91 per cent. of tourist attractions and almost as many participatory attractions are open. I hope that the message will go out from the House today that rural and urban areas are open for business and that people can go and enjoy the facilities there. We have allocated an extra £4 million to speed up the opening of footpaths and assist local authorities with that. I hope that a full return to business will happen soon.

**Mr. Andrew Lansley** (South Cambridgeshire): If it is the right hon. Lady's valedictory appearance at Cabinet Office questions, I wish her well on behalf of the Opposition.

The Minister knows that the need for co-ordinating rural policy has never been more acute than in the past two and a half months since the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Will she tell the House whether the rural affairs group, which she mentioned earlier, has met during that period? If so, has it considered the proposal, which my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) has made for six weeks, for the introduction of an interest-free loan to support businesses that are hard hit by foot and mouth?

**Marjorie Mowlam:** I do not know whether this is my last Question Time. The hon. Gentleman obviously knows more than I do about that, but I thank him for his comments.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the rural affairs group continues to work on the co-ordination of rural policy. We are working hard on aspects of the rural White Paper and we have rural proofing in place. Under the ministerial code, we do not have to announce whether the group has met, but I can say, as its Chair, that I have enjoyed a number of discussions with my ministerial colleagues and that we will continue to ensure that policies—particularly the one that the hon. Gentleman mentioned—are given full consideration.

**Mr. Lansley:** If the right hon. Lady cannot, or will not, tell the House how many times the group has met, will she at least explain how the Cabinet Office has discharged its responsibility for the co-ordination of policy? Where was the co-ordination of policy in the Cabinet Office when the Minister for the Environment was saying the opposite of what the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was saying on safe areas; when the Minister of the Environment was announcing a public inquiry and the Prime Minister was saying the opposite; or when the Prime Minister's official spokesman announced a change in the policy on slaughtering, and the Minister of Agriculture did not even seem to know about it? Has the Cabinet Office abdicated its responsibility to try to get co-ordinated decisions in the management of this crisis?

**Marjorie Mowlam:** I withdraw my generous offer of consideration of the policy that the hon. Gentleman mentioned earlier, only because it occurred to me that I have no idea how much it would cost. I would hate to make any indication that such a commitment would be given without some idea of the finance involved.

In relation to co-ordination in the rural affairs group and the Cabinet Office, we co-ordinate on rural proofing, on the rural White Paper, and across Departments. When the foot and mouth crisis started, the Prime Minister decided that it was big enough for a taskforce to be created, chaired by the Minister of Agriculture, because the main problem was in areas covered by his Ministry. However, all the Ministers in the rural affairs group, as well as other people particularly relevant to foot and mouth disease, were represented round the table, and co-ordination took place in regular morning meetings. In a difficult situation such as the foot and mouth crisis, what is appreciated from the Opposition is support rather than vacuous criticism.

## Drugs

2. **Ms Rosie Winterton** (Doncaster, Central): If she will make a statement on progress made by the UK anti-drugs co-ordinator. [159096]

**The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Marjorie Mowlam):** The anti-drugs co-ordinator's annual report for 1999–2000 shows that we are making progress towards meeting the challenging targets that we have set as part of our 10-year anti-drugs strategy. The co-ordinator's role involves him visiting local community projects. He has, for example, recently visited Doncaster, where he saw at first hand the initiatives taking place. He is also responsible for enforcement by trying to work across national boundaries in Europe and elsewhere, to maximise the efforts to cut supply.

**Ms Winterton:** My right hon. Friend may be aware that central Doncaster was awarded £52 million on Monday under the new deal for communities, and one of the flagship schemes is a drugs rehabilitation project. That is extremely welcome. The only concern of the local drugs action team is to find medical staff trained in detox programmes. Will she therefore discuss with the anti-drugs co-ordinator—particularly given their support for the efforts being made in Doncaster—whether we need to do more to encourage medical professionals to enter this field and have a fast-track programme to train detox staff?

**Marjorie Mowlam:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question and the acknowledgement that the £52 million that has gone into Donny will make a big difference, as such funding has in other cities, in terms of the important project to which a locality chooses to allocate the money. Drug rehabilitation was chosen in Doncaster; other areas

will choose closed circuit television to try to halt crime. It is up to the local partnership to decide how to allocate the money.

On recruitment, we advertised for more drug counsellors, as we were well aware that some areas had difficulties in respect of adequate staffing. As a result of a national campaign, we received more than 42,000 expressions of interest—far more than we ever expected.

Additional funding has been provided to drug action teams, which have been working with local service providers to turn those expressions of interest into work on the ground by local people. To help with that, we have established a bursary scheme, which will create basic training for newly recruited workers. I hope that the follow through will begin soon, but I shall certainly watch the Doncaster situation to ensure that the money is matched by an adequate number of counsellors. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. We must have order in the Chamber.

**Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): I congratulate those who have been doing positive work in trying to deal with and curb drug addiction. Will the Minister say whether there has been much success in sequestrating the funds of those who make large profits from drugs? Does she accept that those who try to educate people away from drug use often hear discordant voices in high places suggesting that some drugs are not harmful? Is not that a dangerous practice?

**Marjorie Mowlam:** We have allocated more money, because of the difficulty caused by young people getting involved with drugs. We have put an additional £152 million into education recently and there are programmes in most schools—we are up to 96 per cent. of secondaries and 76 per cent. of primaries—to ensure that that education is of a quality that makes a difference. We have also put more funding into "positive futures", which I think operates in the hon. Gentleman's neck of the woods. I remember reading about a scheme in Northern Ireland.

That positive initiative is aimed at keeping young people, whether they are excluded or truants, out of the culture on the street and encouraging them to involve themselves in activities such as sport. We have received a lot of support from sporting figures in getting the scheme going. That is what we are doing to get young people off the streets and, I hope, to make better choices in life.

We have concentrated on heroin and cocaine because they are the killers, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that there is no discordance in policy. We will do all that we can to ensure that young people become aware of the problems with drugs.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): The Government are about to make more widely available the deadly addictive drug alcohol, which is involved in 80 per cent. of crimes of violence and abuse. However, they still support the jailing of those seriously ill people who use cannabis medicinally, in spite of the fact that, a month ago, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society's conference said that the drug has unique benefits for those who suffer from severe pain and the effects of multiple sclerosis. Why are the Government soft on a hard drug and hard on a soft drug?

**Marjorie Mowlam:** The first part of my hon. Friend's question relates to alcohol. We are considering what we can do to co-ordinate alcohol and drug policy, because there is clearly a discordance between drugs, alcohol and how they are treated. We are fully committed to taking action on alcohol. I come from an alcoholic family, so I know the difficulties that alcohol creates and I assure him that work is under way.

In relation to cannabis and its medicinal use, as I have said to my hon. Friend on many occasions, we are considering that issue and we keep our policy under constant review. With DW Pharmaceuticals involved, we have a good chance of not being too far from producing a cannaboid, which will be tested by the Medical Research Council. That will provide comfort to those suffering from MS and other diseases. I assure my hon. Friend that the matter is not ignored; it is kept under constant review, and we will change policy when the scientific evidence merits that.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): Is the Minister shocked by the recent adolescent assessment services group report, which calculates that drug abuse has become a regular part of the daily life of more than 400,000 under-16s who use cannabis—now accepted to be a gateway drug—heroin and cocaine? Does she accept that mere harm reduction education programmes have failed those youngsters, and scrap them by removing public funds from their wrong-headed liberal providers? Will she substitute a sensible, sustained campaign—pursued with real conviction—in which children are told the truth about the harmful biological, social and economic consequences of taking any illegal drug?

**Marjorie Mowlam:** We share the hon. Lady's concern—as do most people in this country—about the increasing number of very young people who are experimenting with drugs. The situation is unhealthy and appalling.

We have tried sending messages in the past, but "Just say no" had no effect, or at most a very limited effect. Now, with "positive futures", we are working towards better educational programmes, in which role models and mentors talk to children and try to steer them into a different life. To advertise the problems of drugs, we are trying—with the help of the £220 million over three years that has just gone into communities—to work with those communities, and to work with parents, and in partnership with voluntary and other organisations. The one way to get through to young kids in a community is to work with their parents, peers and mentors, and that is the approach that we are adopting.

4. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): If she will make a statement on the part played by treatment in the anti-drugs strategy. [159098]

**The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Ian McCartney):** Treatment is a key component of the Government's 10-year strategy. We are committed to improving the provision of drug services across the country, such as the NORCAS agency in Lowestoft.

We have already seen a steady increase in the number of problem drug misusers attending treatment services, which was up by 8 per cent. in the six months to March 2000. We have established a counselling, assessment, referral, advice and through-care service in every prison in England and Wales, and through the spending review we have allocated an additional £167 million for drug treatment services over three years from 2001-02. We have also set up a new National Treatment Agency, which is engaged in an appointments process and will make announcements shortly.

**Mr. Blizzard:** I welcome the extra £89,000 a year for the next three years that has just been announced for the local crime reduction partnership in my constituency, under the Government's communities against drugs initiative. It will really help the fight against the menace of drugs in my part of the country.

We have had substantial funds for treatment purposes, but the problem is recruiting people to be trained to administer treatment. Will my right hon. Friend look into recruitment? Treatment is crucial to getting people off drugs, getting crime down, and preventing our streets from being littered with needles. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Before the Minister replies, let me say that there is far too much noise in the Chamber. It is unfair to Members who want to hear what is being said.

**Mr. McCartney:** In replying to my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office gave an absolute commitment on the very issue that my hon. Friend has raised. Let me confirm that in spades: we will look into both the Doncaster situation and the situation in my hon. Friend's constituency as a matter of urgency.

Resources have been made available, because 42,000 people want to do this job and need to be trained. I give my hon. Friend an absolute assurance that I will get back to him as soon as possible after considering his particular circumstances.

**Mrs. Teresa Gorman** (Billericay): The hon. Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) gave the example of alcohol. When the Americans tried prohibition as a way of restricting alcohol use, was not the attempt a complete failure? Is it not time that we looked at the problem of drug taking more from the viewpoint of the victims—those who are attacked and robbed by drug addicts—than from that of people who are silly enough to take the drugs?

**Mr. McCartney:** I hope that the hon. Lady will not take this wrongly, but her last comment was the silliest comment about drugs that I have heard in this place. As one who witnessed, on a daily basis, a son dying of drug abuse, I can say that that was not a self-inflicted injury, and also that it is not possible to take cannabis as something other than a gateway to more dangerous drugs.

Frankly, I am sick and tired of Members in this House and people outside thinking that there is an easy answer to preventing children from falling into drug abuse traps—through cannabis and then from that to other drugs. This is a very difficult, complex issue. We have a 10-year plan. I hope that the hon. Lady will get behind it. Every year we succeed with that, hundreds of children who would die if they did not have the plan will go on to be good citizens and good adults.

**Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): I welcome the setting up of the National Treatment Agency, but does my right hon. Friend agree that treatment should be more than methadone, methadone and even more methadone, and that choices of treatment must be made available? Will he encourage the NTA to offer those choices, including more abstinence programmes, so that we can wean people off methadone?

**Mr. McCartney:** I make it absolutely clear that the whole purpose of building capacity in treatment is to provide an individual service to meet the needs of the individual. Many of those individuals have complex multi-drug problems, so each treatment has to relate to their needs and get them to buy into the treatment. Far too often, a young person starts treatment, goes off it and ends up using illegal drugs, getting damaged and sometimes dying from an overdose. My hon. Friend's point is well catered for in the new strategy. Additional resources are being made available to ensure at local level that drug treatment referral systems and capacity relate to the needs of the individual and not to the system.

**Jackie Ballard** (Taunton): The Minister will be aware that many drug addicts lead chaotic life styles that do not lend themselves easily to treatment within the community. What progress have the Government made in the past four years in the provision of residential treatment facilities for drug addicts who are not serving prison sentences?

**Mr. McCartney:** That is a fair question. One of the key challenges for the Government is to provide growing capacity. We have set ourselves targets for 2002, 2005 and 2008. One of the aims of the National Treatment Agency and of the resources that are going into the Prison Service is to develop the strategy that she talks about: outreach facilities where individuals can seek what I would call asylum—a protected environment to deal with their specific needs. Some of those needs are to do with chaotic drug use, some with their mental health, and some with their physical health. Sometimes, it is all three. Because of that, treatment in the community is sometimes not a realistic prospect for them in the first instance, so the point is well made. I assure the hon. Lady that that is part of the strategy.

## Quangos

5. **Mr. Bob Russell** (Colchester): If she will make a statement on the extent to which quangos are being replaced by democratically elected bodies. [159099]

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Graham Stringer):** Responsibility for 300 public bodies has been transferred to the newly elected Chambers in Belfast, Edinburgh, London and Cardiff.

**Mr. Russell:** I wonder whether the Minister can say whether any quangos were involved in the Wembley fiasco. Many of us were expecting a Labour Government

to roll back the quangoland of the Conservatives. Why is new Labour so opposed to democratic control over the police, schools, hospitals and local colleges?

**Mr. Stringer:** I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, for example, the Funding Agency for Schools has been transferred back to local authorities. That body had an expenditure of nearly £2 billion. However, if he wants to trade figures, 41 executive non-departmental bodies, 125 non-executive bodies, 16 tribunals and one board of visitors have been transferred. It means that, in net terms, although some have been created and some merged, there are 10 per cent. fewer quangos than when the Government came to office.

**Mrs. Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside): What recommendations would my hon. Friend make in giving powers to regional chambers, so that they could bring accountability to regional quangos before we have directly elected regional authorities? When does he anticipate that they will come into being in England?

**Mr. Stringer:** It is Government policy to give the electorates in the different regions the opportunity to decide whether they elect regional assemblies. When such assemblies are elected—if the electorates so choose—they will have a transparent relationship with many of the existing regional public bodies.

## PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

### Engagements

Q1. [159128] **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 2 May.

**The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair):** This morning, I spoke to Sir John Stevens, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in sending our congratulations to the Met police on a successful operation yesterday. I also had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further such meetings later today.

**Mr. Robathan:** Tomorrow, our capital city will be brought to a standstill by the RMT. Will the Prime Minister explain to all those who will have to endure tomorrow's chaos that the RMT not only gives his Transport Secretary a flat in Clapham, but pays the Hull, East constituency Labour party in excess of £1,000 a year, which should have, but never has, been declared in the Register of Members' Interests? At this time, is it appropriate that his Transport Secretary is in hock to the RMT?

**The Prime Minister:** First, what the hon. Gentleman says about my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is simply not correct. Secondly, I agree entirely that the industrial action is unjustified.

As for the tube in general, I remind Conservative Members that this Government are investing in its future. The Conservative party cut that investment and is committed to privatising the tube.

**Mr. David Lammy** (Tottenham): The Prime Minister will be aware that, in the last four years, his Government have taken 700 failing schools out of special measures, compared with just 27 in the last years of the Tories. The Government have also turned around failing local education authorities. Can my right hon. Friend assure Tottenham parents that, alongside the improvements in our primary schools, we can now have greater confidence in our secondary schools?

**The Prime Minister:** No fewer than seven failing schools in Haringey have been taken out of special measures in the last few years. That stands in sharp contrast to what happened before. I know that my hon. Friend will realise that, today, we have the best primary school results that this country has ever seen. That is as a result of the investment that this party has put in. The Conservative party is still committed to cutting that vital investment in the services of the future.

**Mr. William Hague** (Richmond, Yorks): On behalf of the Opposition, may I express my admiration for the tremendous job done by the Metropolitan police yesterday—not just by the senior police officers but by thousands of police men and women who had to put up with abuse and sometimes violent scuffles in order to maintain the peace in London yesterday?

On a less successful aspect of Government management, will the Prime Minister tell us which project he thinks the Department for Culture, Media and Sport can be proudest of: the national lottery operator, the dome or Wembley stadium?

**The Prime Minister:** As the right hon. Gentleman well knows, Wembley stadium is a Football Association project, not a Government project. Might I just remind him that the project was initiated in 1994, when he was a member of the Government?

**Mr. Hague:** All of a sudden, it is not a Government project. The truth is that the Government's handling of each of those projects has been a fiasco and has poured £750 million down the drain. If it is not a Government project, why did the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport say last year:

"We would have ended up with a fiasco if we had not taken action"?

Why did he say that

"we were right to take the decision we did. We will have emerged . . . with possibly the best of both worlds"?

That would have been an own goal had he not taken down the goal posts. Why did the Culture Secretary describe the new designs for Wembley as stunning, only for the Minister for Sport to say that it was the wrong kind of stadium? The Government have been involved throughout. They scrapped the design, closed the stadium and dug up the

pitch. Will the Government now take responsibility and apologise to millions of sports fans for the huge mess they have created?

**The Prime Minister:** The bandwagonning activities of the right hon. Gentleman know no bounds. This was a project that was agreed in 1994. In 1996, again when he was a member of the Government, they agreed £120 million of lottery money and it was agreed as a Football Association project. I regret the fact that it has fallen through, and we must now sit down and work out a way through it so that we have a proper national stadium. However, it is absolutely absurd, in circumstances in which the FA has made it clear throughout that it should be its project with private sector backing, for the right hon. Gentleman to park his bandwagon at Wembley and blame the Government.

**Mr. Hague:** We are not taking lectures on bandwagons from a man who last week allowed the whole of Government policy to be dictated by Phoenix the calf. The Government never take responsibility for anything. They approved the design for Wembley stadium and said that it was magnificent. In the space of four years, they have spent £120 million closing Wembley stadium, one of the most famous sites in Britain, and £600 million turning the dome into one of the least popular sites in the world. Does not it sum up four years of this Government that they have spent a fortune of other people's money creating what did not work and wrecking what did work, while failing to deliver anything of practical value at all?

**The Prime Minister:** I now take that as the right hon. Gentleman's view that Wembley should never have been closed. Perhaps then he will explain why, in 1994, the Government of whom he was a member actually took the decision to have a new national stadium. As we are talking about reputations and what works and does not work, I treated the House a few months ago to the views of Mr. Nigel Hastilow, and today I wish to bring a new figure before the House—the parliamentary candidate from Bridgwater, Mr. Liddell-Grainger, whose local Conservatives have put out a leaflet that reads

"What we have to do is"—

**Hon. Members:** Order.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Do not tell me how to do my job.

**The Prime Minister:** Just listen. They said that they had

"to explain to Conservatives who do not like William Hague that the only way to find a new leader is to get the Conservatives in power under William Hague so that a new leader can emerge from the more unknown Conservative Members".

Fortunately, there is a very broad field.

As for delivery, it is this party that has put a record amount of money into public services—schools, hospitals, transport and police—and it is the Conservative party that would cut the money.

**Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot): Disgraceful.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Mr. Howarth, I hope that you were not referring to me. I know how to conduct my affairs and I hope that you are not attacking the Chair.

**Mr. Howarth:** I shall raise a point of order at the end of Prime Minister's questions.

**Mr. Speaker:** You are perfectly entitled to raise a point of order, and I will not deny you that, but no one will shout at this Chair while these proceedings are going on.

**Mr. Robin Corbett** (Birmingham, Erdington): Does my right hon. Friend accept that claims of a crisis in police recruitment and retention are as unhelpful to the police as they are untrue? West Midlands police last year recruited a record 547 officers and plan to do the same again this year. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to keep the investment that has made that possible at least at its present level?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, the fact is that the number of police recruits is up something like 77 per cent. on last year. That means that as a result of the additional finances that have been put into the police, we have around 1,300 additional police officers. That is good news for my hon. Friend's constituency and many others, but it comes as part of a whole programme that is putting more money into recruiting public sector workers. Today, incidentally, we can also announce a 26 per cent. increase in graduate training applications for teaching. That is the investment that we have put in on the basis of a stable economy, delivering for the people of this country.

**Mr. Charles Kennedy** (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Will the Prime Minister confirm that, on average over the course of this Parliament, investment in schools, hospitals and pensions as a proportion of our national income is lower under his Government than under the previous Government?

**The Prime Minister:** No. It is absolutely true that, in the first two years of this Government's term of office, for the reasons that we have explained, we applied very strict spending rules to get rid of the large deficit. However, in the past couple of years, spending on health and education as a proportion of gross domestic product and the extra money that we have given to pensioners have meant that a steadily rising proportion of our national income is now going to those services and those people.

**Mr. Kennedy:** Given what the Prime Minister does admit in terms of his policy, will he explain why, in the past four years, out-patient waiting lists have risen, secondary school class sizes have grown, and the number of pensioners plummeting into poverty has got bigger? Is not that a sad indictment of his premiership, and does not Britain deserve better?

**The Prime Minister:** In respect of poverty and pensioners, the right hon. Gentleman is simply wrong. The minimum income guarantee, the £200 winter fuel

allowance and the free television licences for pensioners aged over 75 have lifted significant numbers of pensioners out of poverty.

On class sizes, it is right that there has been a rise in secondary school class sizes of, I think, 0.3 of a pupil. There have been rises in class sizes for many years. We said that we would focus particularly on five, six and seven-year-olds, for whom there has been a dramatic reduction in class sizes. Overall, the figures for class sizes in all our schools are down, not up.

In respect of waiting lists, our pledge was to reduce in-patient waiting lists by over 100,000. We have met that pledge. Again, it is correct to say that out-patient lists rose for the initial period under this Government. Now, out-patient and in-patient lists are falling together.

**Ms Hazel Blears** (Salford): I am delighted that Kersal and Charlestown in Salford have been allocated an extra £53 million through the Government's new deal for communities. That will mean that there will be a health centre, jobs, money to tackle crime and a real future for young people. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that regenerating inner-city areas and reinvigorating their communities will remain a top priority for a Labour Government? Will not that be in contrast to the Tories, who condemned generations of our young people to a life without a decent future?

**The Prime Minister:** It will remain a priority, not only because it is right that money goes into local communities but because it helps the people of those communities by giving them some chance for the future. One of the Government's proudest achievements is the creation of some 1 million extra jobs in our economy. As a result, the amount of money that we are spending on benefits has fallen dramatically. Giving people a standard of living and a good chance for the future is good not just for them but for the economy as a whole.

I know that my hon. Friend will be the first to accept that the measures taken to reduce the national debt mean that, whereas when the Government came to office we were spending more on interest payments on the debt than on the school system, we are now spending £10 billion a year more on the school system.

Q2. [159129] **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): I know that the reports in the armed forces of the Ministry of Defence's planned cuts have already caused several soldiers to resign because they see no future for their regiments under Labour. Will the Prime Minister guarantee to those soldiers, the armed forces and the electorate that there will be no cuts in the regiments of either the Regular Army or the Territorial Army while he remains Prime Minister? Yes or no?

**The Prime Minister:** The stories about the cuts in regiments were denied by the Ministry of Defence at the time. They are not true. It is also the case that, over the next few years, there will be the first real-terms rise in defence spending in this country for a long time. With the greatest respect to Conservative Members, their protestations of affection for our armed forces would be a lot more credible if, when they were in office, they had not cut defence spending by 30 per cent.

**Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Does my right hon. Friend agree that yesterday's pronouncement by President Bush that he is to ditch the anti-ballistic missile treaty is likely to move the world into a more dangerous phase? Does he also agree that, in that context, the expansion of NATO ought to be put on hold, as going ahead with it now would move the world into a much more dangerous state?

**The Prime Minister:** I understand entirely my hon. Friend's concerns, but I am afraid that I cannot agree with what he has said. I believe that the enlargement of NATO is vital to honour the promise that we gave to those emerging eastern European countries that are now democracies. I also think that President Bush has set out a case that we have to listen to about how this is a different world following the cold war—Russia is no longer an enemy of the west but, on the contrary, a partner. Therefore, it is important that we look at new ways of dealing with the threat of weapons of mass destruction.

We will make our deliberations on the more general issue of missile defence once we have a specific proposal from the American Administration. President Bush has set out a new argument and we need to listen to it. I also welcome the fact that he has made it clear that there will be consultations not only with close allies such as ourselves but with Russia. This is an argument that we must watch.

Q3. [159130] **Mr. Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): Bob Kiley, the man who saved the New York underground, has described Labour's plans to part-privatise the London underground as fatally flawed, unworkable and dangerous. Why is the Prime Minister so committed to implementing them?

**The Prime Minister:** Because that is not the view of many others, including those who advised us on the original options. It is not a question of privatising the tube; it is about making sure that the infrastructure of the tube—the capital renewal work that is desperately important and needs billions of pounds to carry out—is done in the most effective way, giving the best value for money for the taxpayer.

We are prepared to put a record investment into the tube, but it must be done on the basis that the taxpayer gets value for money and that we do not repeat the experience of the Jubilee line, which ended up being constructed at a £2 billion overrun and a couple of years late. Therefore, it is important that we have the right relationship with the private sector so that the tube and the running of the tube remain publicly owned and in the public sector, but the construction work is done by the private sector.

Q4. [159131] **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): The Prime Minister will be well aware of the despair felt by parents who discover that a child of theirs is taking drugs. What can he say to the parents in my constituency, whose anxiety is greatly increased because they cannot get the support and information they need to help their child?

Will he ensure that some of the £200 million that has been allocated for community partnerships against drugs is used to support the families of drug users and those who work with them, such as the Footsteps project in Warrington, so that we can get real assistance to those in the front line of this battle?

**The Prime Minister:** The Footsteps project in Warrington is well known and highly successful. Part of the £200 million for community partnerships is precisely for that purpose. Something like £150 million will be put into drug action teams and projects around the country specifically to help families with drug problems.

It is important to recognise that drugs are often linked with the problem of social exclusion and with high levels of poverty, unemployment and deprivation in our inner cities. The investment in our inner cities that I mentioned a moment ago will also play its part in reducing the temptations for those youngsters to get into drugs.

**Mr. William Hague** (Richmond, Yorks): May I welcome the Prime Minister's disagreement with the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) on defence matters, and ask him whether he thinks that Britain would benefit from the protection of a nuclear missile shield?

**The Prime Minister:** As I have said to the right hon. Gentleman and to the House on many occasions, we do not yet have a specific proposal from the United States Administration. We do not know what technology they will use—sea-based or land-based. The United States is sending over a team to consult its closest allies next week, and we will be part of that consultation. When we have a proposal, we will make our determination. However, we have said that we understand the issues that the United States is raising and, of course, will always work closely with our American allies.

**Mr. Hague:** The President gave an extremely clear speech yesterday. The Labour Chairman of the Select Committee on Defence said this morning that now that the President has said that America will develop a missile shield:

"I think one has to decide yes or no are we going to support or not?"

Is not what is needed the clearest possible public statement of principle that we want a defence shield to be developed and that such a shield would be in Britain's defence interest? Will the Prime Minister now give such a statement?

**The Prime Minister:** I do not agree with the right hon. Gentleman. What is important is to make sure that we have a proposal from the United States Administration upon which we can give a considered view. I understand all the reasons why the right hon. Gentleman simply says that, whatever the proposal, we should agree with it. However, it is sensible, as we have said before, to wait until there is a specific proposal and to give our determination on that, recognising, as we do, that the issues raised by the American Administration are real and correct in respect of weapons of mass destruction but also knowing that it is a highly sensitive issue and that we should handle it with care, as President Bush is indeed doing. The right hon. Gentleman seems more reluctant to do that.

**Mr. Hague:** It does not follow that, because it is a sensitive issue, Her Majesty's Government should dodge the issue. The Prime Minister continues to avoid giving proper and clear support to a missile shield, and that position has been noticed in the United States. Does he agree that missile defence gives the people of Britain the chance of defending ourselves in the future against the unimaginable horror of nuclear terrorism? Our closest ally is taking the lead on this issue. Is not it time that the Government had the courage to come out and support it?

**The Prime Minister:** It is not a question of courage. The question whether a missile defence shield could have an important role for this country is surely to be determined on the basis of the proposal that is actually put forward. It is important to study that proposal in detail and it is also important that we play a role in trying to make sure that whatever different views there may be are reconciled not just here but elsewhere. I believe that we can play such a role. We have made it quite clear already—I did so in the press conference that I held with President Bush at Camp David—that we understand the concerns that the Americans have raised. We recognise that it is a different world in terms of nuclear proliferation and missile defence than the world of 10, 15 or 20 years ago, but I believe it is important and right that we wait for a firm proposal before giving a firm decision.

**Mr. Tony McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead): Will my right hon. Friend accept my congratulations on the recent publication of the pensioners' guide? However, does he accept that something needs correcting in it? It gives people who have been bereaved only three months in which to make their claim. MPs and others have people coming to them because of the major financial difficulties that those people face because of bereavement, so will my right hon. Friend take a real interest in the issue to ensure that that period is extended?

**The Prime Minister:** I was not aware of the particular point that my hon. Friend has raised, but I shall certainly look into it. The purpose of the guide is to help pensioners—not just poor pensioners, but others as well—in difficulty. Therefore, I shall certainly look into the point that he makes.

Q5. [159132] **Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Beckenham): Immediately before the previous general election, the right hon. Gentleman called for the publication of the report by the Standards and Privileges Committee on Mr. Neil Hamilton. Will the right hon. Gentleman give the same commitment to seek to ensure the publication of the Committee's report on the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson)? If he feels powerless to do so, will he instruct the Department of Trade and Industry to publish its report on the same Member?

**The Prime Minister:** It must surely be for the Privileges Committee to decide that; it is perfectly free to decide whatever it wishes.

Q6. [159133] **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, nearly 90 years after Lloyd George first introduced legislation insisting that all pubs close at a fixed time, this Government will at an early opportunity create a more modern, a more flexible and a more civilised liquor-licensing system?

**The Prime Minister:** That may be one of the legacies of Lloyd George that the Liberal party is less keen to own up to. My hon. Friend is absolutely right and, in this day and age, such a change in the licensing laws is very important. I pay tribute to him, because he has campaigned so long and so hard for this change in the law. It is in part due to the persuasiveness of his arguments that the change has come about.

Q7. [159134] **Mr. Lembit Öpik** (Montgomeryshire): I know that the Prime Minister will join me in offering his sympathy to the families of the three Montgomeryshire farmers who have tragically taken their own lives since the foot and mouth crisis began.

Because the welfare cull has been delayed, some livestock are dying in the fields of mid-Wales, so will the right hon. Gentleman be willing to respond personally to some proposals that I would like to send him on speeding up the welfare cull and to tackle the desperate levels of stress in our rural communities?

**The Prime Minister:** I shall certainly respond to any document that the hon. Gentleman sends me. There have been real problems with the welfare scheme, partly because of the large number of animals involved and because the restrictions on movement have been so great. We have recently been able to lift many of those restrictions, and something like 16,000 farms have been removed from them within the past few days. The numbers in the animal welfare scheme are falling the entire time, the backlog is reducing and many animals are being withdrawn, so it is likely to be far easier to implement the scheme than we originally thought. In addition, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals has provided invaluable advice.

Of course, many farmers have suffered deep distress during the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, and that is one reason that we agreed to match the funding for such schemes as the rural stress network. I shall certainly consider any cases and documents that the hon. Gentleman sends me.

**Ms Julia Drown** (South Swindon): Parents and parents-to-be will welcome today's announcement on the recruitment of more midwives and the £100 million that is to be spent on maternity units up and down the country. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the priority for maternity services should be 1:1 midwifery care for women during labour, a reduction in the unhealthily high caesarian rate in this country, and improved post-natal care for families?

**The Prime Minister:** I agree with all my hon. Friend's points. Part of today's announcement is designed to deal with those issues. There will be about 500 extra midwives in the health service by this time next year and an extra 2,000 over the next five years. We have been keen to expand that sector for some time. However, that policy should be seen alongside the additional money for accident and emergency departments, for the extra 17,000 nurses who now work in the health service and for the hospital-building programme, which is involved in 68 projects around the country, and the record investment that will go into the service in the next few years. Although it has taken time to achieve that, the money is going in and yielding a benefit.

Q8. [159135] **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): Is the Prime Minister aware that foot and mouth has had a devastating effect on a number of industries apart from agriculture, in particular on racing? Is he also aware that because of cancelled race meetings, many jockeys have lost many rides and will not be compensated through a business rate scheme? Will he provide another form of compensation?

**The Prime Minister:** Additional money has, of course, been provided for various schemes, including for the tourism industry today. I am not aware of the particular issue that the hon. Gentleman raises, but I shall certainly look into it.

It is worth pointing out that the single most important consideration is that we manage to eradicate the last of the foot and mouth epidemic. I should like to pay tribute to the work done not just by the Army but by MAFF officials, who have done a heroic job at a local level and have managed, within two months of the epidemic starting, to reduce the number of cases to single figures a day, which is where we are now. There are still many issues to work out and problems will arise, but, as the operation has reduced the number of cases substantially, the pressure both on the farming industry and others is reducing. However, I shall consider the specific issue raised by the hon. Gentleman, of which I was unaware.

**Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Inverclyde): Although we readily acknowledge the serious problems caused to farmers by foot and mouth, should not the same sympathy be shown to our beleaguered fishing industry? Many fishermen face ruin. If we are to have an adequate decommissioning scheme to reduce the United Kingdom fleet, should not Brussels aim to reduce the whole of the European Union fleet? It should not be aimed purely at the British fleet.

**The Prime Minister:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend; of course the scheme should not be aimed simply at the British fleet. The cut in quotas is severely affecting the fishing industries of all European countries. We are well aware of the problems of the fishing industry, which is why my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food recently announced the decommissioning scheme. We hope to build on that, and provide support and assistance for the fishing industry and its communities to adapt in the way that they must. However, we have come to recognise, over a long period of time, that the trouble is that there is no alternative but to cut the amount of fish caught in the North sea, because of the problems of conserving stock.

We face a difficult decision, which we cannot avoid, but we are doing what we can to help the fishing industry through these times.

Q9. [159136] **Sir Michael Spicer** (West Worcestershire): Why does the Chancellor of the Exchequer keep pretending that the economy is not slowing down when it manifestly is?

**The Prime Minister:** I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman asked a question about the economy because it is rare for Conservative Members to do so. The reason that the Chancellor is, as he needs to be, cautiously optimistic about the British economy is because under this Government we now have the lowest inflation in Europe; it is because after national debt doubled, we have reduced it very sharply; it is because we have a million extra jobs in the economy; it is because we have halved the rate of long-term unemployment; and it is because mortgage rates are half of what they were in the Conservative years. In other words, it is because we have a lot to be proud of.

**Mr. Gerald Howarth:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** I will take the private notice question first.

## Wembley Stadium

3.31 pm

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth** (East Surrey) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement about the Wembley national stadium project.

**The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith):** The Football Association's announcement yesterday that it could not deliver its plans for Wembley was very disappointing news, all the more so given the repeated assurances given to Sport England and the Government over the whole of last year, by the Wembley project team, that everything was on track. The Government have consistently supported the concept of a national stadium, and have done so on the basis of continued assurances from football that its project would be delivered.

In 1996, the then Great Britain Sports Council decided that Wembley should be the location for a national stadium. From 1998 onwards, the project has been led by the Football Association via a wholly owned subsidiary, Wembley National Stadium Ltd. From that point, the Football Association and its subsidiary drove the project forward in negotiation with Wembley plc over the acquisition of the land and in agreement with Sport England over the terms of lottery funding for the acquisition, the design issues and, most importantly, securing the necessary financing to make the project viable.

Wembley National Stadium Ltd., under its chairman Ken Bates, consistently assured everyone that all was well with the project. That has proved not to be the case. The first occasion on which that was demonstrated was in the autumn of 1999, when it became clear that the needs of athletics could not sensibly be met by the WNSL scheme. That was a result of the costs of creating and dismantling the concrete platform for athletics, the costs of acquiring the necessary land for the required warm-up track and the fact that there would be no lasting legacy for athletics at the national stadium.

I therefore decided that athletics should be removed from Wembley, and subsequently Lee Valley athletics stadium was chosen by UK Athletics as the national centre for athletics and the venue for the 2005 world athletics championships. That decision has been entirely vindicated by subsequent events, and work is now well advanced on the designs for the Enfield stadium.

The second occasion on which WNSL's assurances that all was well with the project proved to be misplaced was in November last year when the loan syndication to finance the whole project failed. The principal reason for the banks' reluctance to provide finance was their doubts about the WNSL business case and, in particular, the ambitious projections of hospitality and premium-seat income. Let us not forget that the project had escalated in estimated cost from a little over £300 million to a total of £650 million. The banks were also concerned that the FA stood to gain from the project but carried little or no risk.

At that point, some much-needed realism was injected into WNSL and the Football Association's thinking on the project. Following the failure of the loan syndication, the FA replaced Ken Bates with Sir Rodney Walker as chairman of WNSL and took a much closer interest in the project. The FA made clear its intention to address the banks' concerns that the FA itself was not taking its share of the risk in the project. Regrettably, the Government learned last week that the Football Association did not feel that it could do that without a further significant injection of funds. The FA initially requested up to £300 million from the Government. I am afraid that that is simply not on, especially when the scale of the current costly design of the new Wembley is due to the needs of the commercial interests in the project.

In the light of the FA's announcement yesterday, the Government will review all the options for a national stadium. To assist in that process, we have asked the existing ministerial group looking at cross-governmental issues surrounding the Commonwealth games to look at alternative solutions. I should stress at this stage that no options are ruled out. Therefore, a solution might be found to develop a new-build or a refurbishment solution at Wembley. Other alternatives may be considered. We want to play our part as the Government in securing a good, affordable and sustainable national stadium for England. That is what we will now do.

**Mr. Ainsworth:** I thank the Secretary of State for his reply. Does he accept that the failure of the national stadium project is a failure of public policy? Does he accept that the collapse of the project has brought humiliation to Britain and that people here and all over the world are shaking their heads in disbelief and asking why, under this Government, nothing seems to work any more? Does he accept that he carries heavy responsibility for the failure of Wembley? Does he acknowledge that his attempts to shuffle the blame on to Ken Bates and the Football Association are widely regarded as futile and cowardly? Did he not give his blessing to the appointment of Sir Rodney Walker, and did not Sir Rodney give his approval to the Bates plan earlier this year?

Does the Secretary of State accept that his claim that the project is not a Government one looks ridiculous, when it was his decision—and his alone—in autumn 1999 to abandon the original design after it had been approved by the British Olympic Association, the Football Association, the Rugby Football Union, Sport England and his own architectural advisers? If it was not a Government project, what right had he to intervene in that fatal way? Does he now accept that he was wrong to ignore the advice of the Select Committee, and that it was inexcusable, arrogant and contemptuous to dismiss that advice within minutes of it being offered?

Does the Secretary of State accept that his intervention plunged the project into controversy when none had previously existed, provoking 18 months of appalling publicity, when the project—of which we all wanted to be proud—became a fiasco and a byword for Government incompetence? Did not that do more than anything to undermine investor confidence in the project? Does he think it was helpful or responsible to describe the design as "stunning" and "magnificent" on 29 July 1999, when he later said in the House that

"at the time, I was concerned about the viability of the proposed solution".—[*Official Report*, 1 December 1999; Vol. 340, c. 305.]

Does he understand that the present appalling situation stems directly from his actions and the train of confusion that they set in motion? Does he agree that he is responsible for 18 months of dither, delay and millions of wasted pounds?

*[Mr. Ainsworth]*

What does the Secretary of State think his shambolic handling of this national project will tell the world about Britain's ability to host a future Olympic games? Is there not now, as a direct result of his actions, a real possibility that we will face the further humiliation of having to tell the International Amateur Athletics Federation that we cannot, after all, host the 2005 world championships?

The whole House wants to see the Wembley project back on track, but, if it cannot be revived, what will happen to the £120 million of lottery money that has already gone into it? Will the Secretary of State confirm that Wembley remains the Government's preferred venue for the national stadium?

It will be a relief to all who care about our national game that the Secretary of State has been shunted to the sidelines by the Prime Minister, but it is too late: the damage has been done. The Secretary of State has lost the confidence of the sporting world and of the public. He has lost the confidence of many of his right hon. and hon. Friends, including, by implication, the Prime Minister. If he had done the right thing and resigned when the first disastrous consequences of his actions became apparent, I honestly believe that we would now be looking forward to the opening of a great new national stadium. Instead, we are faced with a humiliating fiasco.

The Secretary of State is widely regarded as a decent man, but he has repeatedly proved himself to be an incompetent Minister. Will he resign today?

**Mr. Smith:** On my calculation, this is the 39th time that the hon. Gentleman has called for my resignation. I refer him to my first 38 answers.

The hon. Gentleman began by describing today's announcement as a "failure of public policy." I remind him that it was public policy put in place by the previous Government. It is their project that the Football Association has been valiantly trying to take forward.

The hon. Gentleman asked one or two questions. One related to the decision taken in December 1999 to take athletics out of the then scheme. I outlined in my initial answer why we took that decision, and thank goodness we did. If we had not taken that decision, we would now, as advocated by the hon. Gentleman, have no venue for the 2005 world athletics championships. We do have such a venue. Work is proceeding apace on that. The design work is well advanced and the Lee Valley stadium will be an excellent athletics-specific venue for those championships, with a long-term sustainable legacy for athletics as well.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the £120 million of lottery funds. Under the terms of the lottery agreement, if a national stadium does not proceed at Wembley, the money is returnable to Sport England for further use under the usual terms of the lottery.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether Wembley is the Government's preferred location. The answer is yes, because the Wembley site has been purchased with lottery funds. It is owned by the FA. It is the sensible place to start looking for alternative schemes, but we are not at this stage ruling out other options. We need to look first at Wembley, but other alternatives may emerge, at which we will want to look carefully and closely.

The hon. Gentleman says rather breezily that under the Government nothing seems to work any more. I refer him to the Cardiff Millennium stadium, the Eden project, Tate Modern, the British museum great court, the Magna project in Rotherham, the Science museum extension, the Lowry centre, the Walsall art gallery, the Manchester stadium and swimming pool and countless other projects—indeed, more projects than the number of times that the hon. Gentleman has demanded my resignation.

**Mr. John Maxton** (Glasgow, Cathcart): Given that one English football team has just spent almost £20 million on one player, and given the enormous sums that both the Premier League and the FA obtain from television to show football, would it not be totally wrong for the British taxpayer to subsidise the building of a national football stadium? If the Government have such money available, would it not be much better spent providing facilities and coaching for the many youngsters who want the play the game of football, rather than simply watch it?

**Mr. Smith:** We already provide substantial funds for precisely the purpose of coaching, training and educating young people across the board in sport, and that includes large amounts for the sport of football.

My hon. Friend is right that we need to be prudent in our use of taxpayers' money, which is why, when a specific request came to us last week for an immediate Government injection into the project, particularly given the scale of the project, which is far in excess of the estimated cost of any other stadium anywhere else in the world, we did not feel able to agree to it.

**Mr. Bob Russell** (Colchester): I welcome the Conservative Opposition to their latest bandwagon. I have heard some things for the first time today.

The Secretary of State reeled off a list of great successes, but he seeks to deny any responsibility whatever for the Wembley fiasco. Surely he will not claim that what happened yesterday came as a surprise. Six months ago, the national media and the City warned us of what was likely to happen, and it happened yesterday. There is cross-party support for early-day motion 1, which, in case the Secretary of State has not read it, I will put on the record.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman is not going to put it on the record.

**Mr. Russell:** The right hon. Gentleman will know that the cost of the scheme was £660 million and rising. What is the point of destroying arguably the most famous stadium in the world, the scene of our most successful English sporting triumph, and replacing it with a McDonald's arch?

The right hon. Gentleman also has responsibility for tourism and heritage, and he knows that the demolition of Wembley is not helpful to football. As has been pointed out, we need to look again at whether Wembley is the right place for such a stadium. Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that even a new Wembley stadium will still be accessed by inadequate rail, road and air

links? The case for looking elsewhere for a national stadium should be considered—if we need a new national stadium.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The Secretary of State should have an opportunity to answer the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Smith:** I must tell the hon. Gentleman that six months ago I publicly expressed alarm at the way in which the figure was escalating, as a result of which the FA took a much closer interest in the project, under the leadership of Adam Crozier. It put in Rodney Walker to try to sort the matter out, and he did a valiant job of trying to make the figures work, but, at the end of the day, he was not able to do so to the FA's satisfaction.

Refurbishment of the existing stadium has to be an option. It would impose constraints on the number of people who could be accommodated in the stadium, but it is something that we need to consider carefully and seriously.

**Mr. Barry Gardiner** (Brent, North): Does the Secretary of State share my incredulity that the FA, which, during the past two years, has had an income stream of £1.8 billion, and which, only on Monday, announced £48 million in sponsorship from Barclaycard for the Premier League, will not put up the money to adopt an equity stake in the project to the tune of £125 million? Does he also share my concern that £170 million worth of infrastructure projects that are already under way, such as the stadium corridor, the refurbishment of Wembley Park, Wembley Central and Wembley Stadium stations, are put in jeopardy by the decision taken by the FA, and that regeneration projects to the value of £620 million in north-west London submitted on the back of the stadium development are also in jeopardy? I welcome the Government's assurance, as well as the assurance that he gave earlier, that Wembley is still the preferred location, but will he ensure that the voice of local people and the importance of regeneration to the local community are among the prime considerations of the Cabinet Committee when it considers the issue?

**Mr. Smith:** I can indeed give my hon. Friend that assurance. The regeneration aspects of the area surrounding the stadium, on which the Wembley taskforce, under the chairmanship of Sir Nigel Mobbs, is working hard, are extremely important for the whole of north-west London. We will bear those issues very much in mind as we now look as rapidly and sensibly as we can at the various alternatives.

**Sir Norman Fowler** (Sutton Coldfield): The Secretary of State says that he will review all the options for the national stadium. I hope that he will learn from experience and remember the disaster of the dome at Greenwich. Above all, I hope that one of these national projects can be situated north of London, preferably in Birmingham, where the transport is in place, the land is available and public support is absolutely assured.

**Mr. Smith:** I noted this morning that Birmingham city council made an interesting proposal of precisely this nature. As I said, we want first to consider what is possible at Wembley, but we are not ruling out any other alternatives and we will look carefully at the propositions that are put to us.

**Ms Claire Ward** (Watford): Does my right hon. Friend accept that now is an appropriate time, given the review of Wembley stadium, to consider the future of Picketts Lock? As £120 million of public lottery money was originally put into Wembley stadium and a deal has been done for part of that money to go to Picketts Lock, is not it time, as we are going back to the drawing board, to consider the whole future for a stadium that can serve all our sports?

**Mr. Smith:** I am afraid that I cannot agree with my hon. Friend on that point. The 2005 world athletics championships have been bid for and won by London, and we must ensure that we provide a high-quality stadium for that event. The Lee Valley stadium at Picketts Lock is in the design phase. It is an extremely good design that gives us an opportunity to provide not only a good venue for the 2005 championships, but a high-class performance centre in perpetuity and very good community facilities for the whole of north and east London. That is a prize that is very much to be won, and we want to ensure that we win it.

**Mr. Roger Gale** (North Thanet): The Secretary of State will recall that the Prime Minister gave his personal support to the millennium dome and endorsed the view that it would form the first paragraph of his party's next election manifesto. He will also recall that the Prime Minister took personal charge of the foot and mouth crisis, and turned it into a disaster that has devastated rural communities. As football is rather important in England, will he give the House an assurance that the Prime Minister will not seek to take personal charge of the Wembley stadium?

**Mr. Smith:** I cannot accept either the conclusion or the premise of the hon. Gentleman's question.

**Mr. Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the decision taken to establish an athletics stadium in the Lee valley was absolutely right? When the athletics championships come to this country, many people in north, east and other parts of London will recognise that the Government made a wise decision.

On the future of the football stadium at Wembley, does he recognise that a large number of clubs in London, which are looking for new grounds, might be persuaded to reconsider moving to a new facility if the plan goes ahead?

**Mr. Smith:** I can wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend's endorsement of the Lee valley option for the 2005 world championships. As I said, work is well advanced. I am proud that we will have a purpose-built, dedicated athletics facility for those championships. One of the reasons why we were so successful in winning IAAF approval for the proposal in Paris last year was the fact that that facility would be designed and built specifically for athletics. We want to stick to that.

**Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): The Secretary of State knows that, in the four years of the Labour

*[Mr. Nick Hawkins]*

Government, I and other members of the all-party sports committee have repeatedly questioned him about the project. On many occasions, he has preened himself in front of not only hon. Members but the world's media and taken credit for what he described as a "magnificent" and "stunning" project. Does he now acknowledge that his ambitions are crumbling to dust, that his claims that the stadium is not a Government project and that Macavity's not there and his attempts to distance himself from events have no credibility not only in the House but in the eyes of the world? Does he further accept that he must take responsibility and resign?

**Mr. Smith:** No.

**Mr. Doug Henderson** (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): My right hon. Friend's friends in the north are fed up with projects being directed to the southern part of the country. We cannot prevent the private sector from investing where it wishes. However, in the case that we are considering, the private sector has decided that Wembley is not viable because of the additional costs that such a location incurs. If any public money, including lottery money, is to be used, can we have value for money by considering options in other parts of the country? They include refurbishing existing football stadiums and spreading international football and rugby league matches throughout the country. Other countries, such as Italy, do that.

**Mr. Smith:** As I have already said, we are prepared to consider other options, and I will bear my hon. Friend's comments in mind. I am delighted that major projects under the Department's umbrella will go to the north of England. I am especially pleased that the Baltic flour mills and the Gateshead music centre are well under way.

**Mr. Andrew Stunell** (Hazel Grove): I welcome the Secretary of State's comments about keeping options open. He mentioned the Commonwealth games in Manchester in 2002. They will be the first big international sporting event in this country after the foot and mouth crisis and will afford great opportunities for regenerating international tourism. Will he assure hon. Members that he will bear regeneration in mind when he considers the stadium, which could properly be located in Greater Manchester?

**Mr. Smith:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman's endorsement of the importance of the 2002 Commonwealth games, which constitute a major sporting event. They will draw people from all around the world and we can use them in our campaign to boost tourism in the sad aftermath of foot and mouth disease. The announcement that we made this morning of an additional £12 million for the British Tourist Authority's promotion budget will help in that task.

**Ms Joan Walley** (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I welcome my right hon. Friend's work to try to find a solution. Football is our national spectator sport, and it is therefore essential to find a long-term, sustainable solution. We want not a stadium that will cost people far too much to visit, but a venue that ordinary football fans and their families can afford. I welcome my right hon. Friend's decision not to rule anything in or out at present. I ask him to consider all the options. If Wembley cannot be refurbished, will he consider the principles of environmental sustainability in, for example, the distances that fans travel to and from football matches? Will he consider the possibility of a Wembley of the north, or even of the midlands?

**Mr. Smith:** We will consider all the options. I agree with my hon. Friend that is essential to find a good solution. We want a national stadium in England, and it is demonstrably possible to achieve that. The Millennium stadium in Cardiff was built for £126 million, a fifth of the estimated cost of the current Wembley project. Let us learn some lessons from the enormous success of that project and apply them to a national stadium for England.

**Mr. Nigel Evans** (Ribble Valley): Today is the fourth anniversary of the Labour Government, and what an appalling birthday present the Secretary of State has given the nation. Wembley stadium was world famous for all the right reasons, and the dome is world famous for all the wrong ones. If the new Wembley project had been a great success, the Government would have claimed credit for it. Now that it is an appalling fiasco, they are rubbing their hands and not taking any of the blame. In the dying days of this dreadful and appalling Government, will the Secretary of State—who obviously has a problem with the word "resign"—at least come to the Dispatch Box and say that he is sorry?

**Mr. Smith:** The one thing on which I can agree with the hon. Gentleman is that this is, indeed, the fourth anniversary of the election of this Government. I look forward to many more such anniversaries.

**Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): My right hon. Friend will know that I have asked questions consistently on this subject over the past 10 years. Indeed, I had a question on it on Monday's Order Paper, which, unfortunately, we did not reach. I have always supported the need for a replacement Wembley. Wembley stadium, as it was, was not up to standard for the 21st century. We need a replacement that will provide good facilities for the majority of the crowd—ordinary people—and it need not cost £400 million. This is not the Government's fault, and they should tell the FA to get itself sorted out. We need a new national stadium, and I believe that it should be in London, and at Wembley. The FA needs to sort this out, because there is enough money in football to do so.

**Mr. Smith:** My hon. Friend has, indeed, been consistent in pursuing the need for a national stadium that will offer considerably better conditions than the rather dilapidated ones at the existing Wembley. We wish to see a national stadium, but we must get this right and we must not break everyone's bank in the process.

**Mr. David Tredinnick** (Bosworth): Will the Secretary of State accept that it was a terrible decision to take Wembley out of service before plans for a new stadium had been agreed? Will he also accept that he has totally underestimated the affection that the British public have for the old Wembley stadium? I say that as one who was lucky enough to go there with his father, on 30 July 1966, to watch that great World cup final. Is not the solution for

the Secretary of State to make good as best he can the circumstances at Wembley, and to take up the suggestion made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) and build a new stadium and all its ancillary facilities in Birmingham—in the heart of the midlands—to give the midlands a little? Is not it a fact that this problem is a national humiliation, and that it is happening on the fourth anniversary of this Government?

**Mr. Smith:** The decision to take Wembley out of service was taken by Wembley National Stadium Ltd. As I have already said, we shall consider a range of options to see what is most affordable and sustainable, both environmentally—as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) mentioned—and economically.

**Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): I find myself in a minority here. May I say, as a socialist, that although the Secretary of State's job is to promote sports and to provide all the academies, providing an affordable and sustainable—to use his words—national stadium for the industry of soccer is not core Government business, bearing in mind the critical issues now facing us in this country? In my view, it is good that the Government should try to facilitate and encourage this project, but not with public money or with too much energy.

As a socialist, I think that market forces should prevail in this case. We should call the bluff of the Football Association, because the money is there, and the FA will provide it and refurbish Wembley stadium. The one condition that I would like to lay down is that the towers should not be removed. Where else would a heritage building be allowed to have such features removed? I will tell the House why that is happening. It is because of the disproportionate clout and influence of the football industry. That needs to be curtailed, and the industry's bluff needs to be called.

**Mr. Smith:** I believe that it is the job of the Government to facilitate a good and sustainable solution to this matter. The twin towers are, indeed, deeply loved across the country, and that is why we will, of course, consider refurbishment as well as new-build options. We need to assess the aesthetics, the heritage, the football and the economic case for the various options in front of us.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): In the past few weeks, the Prime Minister has wrested control of foot and mouth away from the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and taken it on himself. Now we hear that control over this fiasco has been taken away from the Secretary of State and given to the Home Secretary. Given that, and the stinging criticism made by the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport of the Secretary of State's intervention in 1999 and other issues, how does he feel about his stewardship of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport over the past four years?

**Mr. Smith:** Very confident.

**Mr. David Hinchliffe** (Wakefield): Does it remain the aim of the Government to ensure that the new national stadium will cater for sports other than association football—in particular, of course, the great game of rugby league? My right hon. Friend was at Twickenham on Saturday, with the Prime Minister and the Minister for Sport, for the rugby league Challenge cup final. For one or two of us—certainly those of us who are banned from rugby union for life—it was a rather uncomfortable experience. Can my right hon. Friend give an assurance that we will not have to go there again? He will be a popular man if he can ensure that rugby league is not played at Twickenham again.

**Mr. Smith:** The location for the rugby league cup final is a matter for the rugby league authorities, not for me. I suspect that my hon. Friend has influence in that quarter, and he may wish to make his views known there. However, his central point is important. It has always been envisaged, and should still be envisaged, that a national stadium should cater for football and for rugby league.

**Mr. Owen Paterson** (North Shropshire): To prevent the project from collapsing altogether, what is the maximum expenditure of lottery or taxpayers' funds that the Secretary of State is prepared to endorse?

**Mr. Smith:** There has already been a contribution of £120 million of lottery funds to the purchase of the existing stadium.

**Mr. Paterson:** How much?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Let the Secretary of State answer.

**Mr. Smith:** We need to consider—

**Mr. Paterson:** It is an easy question. How much?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I tell the hon. Gentleman again: let the Secretary of State answer.

**Mr. Smith:** We need to consider all the various alternatives and the costs. We must also consider where the money can be raised. Those issues will be determined over the next few months.

**Mr. Derek Wyatt** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I wonder whether my right hon. Friend might ask the FA whether it might like to buy Picketts Lock. Rugby union, the sport with which I am familiar, rebuilt two thirds of Twickenham 10 years ago, based on the premise of debenture tickets and media sales of television rights. Am I right in thinking that debentures were ruled out completely for Wembley? If so, who made the decision?

**Mr. Smith:** The decisions about the methods of financing for the Wembley project were made by the FA and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. I am pleased that my hon. Friend has drawn attention to Twickenham, which represents an extremely good example of a sport deciding to reconstruct its stadium and doing so successfully by raising the money itself.

**Mr. Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): It is a pleasure, albeit a rare one, for me entirely to concur with the views of the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler). I seek a categoric assurance from my right hon. Friend: if Birmingham is able to show that it

*[Mr. Steve McCabe]*

can provide a first-class, easily accessible, brand-new stadium at a fraction of the cost of the Wembley project, will he ensure that no sleight of hand will be allowed to sabotage our efforts?

**Mr. Smith:** We shall consider any proposals that are put to us completely fairly and completely openly. We shall make an assessment based on what would provide the best stadium for football and rugby league and the most affordable cost.

**Mr. Derek Twigg** (Halton): Towards the end of last year, a deal to move the Wembley towers to Widnes in my constituency, where they would have formed part of the new national rugby league museum, was all but completed—the ink was nearly dry on the paper. If another opportunity to move the towers arises, will my right hon. Friend give his support for that?

I welcome my right hon. Friend's decision to take a fresh look at the problem of Wembley. We have heard nonsense from the Tories, who have put nothing of substance on the table today. It is right not to rule out other locations and my right hon. Friend might consider the north-west of England, where he will find the best rugby league and soccer teams in the country. Building a national stadium in the region would save supporters money as they would not have to travel back and forth to other venues.

**Mr. Smith:** There is a practical difficulty with moving the Wembley towers, because of the nature of their construction. However, if ingenious methods of moving them can be found and if the finance for the operation can be put together, such an option may be considered. I note my hon. Friend's bid for the north-west of England to host a national stadium. So far, we have had bids from Wembley itself, the north-west, the north-east, Birmingham and other parts of the midlands. Indeed, if market forces are operating, perhaps such competition is the best possible way to secure a good stadium at an affordable price.

**Mr. David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): Was it not chronic and perverse metro-centricity that left the national showcase for the national game in a shabby stadium in an inaccessible, expensive and congested north-west London suburb when decades ago it could have been moved to the midlands or the north? Will my right hon. Friend look carefully at the potential of the east midlands to provide a home for the national game that is accessible, affordable and closer to the real supporters of football?

**Mr. Smith:** One of the good aspects of the Wembley project so far has been the commitment of all parties—the single regeneration budget panel, the Wembley taskforce and the mayor of London—to improving the accessibility of the Wembley area, and the regeneration of that area is one of the benefits that have been sought. I reiterate, however, what I have said to others: we will look at all the options, and we will consider alternative locations. We want to do the right thing and ensure that we end up with the best possible national stadium.

## Points of Order

4.11 pm

**Mr. Jonathan Sayeed** (Mid-Bedfordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, of which I have given notice both to you and to the Minister concerned.

On 27 March I tabled two questions to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, to which I have received no substantive answer. Let me briefly explain. I asked the Minister from which countries whose standards of animal welfare, health or hygiene were lower than those of this country we were importing meat or poultry or their products. Neither question was difficult to answer—I should have thought that the Minister already had the information—and answering would have been neither time-consuming nor expensive; yet, 36 days later, there is still no answer.

The only reason I can think of for the fact that there has been no answer is that providing such an answer would be politically embarrassing. The Government are too embarrassed to admit that British farming has been put at a competitive disadvantage by the Government's failure to take action to ban products from countries whose standards are poorer than ours. The Government understand that products in those countries—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman's point of order is already clear to me; he is now setting out his reason for tabling his questions. Would he leave it at that?

**Mr. Sayeed:** May I finish, Mr. Speaker, very briefly? Can you confirm that my two questions were in order, and that it is unacceptable for a Government to delay answers deliberately just because those answers are politically embarrassing to them?

**Mr. Speaker:** If the Table Office accepted the two questions, they must have been in order.

All hon. Members are entitled to timeous replies, but it must also be appreciated that the Department to which the hon. Gentleman referred is under a great deal of strain. Members should realise that, and exercise some patience. I put it on record, however, that the hon. Gentleman is entitled to a timeous answer.

**Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hope that you will deem me to have given you notice of it—if not entirely formally—during Prime Minister's Question Time.

During that Question Time, Mr. Speaker, you will have heard a great many cries of "Disgraceful" from Conservative Members. I am sure you will accept that they were aimed not at the Chair but at the conduct of the Prime Minister.

It is indeed disgraceful that the Prime Minister has changed the rules of the House: instead of coming here twice a week, he now deigns to come only once a week. His constitutional duty is to answer questions from Members in all parts of the House, but particularly from the Leader of the Opposition. I am sure that you will agree, Mr. Speaker, that, in response to very serious points that were made by my right hon. Friend about Wembley stadium, the dome and so on, the Prime Minister was gratuitously abusive to my right hon. Friend, referring to

some remarks by some Conservative candidate—a matter for which the Prime Minister has no responsibility whatever. I am sure that you will agree that that behaviour tends to bring the House into disrepute with the public.

You referred to this matter in an earlier statement:

"Questions are out of order if they relate to Opposition party policies rather than Government responsibilities."

You went on to say:

"Of course I recognise that over many years, Question Time has developed as a lively occasion on which political points are scored. That applies particularly to Prime Minister's Question Time. As I said last week, although the same constraints apply, I think it right to allow the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition a greater degree of latitude."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2001; Vol. 363, c. 315.]

Given the widespread concern expressed by Opposition Members during Prime Minister's questions, to what extent do any constraints apply to the Prime Minister, who comes here only once a week? He should be answering questions instead of trying to score cheap points off my right hon. Friend on matters that do not relate to Prime Ministerial responsibilities.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I must first answer the point of order raised by the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth). Certainly, Prime Minister's Question Time this afternoon was very lively; I think that we can both agree with that. At all times, I must be able to use my judgment. The Prime Minister does not change the rules of the House. The House changes the rules. I am the custodian of those rules. I heard many hon. Members shouting, "Disgraceful." I did feel that some of those remarks were directed at me. I accept the hon. Gentleman's explanation that they were not directed at me—that is fine—but some were telling me to intervene and to stop the Prime Minister.

I will use my judgment at all times in the House. It is for me to use my judgment. Let me put it on the record that the worst thing that can happen is for hon. Members to tell me to intervene, because in doing so they are telling me how to do my job. Believe me: I will stay put and I will not intervene in those circumstances. I will use my judgment.

The hon. Gentleman has given me an opportunity to add that, when the House gets very noisy, it is unfair to those who are asking and, indeed, answering questions. The noise level has been very bad. I expect co-operation from hon. Members on both sides of the House during Prime Minister's questions and other parliamentary questions. The noise level can be far too high.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising the matter. I am glad that he was not directing his cries at me, but he and others were out of order when they were shouting far too loudly in the Chamber. That goes for hon. Members on both sides of the House. It would be best to leave it at that. It was a noisy day. There was more than one excited hon. Member.

**Mr. Andrew Tyrie** (Chichester): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have given notice in correspondence with you of the point that I want to raise, which connects directly with the point on which you have just ruled.

I had understood that the Prime Minister could only answer questions for which he was responsible and for which the Executive were responsible. We had a contentious case today. Six weeks ago, you ruled that a question on Short money to the Prime Minister was in order. But the House vote that pays for the Short money is not a matter for the Executive or in any way a matter for the Prime Minister. As you know, it is a matter for the House of Commons Commission, which you chair. I hesitated to raise this in the House on a point of order, so I wrote to you. If I may, I will read out part of your reply:

"I am sure you will, on reflection, understand that it would not be appropriate for me to account to individual Members for my rulings or to enter into discussions about them."

Yours is a quasi-judicial rule, Mr. Speaker. Like judges, you are not required to provide any explanation, but explanations are generally given by judges of their decisions and rulings. I am rising now to ask whether, on reflection, you think it would be helpful to say whether the Prime Minister may now be asked questions on subjects for which he is palpably not responsible.

**Mr. Speaker:** I must say to the hon. Gentleman that that would not be helpful. If he wished to have a private discussion with me, that might be helpful.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not the case, as *Hansard* will show, that previous Prime Ministers—Labour and Conservative—have used Question Time and every aspect of the agenda before them to try to defend the Government's record, and that the present Prime Minister has not departed from that? I refer you to 10 January, when the Prime Minister, quoting a Conservative candidate in Birmingham, said:

"It might be thought a strange form of madness for someone to nail their colours to the Conservative mast at such a time of crisis for the party."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 2001; Vol. 360, c. 1073.]

No Conservative objected to that. There were points of order—from what may be described as the usual suspects—but no Conservative objected to what the Prime Minister said. What has been said today has been said previously by previous Prime Ministers. Conservative Members—certainly those who are new to the House—should consult *Hansard* over the years to see what those Prime Ministers have done.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman is not raising a point of order.

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In common with other hon. Members, I am extremely grateful for the ruling that you have just given and the guidance that you have thereby provided.

On a different point, on several dozen occasions in recent months, at a time when right hon. and hon. Members have been asking questions, at best tangentially related, if related at all, to Ministers' responsibilities, right hon. and hon. Members have busily been chatting to you while you have been occupying the Chair. I wonder if I might put it to you that it would be extremely helpful to the efficient dispatch of business and the retention of good

*[Mr. John Bercow]*

order if they did not do that, because we wish, of course, to have the full benefit at all times both of your personal attention and of your intellectual resources.

**Mr. Speaker:** That is a bit like the kettle calling the pot black, as the hon. Gentleman is one of the chatterers.

**Mr. Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could it ever be in order for a Leader of the Opposition to be afforded special protection in this House during Question Time or any other occasion, no matter how exposed, vulnerable or pathetic that Leader might be?

**Mr. Speaker:** We now move on.

## BILL PRESENTED

BANKING (INQUIRY)

Mr. Christopher Leslie, supported by Mr. Phil Hope, Mr. Terry Rooney, Mr. James Plaskitt, Ms Sally Keeble, Maria Eagle, Shona McIsaac and Ms Rosie Winterton presented a Bill to require the Financial Services Authority to carry out an inquiry into the operation of overdraft facilities provided by clearing banks and deposit-taking institutions; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on 11 May, and to be printed [Bill 91].

## Bereavement Payments (Entitlement Conditions) (Amendment)

4.24 pm

**Mr. Roger Gale** (North Thanet): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the timescale within which payments may be made to bereaved persons.

My Bill would require a change in the provisions of the Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendments) (No. 2) Regulations, laid on 14 March 1997. These regulations—which apply to widows' benefit and widows' payment, or bereavement allowance, as it became on 9 April this year—reduced from 12 months to three the prescribed time limit within which a claim for benefit may be made. The clock starts running, effectively, from the date of death of the spouse.

The need to change those regulations was drawn to my attention by the tragic case of my young constituent Mrs. Corinna Smith. I raised this matter in an Adjournment debate more than a year ago, on 6 April 2000, and I therefore propose only to give a summary of the details. On 2 June 1999, Alan Smith of Margate was working with highly inflammable chemicals which caught fire, inflicting terrible burns, from which Mr. Smith subsequently died on 18 June, leaving a 19-year-old widow, Corinna.

Mrs. Smith was required to identify her husband's body in the Broomfield hospital, Chelmsford and then, for a second time, at the Buckland hospital, Dover, to which his remains had been transferred and where a post mortem was carried out. Alan Smith's corpse was subsequently released by the Dover coroner, who provided to the undertakers the burial order necessary for a funeral to take place on 8 July 1999.

A postponed inquest into Alan Smith's death was eventually held on 12 October 1999 and the Chelmsford registrar was finally able to issue a death certificate on 14 October. That was posted to Mrs. Smith with a covering letter, saying:

"Please find enclosed a Certificate of Registration of Death which should be completed on the reverse side and returned to the Department of Social Security. The leaflets enclosed may be of some assistance to you."

That was the first official document that Corinna Smith had received since the death of her husband four months earlier.

As Mrs. Smith was under 45, she did not qualify for a widows' pension and so she claimed the £1,000 widows' payment—the only assistance available to women facing her tragic circumstances—that she needed to help to repay money borrowed to pay for her husband's funeral and related expenses. In a pro forma notice issued by the local DSS she was told that

"because more than three months had elapsed since the death of her husband"

she would receive no money. A subsequent appeal to a tribunal delivered the decision that

"there is no entitlement to a Widow's Payment in respect of a death occurring more than 3 months before the date of the claim."

I regarded, and continue to regard, the denial to Mrs. Smith of what was clearly a payment that should have been hers by right, as a considerable injustice and as an affront that added insult to dreadful injury. I engaged in an exchange of letters with the Secretary of State and

the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley). I received much jargon and avowed sympathy for my constituent's plight, including the crass assertion that the Minister could

"appreciate that the time immediately after the death of a spouse will be traumatic and claiming may not be the main priority",

together with a rigid adherence to the book, which says that no payment will be made if a claim is made outside three months.

Given that the death certificate and letter of advice were not sent to Mrs. Smith until after the three-month deadline had passed, I assume that my constituent was expected either to read the fine print of every document in the DSS office or to have second sight in order to know of her entitlement. Without the necessary documentation and information it was not, of course, possible for her to claim in time.

My purpose in raising the matter in an Adjournment debate was not to win retrospective benefit which the Government were clearly determined, under rigid adherence to the regulations, to deny to Mrs. Smith, but to urge the Secretary of State to change the regulations so that no other woman would have to suffer, in similar circumstances, the indignity suffered by my constituent. In response, the Government Department charged with the duty of protecting the most vulnerable in society made it plain that, not to put too fine a point on it, my proposed and simple solution was "not thought of here", and it would not budge.

Replying to the debate, another Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle)—who, I am pleased to see, is in her place this afternoon—acknowledged that

"in Mrs. Smith's case there were good reasons for the delay in claiming benefit"

and that

"It was not her fault that the inquest was adjourned and that, by the time that it . . . took place . . . the three months had elapsed".

The Minister also offered, again, the helpful observation that

"at a time of traumatic loss, a widow may not be best placed emotionally or otherwise to make the business of claiming benefit"

the first priority. But the Government's bottom line was that, as the three-month time limit is

"an absolute rule, the reason for the delay is immaterial."—[*Official Report*, 6 April 2000; Vol. 347, c. 1259.]

This House of Commons has been devalued by an arrogant Executive, but if it has one useful purpose left it is, when necessary, to challenge and to change absolute rules—and that is what this Bill is about. I have made it plain that the regulations were laid by the last Conservative Government. They have been implemented and enforced by the present Government. As we all know, in politics there is a law of unintended consequences, and I do not for one moment believe that the authors of this nonsense intended to deny the thankfully very few Corinna Smiths of this world a pitiful bereavement benefit in their hour of need.

When I began this crusade I did not seek to apportion blame. However, it has become apparent that this Secretary of State and his Ministers are determined to perpetuate the injustice.

On 9 April, the widows' payment was replaced with the bereavement benefit, and the amount involved was increased from £1,000 to £2,000. It would have been easy to change the regulations at that time and, instead of starting the three-month clock running from the moment of death, to start it from the time when the death certificate—and the vital advice that goes with it—is issued.

That would have been easy, but this Secretary of State has chosen not to do it. It is to bring about that very simple change, and to make sure that others in the future are not denied Corinna Smith's widow's mite, that I seek leave today to introduce this Bill.

*Question put and agreed to.*

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Roger Gale, Mr. Peter Bottomley, Mrs. Helen Brinton, Mr. Ian Bruce, Sir Sydney Chapman, Mr. Nigel Jones, Mr. Andrew Rowe, Rev. Martin Smyth, Mr. Ian Stewart and Mrs. Ann Winterton.

### Bereavement Payments (Entitlement Conditions) (Amendment)

Mr. Roger Gale accordingly presented a Bill to amend the time scale within which payments may be made to bereaved persons: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 11 May, and to be printed [Bill 92].

## STANDING COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AFFAIRS

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 117(6) (Standing Committee on Regional Affairs),*

That—

(1) the matter of raising the economic performance of the regions and tackling regional imbalances, being a matter relating to regional affairs in England, be referred to the Standing Committee on Regional Affairs;

(2) the committee meet at half-past One o'clock on Thursday 10th May at Westminster to consider the matter referred to it under paragraph (1) above; and

(3) the proceedings at that meeting be interrupted at Four o'clock.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

*Question agreed to.*

# Regulatory Reform

*[Relevant documents: The First Special Report of the Deregulation Committee, Session 2000-2001, on the Handling of Regulatory Reform Orders, HC328.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker** (Mr. Michael Lord): Before we proceed, I should tell the House that Mr. Speaker has selected amendments (a) and (b) in the name of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth).

4.32 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Graham Stringer):** I beg to move,

That the following changes be made to the Standing Orders of the House—

A. That Standing Order No. 141 (Deregulation Committee) be repealed and the following new Standing Order be made—

*Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee*

(1) There shall be a select committee, called the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee, to examine—

(i) every document containing proposals laid before the House under section 3 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 (the 1994 Act) or under section 6 of the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 (the 2001 Act);

(ii) every draft order proposed to be made under section 1 of the 1994 Act or section 1 of the 2001 Act; and

(iii) every subordinate provisions order or draft of such an order made or proposed to be made under sections 1 and 4 of the 2001 Act.

(2) The committee shall report to the House, in relation to every proposals document referred to in paragraph 1(i) of this order, either

(a) that a draft order in the same terms as the proposals should be laid before the House; or

(b) that the proposals should be amended before a draft order is laid before the House; or

(c) that the order-making power should not be used in respect of the proposals.

(3) The committee shall report to the House, in relation to every draft order referred to in paragraph 1(ii) of this order, its recommendation whether the draft order should be approved.

(4) The committee may draw the special attention of the House to any subordinate provisions order or draft order referred to in paragraph 1(iii) of this order, and may report its opinion whether or not the order or draft order should be approved or, as the case may be, annulled.

(5) The committee may report to the House on any matter arising from its consideration of the said proposals, draft orders or subordinate provisions orders.

(6)(A) In its consideration of proposals the committee shall consider in each case whether the proposals

(a) appear to make an inappropriate use of delegated legislation;

(b) remove or reduce a burden or the authorisation or requirement of a burden;

(c) continue any necessary protection;

(d) have been the subject of, and take appropriate account of, adequate consultation;

(e) impose a charge on the public revenues or contain provisions requiring payments to be made to the Exchequer or any government department or to any local or public authority in consideration of any licence or consent or of any services to be rendered, or prescribe the amount of any such charge or payment;

(f) purport to have retrospective effect;

(g) give rise to doubts whether they are intra vires;

(h) require elucidation, are not written in plain English or appear to be defectively drafted;

(i) appear to be incompatible with any obligation resulting from membership of the European Union.

(B) In the case of proposals presented under the 2001 Act, the committee shall also consider whether the proposals:

(j) prevent any person from continuing to exercise any right or freedom which he might reasonably expect to continue to exercise;

(k) satisfy the conditions of proportionality between burdens and benefits set out in sections 1 and 3 of the Act;

(l) satisfy the test of desirability set out in section 3(2)(b) of the Act;

(m) have been the subject of, and take appropriate account of, estimates of increases or reductions in costs or other benefits which may result from their implementation; or

(n) include provisions to be designated in the draft order as subordinate provisions;

and in the case of the latter consideration the committee shall report its opinion whether such a designation should be made, and to what parliamentary proceedings any subordinate provisions orders should be subject.

(7) In its consideration of draft orders, the committee shall consider in each case all such matters set out in paragraph (6) of this order as are relevant and the extent to which the Minister concerned has had regard to any resolution or report of the Committee or to any other representations made during the period for parliamentary consideration.

(8) In its consideration of any subordinate provisions order the committee shall in each case consider whether the special attention of the House should be drawn to it on any of the grounds on which (in accordance with paragraph 1(B) of Standing Order No. 151 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee)) the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments may draw the attention of the House to a statutory instrument; and if the committee is of the opinion that any such order or draft order should be annulled, or, as the case may be, should not be approved, they shall report that opinion to the House.

(9) The committee shall consist of eighteen members.

(10) The quorum of the committee shall be five.

(11) Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament.

(12) The committee shall have power—

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom, and to report from time to time;

(b) to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference;

(c) to appoint a sub-committee, of which the quorum shall be two, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom;

(d) to communicate its evidence and any other documents relating to matters of common interest to any committee appointed by this House and to any committee appointed by the Lords to examine deregulation and regulatory reform proposals and draft orders.

(13) The committee and the sub-committee shall have leave to meet concurrently with any select committee appointed by the Lords to examine deregulation and regulatory reform proposals and draft orders and any sub-committee thereof.

(14) The committee and the sub-committee shall have the assistance of the Counsel to the Speaker and, if their Lordships think fit, the Counsel to the Lord Chairman of Committees.

(15) The committee and the sub-committee shall have power to invite Members of the House who are not members of the committee to attend meetings at which witnesses are being examined and such Members may, at the discretion of the chairman, ask questions of

those witnesses; but no Member not being of the committee shall otherwise take part in the proceedings of the committee or sub-committee, or be counted in the quorum.

(16) It shall be an instruction to the committee that before reporting either

(a) that any proposal should be amended before the draft order is laid before the House, or

(b) that the order-making power should not be used in respect of any proposal, or

(c) that any draft order should not be approved,

it shall afford to any government department concerned an opportunity of furnishing orally or in writing to it or to the sub-committee appointed by it such explanations as the department think fit.

(17) It shall be an instruction to the committee that it report on every draft order (not being a subordinate provisions order) not more than fifteen sitting days after the draft order was laid before the House, indicating in the case of draft orders which it recommends should be approved whether its recommendation was agreed without a division.

B. That the following amendments be made to Standing Order No. 18 (Consideration of draft deregulation orders)—

(1) Title, after 'deregulation', insert 'etc.'.

(2) Line 1, after 'Deregulation', insert 'and Regulatory Reform'.

(3) Line 3, after 'Deregulation', insert 'and Regulatory Reform'.

(4) Line 5, after '1994', insert 'or under section 1 of the Regulatory Reform Act 2001'.

C. That the following amendment be made to Standing Order No. 98 (Scottish Grand Committee (delegated legislation))—

Line 15, after 'order', insert 'or regulatory reform order'.

D. That the following amendment be made to Standing Order No. 115 (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (delegated legislation))—

Line 15, after 'order', insert 'or regulatory reform order'.

E. That the following amendment be made to Standing Order No. 118 (Standing committees on delegated legislation))—

Line 14, after 'order', insert 'or regulatory reform order'.

F. That the following amendment be made to Standing Order No. 151 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee))—

Line 25, after '1994', insert 'or under section 1 of the Regulatory Reform Act 2001, or any subordinate provisions order made or draft proposed to be made under that Act'.

G. That the following amendment be made to Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments)—

Line 33, after 'Deregulation', insert 'and Regulatory Reform'.

It is now a little over three weeks since the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 reached the statute book. The debates on the Bill as it went through Parliament, both here and in another place, were for the most part characterised by thoughtful and well-informed contributions. The result, I believe, is an excellent tool for regulatory reform. The Government have already published six consultation documents and I fully expect to see more issued soon.

As was made clear in debate on the Bill, the superaffirmative process that applies to deregulation orders and now to regulatory reform orders is a model of thorough parliamentary scrutiny. In order to ensure that the superaffirmative order-making process remains effective, we need to amend the two Standing Orders now before the House so that they cover all the innovations introduced by what is now the Regulatory Reform Act 2001.

It is therefore with considerable satisfaction that I am proposing today changes to the Standing Orders which will rename the current Deregulation Committee and permit it to consider regulatory reform proposals as well as to complete its scrutiny of those remaining proposals for deregulation orders that are currently before Parliament.

Throughout the debates on the Bill, I stressed that it was a matter for Parliament, and not the Government, to decide the manner in which the Committee would consider proposals for regulatory reform. I am therefore happy to say that the Standing Orders that we are considering today reflect very closely those suggested by the Committee in its first special report of this Session, published on 16 March.

I am sure that it will be of interest to the House if I outline briefly the procedure for the scrutiny of regulatory reform orders. The 2001 Act requires that the relevant Minister undertake extensive public consultation on the proposal in question. Under section 5, this consultation must involve all interested parties, including those that might be adversely affected by the proposals.

The process is, therefore, front loaded, by which I mean that the onus is very much on the Minister to work the policy through fully. The Minister proposing a piece of regulatory reform would need to think through the possible consequences thoroughly and then convince the Scrutiny Committee of the merits of the case. That can only be done on the basis of evidence gathered during the consultation process.

Let me make it clear that the purpose of this extensive public consultation is not only to seek views on the policy but to elicit evidence against a prescribed list of matters without which the proposal cannot legally go ahead. During Third Reading, I placed in the Libraries of the House a draft of an advisory note for Departments on consultation. We will shortly be issuing the final version. I believe that it would be helpful if I reiterated some of the key points.

The consultation document must include all aspects of the proposal. Each consultation on a prospective regulatory reform order must elicit all the information needed to complete the explanatory document that the Minister must lay alongside the proposed order. The consultation responses will need to provide evidence to support any assertions. The Government therefore accept the need for Departments to structure their consultation documents so as to follow the list of matters at section 6(2) of the Act—in particular, the extent to which burdens are to be removed or whether any burdens are to be restated or created; whether any proposal could prevent any person from continuing to exercise any right or freedom that he or she might reasonably expect to continue to exercise, and if so, how he or she is to be enabled to continue to exercise that right or freedom; whether the proposals would create a burden affecting any person in carrying on an activity, and if so, how the conditions concerning proportionality, fair balance and desirability are satisfied; whether any provisions of the proposed order are designated as subordinate provisions, and if so, why they are being so designated; whether any savings or increases in cost are estimated to result from the proposals, and if so, the reasons why savings or increases in costs should be expected; and if it is practicable, the documents should make an estimate of that amount and how it is calculated, and any benefits—other than savings in cost—that are expected to flow from the implementation of the proposals.

*[Mr. Graham Stringer]*

The reason for this degree of detail in consultation documents has as much to do with the specific requirements of the Act as with the Standing Orders of the Scrutiny Committee. Consultation documents on proposals for regulatory reform have two purposes. First, they must set out the proposal against the tests and safeguards in the order-making process in such a way that the intended audience can readily supply the information that the Minister needs to satisfy himself and the Scrutiny Committees that the proposal meets those tests and safeguards. Secondly, they must explain clearly and comprehensibly the policy on which views are being sought, including the implications for the devolved Administrations. These aims may result in a longer consultation document than would otherwise emerge with a straightforward consultation exercise aimed at developing policy.

The Standing Orders require the Scrutiny Committees to pay special attention to the inclusiveness of the consultation process, such as the extent to which it captured the views of those who might be adversely affected, whether directly or indirectly, by the proposal. That is obviously entirely right. It means that the emphasis must be on a wide distribution, covering representative bodies, consumer bodies, trade unions, employers' representatives—including representatives of small business and the Small Business Service—and other likely interest groups. The document should be expressed in a way that all these different interests can understand. It must include sufficient background material for a newcomer to understand the proposal. It should not assume any prior knowledge.

During debate, undertakings were given that highly charged or politically controversial measures are—and will remain—better suited to the Floor of the House. The consultation process will be key to establishing whether a proposal is suitable to enactment as an RRO or whether it would be best dealt with as a Bill. Of course, some proposals, such as the trade union check-off deregulation order, may initially appear controversial but prove amenable to the consensual nature of the order-making process, based, as it is, on the careful gathering of evidence which is weighed up by a scrupulous and independent Committee. The Standing Orders before the House are key to ensuring that the Committee can continue in that vein. Committees have in the past rejected proposals on grounds of inadequate consultation, and the Government fully expect them to maintain their vigilance.

After the consultation process, the proposals are put before the Committee under section 8 of the Act. The Committee considers them for 60 days. The Standing Orders outline the areas that the Committee will study, which reflect the tests and safeguards contained in the Act. We discussed those at considerable length at various stages and I have already run through them today.

At the end of the 60-day period, the Committee will issue a report on the proposals and it is for the Minister to decide how to respond. However, there is a firm Government commitment—which I am happy to repeat—that they will not proceed with an order in the face of the Committee's opposition. The Standing Orders then lay down a further 15 days for the consideration of the Government's proposal, as amended if appropriate. At the end of those 15 days, the Committee will report again and the matter passes for the approval of the House.

If the Committee's report is favourable, the question to approve the draft order is put forthwith without debate. If the Committee's report is favourable but it had divided on the issue, the question to approve the draft order is put after a maximum of one and a half hours of debate. If the Committee's report is not favourable, the question to approve the draft order is put after a maximum of three hours of debate. Again, I stress that that is what is laid down in the Standing Orders. In practice, the Government have made a commitment not to proceed with an order following an unfavourable report.

Experience with the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 has shown that this is an excellent system for scrutinising orders. The Committee's input has frequently been invaluable and the Government have changed many of their proposals in the light of their comments. It has also, on occasion, taken us to task on what it has seen as inadequate consultation on deregulation proposals, and the Government have always taken whatever corrective steps the Committee has recommended.

Although the useful life of the 1994 Act has come to an end, the procedures that governed its use have stood the test of time. The requirements in the Act and the effect of the Standing Orders ensure that the emphasis is on getting it right first time. As a result, it would, for instance, simply not be possible for a Minister to introduce a skeleton order, nor would the Minister be able to make large-scale and piecemeal amendments while the proposal was before the House for scrutiny.

Departments will, of course, also need to address at an early stage the implications of the three devolution settlements for their policy proposals. They must be reflected in the consultation document. Although not expressly provided for, the Standing Orders, as drafted, will ensure that the Scrutiny Committee can address any devolution-related issues when it considers the vires of each proposal. The devolution settlements are reflected in the vires of the Act, and the Committee is charged specifically with considering vires questions.

I am sure that it will be of interest to the House if I outline briefly the changes proposed by the Committee concerning existing Standing Orders Nos. 18 and 141 and the other minor modifications that I am suggesting be included in the Committee's draft. The new Standing Orders take account of two issues. The first is the advent of the Regulatory Reform Act 2001. The Standing Orders before us reflect the new and strengthened criteria against which proposals will be judged.

Secondly, the Standing Orders take account of the fact that proposals under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act that were placed before Parliament before the 2001 Act received Royal Assent are still being considered by the Committee. Four such orders are currently before Parliament. Once they have been dealt with, there will need to be further minor changes to the Standing Orders to reflect the final disappearance of the 1994 power. This will not need to take place until later in the autumn.

As I have said, the orders before us differ slightly from those drafted by the Committee in its first special report. Most of the changes are merely consequential to ensure that references to other Standing Orders remain consistent. The only change of substance is the addition

of paragraph (l) in article (6)(B). This concerns the desirability test, which was—as hon. Members will remember—added by the Liberal Democrats during the progress of the 2001 Act through another place. It makes sense to include it in the Standing Orders along with the other safeguards contained in the Act. I hope that members of the Committee will welcome this small change.

Under these Standing Orders, the Committee members will focus on the new safeguards in the Act. They must ensure that no proposal removes any necessary protection or deprives people of any rights or freedoms that they could reasonably expect to continue to enjoy. They must test to see whether any burdens imposed are proportionate to the benefits expected from them. Any orders imposing burdens must also strike a fair balance between the public interest and the interest of those affected by the burden, and the extent to which they remove burdens or bring other benefits must make the proposals as a whole desirable.

The Standing Orders also include some matters that are not on the face of the Act. For example, the Committee will consider whether proposals are in plain English. Hon. Members will remember that I resisted including such a provision in the Act itself. I was, and remain, concerned that legal clarity should not be sacrificed for superficial simplicity. I know that many Committee members are keen to highlight the issue, and I have no objection to its inclusion in the Standing Orders.

**Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): The Committee welcomes that. Although we included the provision in the draft Standing Orders, we did not expect it to be accepted.

**Mr. Stringer:** I am sure that the Committee's interest in plain English will give rise to interesting debates between its members and the lawyers who advise Departments. That should improve regulatory reform orders. The Committee is required only to "consider" the issue. As I agree that plain English is desirable wherever possible, I am happy for it to do that.

I am sure the House will agree that the Standing Orders are evidence of the Committee's positive input to the process. It is based on consensus, and the Government have been at pains to involve the Committee as much as possible. It has been an exemplary process, and I pay tribute to the Committee's work.

I note that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) has tabled amendments. Amendment (a) would increase the Committee's quorum from five to seven. Its size and quorum remain unchanged from those that applied under the previous Administration. Had the Committee suggested a change—which it did not—the Government would have taken its request seriously. The fact that the matter was not raised suggests that there is no need for the quorum to change for those people who are involved in the Committee.

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst) *rose—*

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham) *rose—*

**Mr. Stringer:** I give way first to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst.

**Mr. Forth:** That is an interesting line of argument. According to the Minister, it is enough if those directly involved do not believe that the quorum should be changed. However, I believe that the House is entitled to take a view of the duties and responsibilities of Committee members, independent of people with a vested interest. I hope he will accept that it is absolutely proper that I should seek the opinion of the House rather than of Committee members, who might want to slide out of attendance in greater numbers than my quorum would allow them to.

**Mr. Stringer:** We are undertaking that process now by considering the views of the House. I am using the fact that the Committee did not think it necessary to change the quorum to support my argument. Other arguments could be used in favour of the current quorum. For example, it is an important consideration that all Select Committees in the past have accepted it.

**Mr. Bercow:** Further to the point made by my right hon. Friend, not only are the views of existing Committee members not the only consideration, they are—frankly—scarcely a consideration at all. I put it to the Minister, who has lived a bit, that it is hardly a surprise that a tiny coterie of individuals—who for most purposes are otherwise largely, if not totally, obscure—should wish to preserve and enhance what pettifogging influence they may have, and are thus likely to oppose an increase in the quorum. As the late Enoch Powell would have said, that is so blindingly obvious that only an extraordinarily clever person could fail to see it.

**Mr. Stringer:** I repeat that we are not relying totally on the Committee's opinions in reaching our conclusions. I remind the hon. Gentleman that on Second Reading, Report and Third Reading, it was brought to the attention of hon. Members that Conservatives were the worst attenders of the Committee. Of course all hon. Members have a right to have their views heard. In particular, it is important to take into account the opinions of people who have had the responsibility of serving as Committee members.

**Mr. Pike:** Is it not important to remember that the quorum was fixed by the Conservative Government when the Committee was set up?

**Mr. Bercow:** I could not give a stuff about that.

**Mr. Pike:** Would it not be useful to note the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) as possible volunteers for the Committee after the election? They might well want to help to make up the quorum.

**Mr. Stringer:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. It is incumbent on hon. Members who want to amend a Standing Order to make the case for a positive change. It is interesting that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) said from a sedentary position that he did not give a stuff about what quorum the previous Government had set. We think it important that they set that standard, and we are satisfied with it.

*[Mr. Stringer]*

We have not heard a good case for change, and we have heard nothing from members of the Committee about a change.

**Mr. Brian Cotter** (Weston-super-Mare): Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Stringer:** I wanted to move on, but I will take the intervention.

**Mr. Bercow:** There is plenty of time.

**Mr. Cotter:** I do not want to labour the point, but is it not bizarre that Conservative Members are talking about increasing the quorum when I, as a member of the Committee, know that we had frequently to make up the quorum without their attendance?

**Mr. Stringer:** That is a very good point. I said earlier that Conservative Members' attendance of the Committee has not been good. One conclusion that we can draw from the amendments and the comments that have been made is that Conservative Members do not want the Committee to function.

I must tell the hon. Member for Buckingham that I wanted to make progress because his colleague on the Front Bench, the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), has courteously told me that he has a prior engagement, and I should like to finish my remarks to give him time to speak.

The second amendment seeks to raise from two to four the quorum of the sub-Committee that could be formed. Again, the proposals do not alter existing procedure. The sub-Committee could of course report only to the Committee proper, for which the usual quorum would be required. The Deregulation Committee did not recommend any change to the status quo.

I do not believe that the Standing Orders would benefit in any way from the amendments in the name of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, so in the light of the small changes that I have outlined, I am happy to accept the Committee's draft for the Standing Orders, and I commend it to the House.

4.52 pm

**Mr. Andrew Lansley** (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful to the Minister for his understanding of my requirement to be elsewhere in the House. I intend no discourtesy if I have to leave the Chamber shortly after the introductory speeches, but of course I hope to return in time for the winding up of the debate.

As the Minister said, we have recently debated some of the important measures in the Regulatory Reform Act 2001. As I said in those proceedings, the powers are exceptional and go beyond what was intended in the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994. The initial consultation documents issued in anticipation of Regulatory Reform Act orders show clearly that they will comprise not only deregulatory measures but those for re-regulation and restructuring of regulation, and will incur expenditure.

For example, it is intended that the vaccine damage payment scheme should be reformed and extended by way of those orders. The review of fire safety legislation that we have discussed will no doubt proceed. That is a large, comprehensive measure, and it is important that we get it right. We are dealing with the amendment of primary legislation through statutory instruments, and the Committee's important work on that should not be under-estimated.

I agree with my right hon. and hon. Friends that the Committee's record of attendance and much of its activity, valuable though it has undoubtedly been, is of little account. It has been of limited effect in the past few years because the Government have taken relatively few deregulatory initiatives since 1997. The fact that there will now be a volume of orders to be considered means that we are coming to the matter afresh, with these new powers, and it behoves us to look forward rather than back. The addition of regulatory reform to the Committee's title is itself resonant of its wider powers and purposes, so we have to make sure that it is effective.

In that context, once again we touch on the membership of Select Committees, not just issues concerning the quorum and so on; I am sure that my right hon. and hon. Friends will deal with that. I do not propose to reiterate arguments made by the Opposition in debates about the selection of members of Select Committees. However, it is important to recognise that there is a special need for Members chosen to serve on the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee to have a critical approach to draft orders and a sense of independence. I hope that, when the Committee is reconstituted, it is borne in mind that a sense of independence and willingness to scrutinise is vital.

We are pleased to see the Chairman of the Deregulation Committee in the Chamber and, when he contributes to the debate, I am sure that he will stress the need for a critical approach and independence, and for the Committee to be reconstituted quickly after the general election, whenever it takes place. There is a 60-day limit on the work of the Committee and, although the clock stops for an election, it restarts immediately after, so it is vital for the Committee to be in place and able to discharge that function.

The Committee's effectiveness, as I am sure that the Minister recognises, will largely depend on the quality of the preliminary consultation under section 5 of the 2001 Act and, indeed, the quality of the document laid before Parliament. I have made points in Committee and on Report about the requirements for preliminary consultation. I am therefore grateful to the Minister for the further changes that he has made in the advisory notes to Departments about consultation documents, and I look forward to any future draft that he may introduce.

The Minister referred to consultation documents that have already been issued. I have addressed the first five, but I note that the sixth, which relates to removing the 20-partner limit and was issued by the Department of Trade and Industry the day before Report and Third Reading, seems to have avoided the errors—perhaps that is too harsh, inconsistencies may be a better word—that characterised previous consultation documents. In particular, the preliminary consultation document does not attempt to prejudge Ministers' opinions on proportionality in the relationship between burdens imposed and benefits

derived; the desirability test to which the Minister referred; and the fair balance test in the Act between the public interest and the private interests affected.

**Mr. Bercow:** My hon. Friend has rightly highlighted the importance of proportionality and fair balance. Does he not agree that it would be useful to gain from the Government an understanding of whether they intend that equal weight should be given to every word in the title of the Committee? Specifically, what are we to expect from a Committee that was previously called the Deregulation Committee and is now to be called the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee? Does my hon. Friend, fair-minded specimen though he invariably is, not suspect, like me, that we are likely to get rather more of the latter than of the former?

**Mr. Lansley:** The weight and meaning of words should be considered carefully. The Minister may, or may not, wish to speculate on that, but I imagine that the title proposed for the Committee recognises its responsibility to continue to consider orders introduced under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 as well as orders that will be introduced under the 2001 Act. When, in due course, the Committee comes to consider only orders introduced under the 2001 Act, no doubt the intention is that it will change its name to the regulatory reform Committee. If Ministers ever get the chance to introduce such a further revised Standing Order, my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and I will, of course, observe and criticise it.

**Mr. Pike:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He is right. The first special report suggested that in the first instance the Committee should be called the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee, but recognised that the name would probably be changed in due course. Whether or not it will, I cannot predict, but there has been no attempt to amend its name today. Two or three amendments have been tabled, but none proposes a change in the Committee's name.

**Mr. Lansley:** I am interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments. If I am to infer from what he says that the Committee, as well as Ministers, may in due course wish to rename the Committee the Regulatory Reform Committee, I would be critical of that. In the light of the passage of the Act, it seems reasonable that the Committee has a job to do in respect of both deregulation and regulatory reform. If titles matter—sometimes they do—it would be better for the Committee to retain the reference to deregulation, because the prime purpose of the measure was always to be deregulation and ought to be so.

I revert to the point that I was making about preliminary consultation. I note with interest that the Department of Trade and Industry's most recent consultation document on removing the 20-partner limit does not seek to prejudge the regulatory impact assessment, and proposes that that should be put together in the light of consultations. Sometimes that is desirable, although it is interesting that no attempt has been made to quantify in advance the extent of the impact.

We should not cavil about that. However, when the Minister comes to consider the form of advice to Departments about the preparation of the document under section 6 of the 2001 Act, I hope that he will encourage Departments, in the light of the preliminary consultation, to be as specific as they can about the impacts that proposed orders will cause to occur.

In particular, those impacts should be disaggregated as far as possible between persons affected. The fair balance test, as the Minister will recall, must balance the public interest with private interests. As the Minister knows, the public interest is often expressed in terms of large numbers of people or public bodies, for whom there is a marginal benefit, as distinct from persons affected, for whom there might be substantial detriments and disbenefits. It is important that such information should be available to the Committee for its work. If the impacts are disaggregated, the Committee can consider the specific impacts on categories of persons and establish whether it is reasonable for them to suffer such detriment, in addition to all the other tests that must be applied.

It will not surprise the Chairman of the Deregulation Committee or the Minister that I hope that when the Committee comes to do its work under the Standing Orders, it will attach special importance to the deregulatory effects. The Committee has two opportunities to do that, under paragraphs 6(A)(b) and 6(B)(l), which give an opportunity for the Committee to consider the extent to which the measures proposed will have a deregulatory impact. I am glad that the Liberal Democrats in another place joined my noble Friends in stressing that point, and that Ministers took it on board.

Before I conclude, I shall deal with the undertakings that Ministers have given and seek the Minister's further response. I also have a number of questions. First, the Minister has been helpful in reiterating the intention that Ministers will not proceed against the advice of the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee. Does that undertaking extend to accepting that where the Committee proposes amendments to an order before it is made, which is one of the conclusions that the Committee can reach, those amendments will be incorporated?

My second question relates to the subordinate provisions orders. On that new responsibility for the Committee, will the Minister give an undertaking that where the Committee recommends that an order should be made by affirmative procedure, Ministers will respond positively to such a recommendation?

Thirdly, I was interested to hear that the Committee may divide on an order. I will be corrected if I am wrong but, to my recollection, that has not occurred in the past. However, such a Division on a matter of substance may show that it was more controversial than was anticipated. Ministers have said that orders will not be made in relation to large and controversial measures, and I suspect that any order which is substantially controversial should not be made using this procedure, so I hope that, in the event of such a Division, they will undertake to consider whether to proceed, without necessarily giving each Committee member a veto. The matter would have to be weighed and if there were a suggestion that it was highly controversial it should not necessarily be proceeded with.

Standing Order 6(A)(i) states that the Committee will consider whether the proposals—

"appear to be incompatible with any obligation resulting from membership of the European Union."

That has been reflected unchanged in the new Standing Orders. However, I do not recall hearing how the Committee would consider, if it were thought relevant,

*[Mr. Lansley]*

compatibility or otherwise with the Human Rights Act 1998. Has the Minister considered whether that should also be reflected in the Standing Orders?

**Mr. Stringer:** The Government gave assurances that regulatory reform orders would have a statement attached to them, as Bills do now, expressing the Minister's view that they are compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998. The House has set up a special Committee to test such assertions.

**Mr. Lansley:** I am grateful to the Minister but, presumably, it has not been Ministers' intention to bring forward legislation using the deregulation legislation that they believe is incompatible with our obligations resulting from membership of the EU. The question is whether, since the Committee has a role in questioning other opinions of Ministers, the Committee has any role in testing that assertion of compatibility made by the Minister. The hon. Gentleman or the Chairman of the Committee may wish to reflect on that further.

I accept that the Minister was responding to our debates when he suggested that the Committee should consider whether orders were written in plain English, but the points made in Committee concerned not simply the quality and clarity of the language, but whether all the measures had been taken which could be taken to achieve simplification in legislation. Will the Minister consider further whether the Committee will be able to consider simplification as well as clarity.

I was surprised to see that, although the proposed Standing Orders include a series of additional considerations following the Regulatory Reform Act 2001, they do not appear to require the Committee to consider inconsistencies and anomalies, which the House will recall is one of the purposes of section 1 of that Act for which orders may be made.

If an order is concerned principally with the removal of inconsistencies and anomalies, alongside the reduction or removal of burdens, it would seem reasonable on the face of it that the Committee should examine whether those inconsistencies and anomalies exist or have been satisfactorily removed and whether additional measures could have been introduced to achieve greater consistency and lack of anomaly.

The Committee faces an important task. The Parliamentary Secretary mentioned consensus. We should not be disparaged for seeking to proceed by consensus in relation to regulatory reform orders, as it does not necessarily mean compromise. Controversial measures should not be proceeded with without proper agreement, and the exceptional powers and procedure of the House for making legislation should be used only when there is agreement between parties that such measures are desirable. As we all know, it falls substantially to the Committee—as to all Committees of the House—to undertake detailed and effective scrutiny. We know from bitter experience that if we do not provide such scrutiny, too much legislation is introduced that we later regret. I therefore hope that the Standing Orders will be effective, that the Parliamentary Secretary can assure me that they will serve their purpose and that the Committee will be effective in discharging its functions.

5.11 pm

**Mr. Peter L. Pike** (Burnley): I should like to say a few words about the motion. In my last intervention on the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), in which I spoke about the name of the Committee, I may have inadvertently given the wrong impression about what could happen in future. It is right to say that the Committee recommended the name that is included in the proposed Standing Orders, but we did not say what it could or would be changed to. We said merely that it could be changed during the lifetime of the Parliament, so I want to correct any wrong impression that I may have given. We want deregulation to continue to be a main function of the Committee. The Government have said all along that they want to remove unnecessary bureaucracy and regulation that serves no useful purpose. I hope that hon. Members from all parties share that view.

**Mr. Anthony Steen** (Totnes): As the hon. Gentleman is Chairman of the Deregulation Committee, of which I am a member, I think that it is right for me to refresh his memory. Only one order has been deregulated this year, and only one order last year. Are the Government genuinely committed to deregulation?

**Mr. Pike:** The hon. Gentleman has not been very noticeable by his attendance at our sittings, although I know that he has asked one or two questions in the House. Ministers have been most anxious for an increase. Indeed, the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 was introduced to increase the flow of activity and the pace with which matters are considered by the Committee.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire said that he could not recall whether the Committee had divided on any issues. The only matter on which there was a Division was the deduction of trade union subscriptions. It was debated and a vote was held on the Floor of the House, in accordance with Standing Orders. The Confederation of British Industry and all the employers who responded to the consultation strongly supported our recognition of the need to remove the bureaucracy that required everybody to sign the form every three years and to end the waste of time and money that was involved. If the Opposition had defeated the proposal, the main sources of concern would have included not only trade unions, but the employers throughout the country who wanted the change to be made.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire made a point about human rights.

**Mr. Bercow:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Pike:** I shall finish the human rights point, which I have started.

We accepted the Government's comments as debates progressed and the Regulatory Reform Bill was enacted, but I assure hon. Members that the Committee will consider the human rights point. I do not know the identity of the members or whether I shall be Chairman, but I shall ensure that the Clerks know about the debate and that the human rights point is considered soon after the general election.

**Mr. Bercow:** In the light of the point about proportionality and the reference in proposed new

paragraph (6)(A)(i) to European Union obligations, will the hon. Gentleman explain the connection between the principle of proportionality in the context of our debate and the principle of proportionality and its application under the protocol on subsidiarity and proportionality in the treaty of Amsterdam?

**Mr. Pike:** I did not mention proportionality and I do not understand why the hon. Gentleman referred to it. I have not reached that part of the proposed new Standing Order. I was responding to a few points that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire made in his opening remarks. I have not started to develop the main points of my speech. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) is obviously anxious to serve on the new Committee so that he can examine every issue in detail in the next Parliament. Every item that we have to consider is listed on our papers and hon. Members ask questions about them.

**Mr. Bercow:** I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's keen and continuing interest in my welfare. I do not want to poison the well of political debate or personal relations, and I therefore stress that I have no objection in principle to serving on the Committee. However, I would be in a position to do that only after I had been sacked from the Opposition Front Bench—or the Government Front Bench, as it will be in the next Parliament. I am therefore in no hurry to serve on the Committee.

**Mr. Pike:** The hon. Gentleman will not be on the Government Front Bench, but he may be sacked from the Opposition Front Bench a little sooner than he expects. I do not know what crime he intends to commit.

**Mr. Forth:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Will you confirm that membership of Select Committees is a matter for the House and that it should not be bandied about by hon. Members making countering offers?

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Yes, that is true, but it would be a good idea to revert to the motion.

**Mr. Pike:** I was speaking about the motion; the right hon. Gentleman's suggestion that I was not doing so is a misinterpretation of my comments.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire referred to the independence of members of the Committee. Since the Deregulation Committee was established under the Deregulation and Contracting Act 1994, there has been no evidence of its members displaying a lack of independence. Few measures have been approved in the exact form that the Government proposed.

Today's Votes and Proceedings outlines yesterday's proceedings and reports three items from the Deregulation Committee. They show that Government proposals were agreed, but with amendment. They state that the proposals,

"should be amended before a draft order is laid before this House."

Indeed, we recommended that the Government should not proceed with one of the proposals for the draft Deregulation (Bingo and Other Gaming) Order. We also recommended that the relevant Department should not implement the most important of the two proposals for the draft Deregulation (Restaurant and Licensing Hours) Order.

All along, therefore, the Committee has shown its independence and carried out its judgments according to the criteria laid down under the present Standing Order. I am sure that it will continue to do that under the new Standing Order, once we have agreed it. Indeed, the Committee agreed yesterday that as soon as the new Committee is established, in the new Parliament, the first sitting would need to consist of a briefing with the officials of the Committee to ensure that everyone understood its workings and the differences in procedures resulting from the new Act. There are bound to be some new members on the Committee. Indeed, everyone could be new, because I fully accept the point that the House appoints the Committee. The first thing that the new Committee will do will be to get to know how it will carry out its business under the new Standing Order and in accordance with the new Act.

We have also made it clear to the Government that there should be a sensible flow of business in the Committee. After the original Committee was established, we recognised why, but thought it wrong, in one instance three items of business were tabled in the same week. Normally, there should be a sensible flow of business if the Committee is to be able to do its work in a sensible way. It cannot have a large number of items thrown at it all at once. That will be clearly stated in the report that we intend to publish this week.

There was agreement under the previous Government that there should be a forward report,, but because there have not been many measures the forward report has tended to disappear. We are recommending that it should come back into being, to show what is on the agenda so that everybody knows what is in the pipeline.

**Mr. Steen:** I always enjoy listening to the hon. Gentleman, but I do not understand what he is talking about. Either these new arrangements are right or wrong. If they are right, we should let them go through; if they are wrong, will he tell us what he has against them? I do not understand what he is talking about. He must forgive me, but perhaps he could explain.

**Mr. Pike:** I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman, who came in late to the debate, is just trying to waste time or is in one of those moods in which he fails to understand anyone speaking plain English—which is mentioned in the new Standing Order. I have spoken in simple terms. All that I am saying is that the new Committee wants to ensure that it has a sensible flow of proposals that ensures that it can deal with them; that there is adequate discussion so that all members of the Committee—including new ones—know exactly how it will work; and that a forward report will be published so that everyone knows what is on the horizon and what the Government have in the system.

**Mr. Forth:** The hon. Gentleman says, quite correctly—and very responsibly, given his current, highly elevated position as Chairman—that he hopes that there will be a regular flow of work for the Committee in the next Parliament. Will he tell us what control the Committee will have over the flow of work to achieve that aim?

**Mr. Pike:** That is an interesting point. We hope that the new Committee will have more power to be proactive, rather than just reactive, and that we shall be able to ask

*[Mr. Pike]*

what is happening and get Ministers to come before us and answer questions if we do not think that the system is working. That option is available to us.

My final point on yesterday's proceedings concerns one of the issues that my hon. Friend the Minister referred to as being part of the Home Office consultation process, and relates to gambling proposals. We want to take evidence from the Home Office on the way in which it intends to deal with legislation and deregulation measures on bingo, one-arm bandits, the lottery and other related issues. There needs to be a sensible approach, rather than a piecemeal one in which provisions overlap. For example, there are cases in which people do not know the age at which one can gamble in a pub as opposed to on a pier at the coast. All those measures differ, and we believe that it is time that the Home Office got those matters organised.

**Mr. Steen:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his indulgence and for his giving way.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, I always try to be helpful to the House. The regulation or, rather, deregulation that the Committee has dealt with tends to involve gambling, dancing or bingo, as if the whole country were governed by people who gamble, love dancing or play bingo. Does he agree that the new Committee's prime objective should not be merely to take evidence as to whether we should gamble, play bingo or go dancing?

**Mr. Pike:** The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonably valid point. Indeed, when his party was in government, I asked whether ours was the Committee on gambling and throwing dice. Yes, that is the main issue that the Committee has considered, but he has seen the list that was relevant to the debate that we held a few weeks ago, which contained a lot of other measures.

We have considered important suggestions such as the truncation of cheques, which involved the banks. That major proposal for improvement has saved the banks a lot of money, although I think that two phases are involved and it is not obvious from what one sees at the front of a bank whether that second phase has been implemented. The hon. Gentleman should not deride what the Committee has done.

**Mr. Bercow:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Pike:** I am trying to speak to the proposed Standing Orders, but I give way for the last time.

**Mr. Bercow:** I am exceptionally grateful to the hon. Gentleman, whose generosity invariably gets the better of him in the House.

Further to the inquiry of my hon. Friend the Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), I put it to the hon. Gentleman, who is a very important, very distinguished, very senior, very respected, very influential and very eminent figure in the House, that it would be useful if the Committee, under not only his chairmanship, but his tutelage, sought to anticipate potentially unfavourable developments rather than merely react to them. In that context, does he intend to use the full majesty of his office to take a view and to encourage his Committee to take a view on the proposed national works council directive?

**Mr. Pike:** I do not think that the Committee under my chairmanship will do more work, because a certain event may take place relatively soon. Although I am the only person who has been a member since its establishment, I do not know whether I will be a member in future. As the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) rightly said, that will be a matter for the House, which may not choose to put me back on the Committee. Let us leave the new Committee and the new Chairman to decide such matters. All we are trying to do is point a few issues in the right direction and approve the Standing Orders.

I intended to be brief, but, because of interventions, I have gone on much longer than I intended. The Standing Orders, which were included in the Committee's first special report, are based on the existing Standing Orders for the Committee, taking account of the 2001 Act. Only minor changes have been made, and the Committee and I welcome them.

In respect of proposed new paragraph (6)(B), burdens and benefit are covered by proposed new sub-paragraph (k). My hon. Friend the Minister referred in particular to the addition of sub-paragraph (l), which refers to

"the test of desirability set out in section 3(2)(b) of the Act".

We welcome that, because it proves that the Government were taking note, even at a late stage, of what the House was saying in order to meet concerns that were expressed, in particular by the Liberal party, but also by others. Therefore, the Government have included that additional measure. Proposed new sub-paragraph (m) refers to other benefits. Vital matters have been dealt with and the Standing Orders will enable the Committee, when it is appointed, to do its job.

Finally, I want to emphasise a point that I made on Report and Third Reading. We all recognise the difficulties that will exist, but if there is an early election—everybody seems to think that there will be—the Committee must be set up as soon as possible so that it can get on with its work.

I accept some of the points made by Conservative Members. I hope that, at times, the Committee will be more proactive and I believe that the 2001 Act and the Standing Orders will provide it with the opportunity to be so, if its members so wish.

5.30 pm

**Mr. Brian Cotter** (Weston-super-Mare): I thank the Minister for his full explanation of the proposed amendments, and the details of the various Standing Orders. The wording of the Standing Orders is perhaps as important as the wording of the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 itself, in that it establishes the parliamentary framework within which the Act will operate. I am sure all Members present want to ensure that the Act can be a truly effective vehicle for the cutting of excessive regulatory red tape which bears down on small firms in particular but also on many other businesses. It gives us parliamentarians a chance to prove to such businesses that we are serious about creating an environment that small firms can use to maximise their potential.

Owing to extensive pre-legislation scrutiny and the careful examination given to the Bill both here and in the other place, the Act that it has become represents a real opportunity for the achievement of that goal. Unless we get the scope of the Standing Orders just right, however—given that they constitute the nuts and bolts of our legislative framework—we shall find ourselves trying to cut the red tape with a pair of blunt scissors. That is why I was so pleased to hear some of the more sensible and constructive arguments that have been advanced today.

As a member of the current Committee, I have been involved with the Act from the outset. That includes the pre-legislation scrutiny. I am glad that we have reached this stage, and hope that the Act will begin to bear fruit in the near future. I welcome most of the changes to the Standing Orders. I especially welcome the name of the new Committee, and the work that it will do in examining the deregulation orders under the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994—alongside the new regulatory reform orders that will ensue.

Further amendments to Standing Order No. 141 should be gladly received. I welcome the inclusion in the Committee's remit of consideration of parliamentary procedure for subordinate provisions orders. An amendment tabled by Lord Borrie means that the Committee will be able to choose the procedure to which such orders should be subject, and will have power to report to the House accordingly. Owing to the wide scope of the Act, the powers vested in the Committee are vital to ensuring that it is not open to potential abuse, and will allow the Committee to exercise extra precautions when it deems that to be necessary.

Probably the most important change to Standing Order No. 141, in terms of the Committee's work, is an addition to the criteria on which proposals for orders must be considered: the necessity for them to be written in plain English. That was mentioned earlier, but I ask leave of the House to repeat it. We are, I hope, seeing the start of a move towards the use of more plain English in Parliament generally.

It is essential for us to make regulations that the business community can easily understand. One should not have to be a legal expert to interpret legislation. I trust that by giving the Committee power to consider regulations in this way, we shall ensure that the Government produce better regulation that is easily understood, and therefore easily adhered to with the minimum of fuss and difficulty. I am glad that the Government are allowing the Committee to judge their legislation on the basis of that objective. Originally, Ministers rejected the idea of including the proposal in the legislation, arguing that a requirement for clear and concise drafting would be automatic in view of its reforming nature. The inclusion of the criterion in the Committee's remit will hopefully mean that we can gradually make poorly drafted, complicated legislation a thing of the past.

I welcome the inclusion of additional criteria against which regulatory reform orders will be judged, which will go alongside those that are relevant to the deregulation orders. It is necessary that the criteria—reasonable expectations, proportionality, desirability and cost—that have been included in the Act are placed within the Committee's remit. That will help to ensure that the Minister making the original order will focus on those issues, being well aware that the Committee will test them upon consideration of the order, which, again, should deter any rogue Minister who might seek to exploit the Act for questionable ends. Of course, I would not dream of suggesting that the existing Minister was a rogue Minister, but who knows who may come along in future—in the far distant future possibly.

**Mr. Bercow:** I am doing my best to preserve a certain sense of normality, but the atmosphere of consensus is becoming positively suffocating. It causes me to refer again to proposed paragraph (6)(A)(i) of the new Standing Order, which refers to obligations as a consequence of our membership of the European Union. If the Committee, which has such an august membership and such an outstanding Chairman, is to have a proper sense of its ambition, it should be prepared properly to scrutinise European Union directives and regulations that might adversely impact on this country. To fail to do so would be meek, mousy and myopic.

**Mr. Cotter:** It must be said that it was under the last Conservative Government that the original measure was put forward and a criticism of that measure is that it was rather meek, mousy and whatever else the hon. Gentleman said, because it did not allow the Committee to be proactive. It is incumbent on the new Committee and the new Chairman—we do not know who that will be—to ensure that it is far more proactive. I believe that it will be.

A couple of points with regard to the remit and composition of the Committee must be addressed. I note the amendments that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) has tabled, which seek to increase the quorum of the new Committee from five to seven and the quorum of the sub-committee from two to four, with the stipulation that at least half that number should be from an Opposition party.

The amendments raise several important points with regard to the effective operation of the Committee. Whether one accepts that the quorum of the Committee should be increased or not, a valuable point is being made. The work of the Committee is likely to be plentiful and complex. In a written answer to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on 27 November last year, the Minister provided a list of the proposals that the Government planned to bring forward under the new Act. We have talked about those before. The list is extensive and wide-ranging and shows that the Government are striving to make great use of the Act across a number of legislative areas.

That means that the Act is likely to be used to a greater extent than its predecessor, but we must recognise that the Committee will need to have the appropriate resources to deal with an extended work load. The lack of work with which the existing Committee has been provided has meant that the resources available to it have been reduced over time. However, it is likely that orders under the new legislation will come in thick and fast. The Committee needs to be prepared for that to ensure that orders are adequately scrutinised.

The Committee currently has 18 members, yet it is rare for all its members to attend sittings. On Second Reading of the Regulatory Reform Bill, the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) said that he had to write to the Conservative Chief Whip in his capacity as Chairman of the Select Committee on Deregulation stressing the need

*[Mr. Cotter]*

for Conservative Members to attend. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) talked about the lack of an effective Committee, but it was noticeable that, during pre-legislative scrutiny of the Bill, Conservative attendance was very low, too—and that at a time when one would have thought that they would be there to ensure that future legislation was effective.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst has tabled an amendment proposing that the sub-committee should include at least one Opposition Member. That highlights the importance of getting the balance on the Committee right and ensuring that Opposition Members make an effective contribution; although that does involve turning up, at least. Some of us hope that the Conservatives will be sufficiently enthused after the expected election to turn up. Of course there may not be many of them to turn up. We are looking for great participation by all parties, including my own.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst has rightly concentrated our minds on the issues, but I feel that, on balance, the existing quorum and membership are about right. We look forward to the points that the right hon. Gentleman will be making later in the debate.

We must consider the Committee's role in the scrutiny of regulatory reform orders. We must ensure that all elements of the Committee have a valid input into proceedings, especially as the Government will now have the power to introduce new burdens. We must ensure that the composition of the Committee reflects all political opinions and views. I welcome the fact that the stipulation remains that once a Member is selected for the Committee, he will continue to serve on it for the duration of the Parliament—

**Mr. Forth:** Whether he turns up or not.

**Mr. Cotter:** Indeed. It will probably be impossible to build up any real expertise in the Committee because so many subjects will be brought forward, but it is important that there is consistency of membership.

**Mr. Forth:** Does the hon. Gentleman think that a stipulation in Standing Orders that a Member, once elected to a Committee by the House, should remain on that Committee for the duration of the Parliament runs somewhat against his criticism—with which I totally agree—of Members who persistently fail to turn up to, show interest in or support the work of the Committee? Would it not be preferable if a mechanism were available that said that if Members did not attend a Committee over a certain period, they could be removed in favour of Members who were more committed to its work? Does he think that there is a danger in giving Members automatic and unchallenged membership of a Committee for the duration of a Parliament?

**Mr. Cotter:** I bow to the great experience of the right hon. Gentleman in this area. My point is a fair one. If people are not doing their job, they ought to be kicked out. Perhaps that applies generally, but it tends to take elections for that to happen. We shall see at the next election how many will be kicked out.

**Mr. Bercow:** I always enjoy listening to the hon. Gentleman, but I cannot allow him to get away with that attempted response to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). He should not seek to obscure the debate by chuntering on about the possible result of the general election. Will he focus on the contradiction that was appositely highlighted by my right hon. Friend between his advocacy, on the one hand, of the argument that members should sit on the Committee to which they are appointed throughout the Parliament and then, when challenged—in characteristically Liberal Democrat fashion—his apparent acceptance of the alternative point of view, that poor attenders should be kicked off? Is he in favour of security of tenure or not?

**Mr. Cotter:** The hon. Gentleman always talks about people chuntering on, but he is also quite capable of that. I stick by my original proposal, but I am tempted by the suggestion of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst because the attendance of Conservative members of the Committee has been deplorable. It would be very nice if one could say to them, "Get off the Committee if you don't turn up," but that is not the right way forward.

**Mr. Pike:** I actually wrote to the Conservative Chief Whip on two occasions, but I never received a reply. One of the Conservative members of the Committee later became a Whip, and I was told that the party could not find any replacement who could attend the Committee.

**Mr. Cotter:** That is a very interesting point.

I was also pleased to learn that the Committee will retain its ability to appoint specialist advisers, which is important because of the varied and complex nature of the business we are expected to consider. I know that the Chairman of the present Committee agrees that the new Committee should be appointed soon after the election, because business will be moving along. I would also like an assurance that the Committee will have adequate resources to fulfil its new functions, in terms of legal and administrative support from civil servants and clerks. It is vital that the members of the Committee have access to as much expertise and information as possible, and that is especially important when considering complex issues.

Resources become essential once again when we consider the Committee's intention to produce an annual report. At least, it was the recommendation of the previous Committee that it should produce an annual report and I hope that the new Committee will take that on board. The Government have indicated that they would find an annual report acceptable, although it has not been included in the motion.

Standing Order No. 141 remains the same in that the new Committee will have the power to invite Members of Parliament who are not part of the Committee to attend meetings. With the permission of the Chairman, the Committee will have the power to ask those Members questions. Ministers will be required to produce documents under section 6 of the Act, but as an additional safeguard it might be appropriate to give the Committee the power to summon Ministers and legally require them to answer its questions. That might prove a further deterrent to any supposed rogue Minister seeking to abuse power in the future.

I hope that the Minister will be able to provide me with some assurances on a few of the matters that I have raised regarding the Standing Order changes, which otherwise will—I hope—provide the basis for effective examination of regulation and deregulation in the future.

5.48 pm

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): I beg to move, as an amendment to the motion, amendment (a), in paragraph (10), leave out "five" and insert "seven".

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I remind the House that with this we are discussing amendment (b), in paragraph (12)(c), leave out "two" and insert "four".

**Mr. Forth:** If one tries to rise above the mind-numbing, mutually congratulatory, consensual nonsense that we have heard so far in the debate, the truth is that we are talking about the legislative process. What the Committee does, if its members bother to turn up and if it bothers to do more than one thing a year—which seems to have been the productivity rate hitherto—is legislate: it makes law and affects people's lives. We are therefore entitled to ask whether we are satisfied that the arrangements in place for the working of the Committee are appropriate to that end.

The Minister, who is conservative to his fingertips, said in a very conservative way, "Because it has always been done this way, it must be all right." The Government are happy to accept that what happened under the previous Government is equally all right, and the conservative Minister would not dream of challenging or changing any aspect of it. I welcome the Minister to the ranks of conservatism, but I am a radical and I see need for change if we can demonstrate that the existing arrangements are unsatisfactory.

I confess that I am not encouraged by what I have heard about the Committee's procedures. It seems to operate extraordinarily slowly, and to rely on the Government for its flow of work. That is hardly appropriate. Members of the Committee often do not bother to turn up, and the Chairman told us that he had to write to the Opposition Chief Whip to ask where members were. That gives me little confidence.

I am delighted and honoured that my amendments have been selected for debate. It is time for the House to consider how Select Committees work, and the attitude to their work of those Committees members. The revised Standing Order requires the Committee to examine provisions, to report to the House, to recommend whether draft orders should be laid before the House or amended, and so on. In effect, that is the legislative process. As such, it has a majesty that requires a guarantee that the people of this country be properly represented on those Committees.

The provisions outlining the structure and working of the Committee horrified me, and the debate so far has not lessened that horror. Nothing said by those eminent members of the Committee who are present or its august, senior and respected Chairman has given me confidence or optimism about how the revised Committee will discharge its duties. I am more than ever convinced that my modest amendments are appropriate.

We are told that the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee will consist of 18 members. That is an encouraging start. Eighteen is a good number, representative of the House and offering an appropriate spectrum of expertise and knowledge. It will allow the Committee to deal with the technical, specialist, difficult and complex matters with which it will be faced as it performs its scrutiny of one measure per year.

Will all 18 members always turn up, however? If not, how satisfactory are the quorum arrangements? This is where I get into difficulty. Amendment (a) deals with the provision in the Standing Order that states that the Committee's quorum shall be five.

In Committees such as this, we can guarantee that the Chairman will always be present, as—almost certainly—will dragooned members of the governing party. My worry, which the Committee's Chairman has more or less confirmed, is that the Committee could sit, deliberate and, in effect, legislate with as few as five Members present. Moreover, all five of those Members could belong to the party in government at the time.

I accept that the Opposition are under a responsibility to provide members of the Committee. I deprecate it when hon. Members serving on a Committee miss its meetings. I believe that my attendance record for the Committees on which I have the honour to serve bears considerable scrutiny. I have no hesitation in saying that all hon. Members serving on Committees should ideally be present at every meeting—but that is not the point. The point is that hon. Members should ask whether they are comfortable with a provision that allows as few as five hon. Members to make or change the law of the land.

I am not comfortable with that. I should have preferred the quorum to be set at an even higher level, but I accept that practicalities must be taken into account. My amendment proposing that the quorum be raised from five to seven is modest, but it would give at least a degree of assurance to hon. Members who are not on the Committee—and to voters and taxpayers—that at least seven people would be present when proposals to change the law of the land were being considered and enacted. That is not unreasonable. It would make it more likely—although it would not guarantee it—that those present embodied a spectrum of views and political representation.

Even more important are the proposals regarding the sub-Committee. Amendment (b) deals with paragraph 12(c) of the motion, which states that the sub-Committee

"shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom."

This is where we get to the freebies and jollies part of the consideration. Hon. Members really like to decamp to different places to do their no doubt important work.

**Mr. Pike:** I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the Committee has never gone beyond the House of Commons on official business.

**Mr. Forth:** I am reassured to hear that, but I am looking to the future. The hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) may want to dwell on the past, but I am a visionary who looks forward to what may lie in the future. We have established that the Minister is a conservative at heart, and that the Chairman of the Committee looks to the past. By contrast, I am a radical who looks to the future.

*[Mr. Forth]*

My aim is to establish the fact that the Standing Order contains an explicit provision that almost invites the sub-Committee to travel. I have never known hon. Members to be reticent or hesitant about accepting an invitation to travel. It would be a revelation to come across one that was, but we can examine the matter of travel later. *[Interruption.]* One of the greatest experts in the universe on parliamentary travel has just arrived in the Chamber. I welcome the right hon. Member for Swansea, but confess that I cannot recall just now whether his constituency is Swansea, East or Swansea, West.

**Mr. Donald Anderson** (Swansea, East): I represent Swansea, East.

**Mr. Forth:** I am sure that the right hon. Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) would not thank me for confusing the Swansea constituencies.

**Mr. Anderson:** Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Forth:** Of course.

**Mr. Anderson:** My grandfather always said that the east is where the wise men came from.

**Mr. Forth:** I shall leave that for the right hon. Gentleman to sort out with the right hon. Member for Swansea, West. I do not want to intervene in the matter, although I know Swansea and like it enormously.

Paragraph 12(c) sets out the sub-Committee's extensive powers to send for "persons, papers and records", and to sit while the House is adjourned. The provision also allows it to travel, and hon. Members are clearly reluctant that reference should be made to that possibility. However, I suspect that those who have not examined the Standing Order will hardly be able to believe one of the other provisions.

The sub-Committee's work inevitably will be complex, technical and difficult, yet its quorum is to be set at two. It is therefore likely—or at least possible—that two Members of the House could bind this very important sub-Committee, which does such important work. Moreover, earlier provisions in the Standing Order mean that those two hon. Members could have a great deal of influence on what the House itself subsequently determines.

The House must decide whether it feels comfortable—in the context of Parliament and the legislative process—with the possibility that just two hon. Members might be able to discharge such important and onerous responsibilities. I do not feel comfortable with that possibility.

Amendment (b) is modest, as it would merely increase the sub-Committee's quorum from two to four. I could have tried to go further, but I want to try to persuade the House that that modest increase would at least provide the assurance that it would not be possible for two members of the sub-Committee to influence events in the way I have described.

The Chairman has said that he has no control over the flow of work; he seems to rely on the Government to feed his Committee with material. If the record is to be believed, one measure a year seems about the average. In a funny way that reassures me, because if we end up, as I fear we may, with a sub-Committee operating on a quorum of two and the Committee on a quorum of only five, I sincerely hope that they will do only one thing a year. I would be nervous if I thought they would do any more work of any great importance at any great rate.

**Mr. Pike:** A few moments ago the right hon. Gentleman said that he was a visionary, looking forward, but now he is looking back to what happened under the Tory legislation. Should we not be looking at what will happen under Labour's Regulatory Reform Act 2001?

**Mr. Forth:** I have been looking back because I was told—I hope reliably—that the Committee had dealt with one measure over the past year. *[Interruption.]* The Chairman of the Committee says with some pride that the Committee did three things yesterday. I will grant the Chairman that—the Committee has done four things in the past year, if my arithmetic holds up under this scrutiny. Even so, that does not strike me as anything to write home about, as my dear mother used to say.

**Mr. Pike:** That was under the Tory Act.

**Mr. Forth:** I accept the Chairman's interventions because I know that he offers them in a helpful way. He seems to be saying that under legislation passed by the wicked Conservative Government, progress was very slow, but that under the exciting and dynamic version of the legislation passed by this Government, there will be rapid progress. We will judge that in the future. We will wait until the next Parliament elects the members of the Committee—and I stress that this House elects the members of the Committee—and the Committee elects its Chairman. The hon. Member for Burnley will no doubt be a contender for that position if he seeks it, but there is no guarantee that he will be elected by the Committee. After that, we can see the pace at which work will be done.

**Mr. Bercow:** My right hon. Friend has just held out the prospect, which will be enticing for some but not for others, of a Committee which will never knowingly be undertravelled. May I put it to my right hon. Friend, consistent with the point that he has just made, that to have a titchy—one might almost say piddling—sub-Committee quorum of two trotting about, conducting their very important, distinguished and complex business, is not entirely consistent with the ambition for the Committee that the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) has described?

Because the declaration of a personal interest is always of the essence in our proceedings, and my right hon. Friend has several times dwelt, with a certain contagious enthusiasm, on the need for election of the Chairman and members of the Committee in the future, may I put it to him that he may wish to be considered for the chairmanship of the Committee under the revised Standing Order, and that if he were successful, he would thereby attain a peak of eminence to which he has never previously so much as aspired?

**Mr. Forth:** My hon. Friend is characteristically generous. I doubt whether my modest experience and

humble aspirations would raise me to anything like the level that my hon. Friend suggests. However, that is something on which I should like to ponder if I am re-elected to this House—an assumption that none of us must make.

I hope that the House will give serious consideration to my amendments. I am honoured that my amendments have been selected, but I think that the argument goes wider. I am unhappy and uneasy about the low quorum numbers that apply to Committees of this House. I am also uneasy, not least because of the comments of the hon. Member for Burnley during this debate, that we are in danger of asking Committees and colleagues to do very important work in very small numbers. I wonder whether the extent to which very small and possibly unrepresentative numbers of Members can have a disproportionate influence on events is widely appreciated. I am assiduous in my attendance in the House on Fridays, and I am happy to say that, because so few other Members turn up, those who are here have a disproportionate influence on events which not all colleagues appreciate. That illustrates the importance of a realistic quorum figure. That this House, in its majesty, cannot even muster a quorum of 40 Members on a Friday indicates that the attitude of many Members to our work does not bear close scrutiny.

I hope that the House will consider my amendments carefully. I would like this to be the first exciting breakaway from the past—so-beloved of the Minister—into a future in which we take our work more seriously and are prepared to commit ourselves to larger quorums. I hope that those fortunate enough to be elected in the forthcoming election will come here with an enthusiasm, vigour and commitment; and that they will not be afraid of a quorum of seven, as I suggest for a Committee of 18, or four, as I suggest for the sub-Committee "with passports".

I believe that my request is modest and that agreeing to it would be a step in the right direction. Accepting the amendments would be a strong signal for other Committees to follow the same course.

6.6 pm

**Mr. Richard Page** (South-West Hertfordshire): I appreciate the way in which the Minister presented the case. However, I thought that he started on a rather unfortunate note when he referred, as I recall, to "mainly thoughtful" amendments. I thought that a gratuitous swipe at Liberal Democrat Members and their amendments—an unwise move, given that the whole House knows that the Labour party has entered into a tactical alliance with the Liberal Democrat party for the next election. To criticise one's partners in such a way is not a career-enhancing move. I therefore advise the hon. Gentleman to be careful about this in the future.

We are in favour of any measures that can reduce burdens, particularly on small businesses. We have seen such burdens increase over the past few years at an extraordinary rate.

**Mr. Bercow:** Exponential.

**Mr. Page:** It is not quite exponential, but we will not debate the correct arithmetical term. Nevertheless, the growth of such burdens has been exceptional, into record figures. Anything that can make life simpler and easier is to be welcome, provided, of course, that the process is democratically accountable.

I regard this as the latest step in a process originally started by my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine) when he considered regulation and deregulation. I hope that nobody will ask me why we put into the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 a limit so that only legislation before 1994 could be considered, because I do not know.

The measure before us is a departure from the traditional process. It is exceptionally important to ensure that it is not and cannot be abused; otherwise we could create many difficulties for ourselves in the future.

I thank the Minister for his explanation—particularly for expounding how the process will operate, the importance and fullness of the consultation document and the way in which it will be adequately filled in by all the interested parties. That is most important. However, I am slightly worried about one or two aspects. The Standing Orders will provide estimates of the costs and savings attached to the new regulations. There must be independence when those costs and savings are calculated. There has been a strong feeling in the past in my party, if not throughout the House, that civil service officials may not have calculated the cost of implementing regulations fully and accurately enough. We want accurate figures that are accepted by the industries involved. Some organisations representing smaller businesses are talking about an extra £10 billion in the cost of implementing regulations.

I welcome the Minister's repetition of the Government's commitment that, if the Committee decides to reject a particular order, the measure will not proceed to the House for a vote. That is an important democratic commitment, which should be welcomed.

The Committee will have much greater responsibility than it had in the past. I heard the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) defend what has happened and defend the criticisms of my right hon. and hon. Friends. I understand why Conservative Members are not that keen to turn up at a Committee that is dealing with, for example, dancing on Sundays. I do not think that such an issue catches the popular mood or the interest of every Member of the House.

The issues that will come before the Committee are vital to the reduction of regulatory burdens, and I would like to think that a high quality of Member will serve on it. Their input will be important, and my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) alluded to that point.

Resources are another aspect of the issue. When, subject to the leave of the House, the Minister winds up, I hope that he will touch on the issue of the provision of resources. I am glad that the Committee will retain the ability to have independent advisers, because it will deal with a variety of subjects. It is not like the Select Committees on Home Affairs, Health or Trade and Industry; it will deal with regulations that cover the whole gamut of government. It will therefore need to be able to draw on the help of independent advisers.

Although I would like to express unadulterated praise for the proposal, one or two issues give rise to criticism. The aficionados who have followed this issue are well aware of the substance and shape of the changes that are being made to the Standing Orders. However, the fact that

*[Mr. Page]*

such long and complex proposals appeared on the Order Paper only on Monday is unsatisfactory. I am sure that some Members would have contributed to this debate if they had had longer to consider the proposals. As soon as I knew that the matter was coming up, I went to the Vote Office; but I obtained a copy of the proposals only on Monday morning. The time scale for consideration has been inadequate.

The provision relating to plain English is to be welcomed. I noticed how the Minister tried to weasel himself out of his previous comments by referring to his distaste for superficial simplicity. We are looking not for superficial simplicity, but for plain English that can be understood. That was why we tabled amendments to the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 and are glad that such suggestions are now being adopted in the Standing Orders. Legislation does not have to be in archaic legal language to have the clarity that he mentioned. We can achieve that aim without using the legalese that no one except lawyers understands. Provisions often appear in seven or eight paragraphs when one or two would be sufficient.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire made several comments on the issue of proportionality, and I hope that the Minister will respond to them. When the Regulatory Reform Act was being considered by both Houses and in Committee, we drew attention to the unsatisfactory nature of the test of proportionality, as set out in sections 1 and 3. The Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 allowed burdens to be imposed only when they were less onerous, but that is not the case now. More onerous burdens can be imposed, which shows the importance of the Committee's members not being lobby fodder for any particular party. They must be independent and consider the issues so that regulations are not approved if they would, on balance, disadvantage the whole cause of deregulation.

I shall finish as I started. Conservative Members want the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 to work and we want the burdens on our people to be reduced. We will do everything that we can to make sure that it works in the most effective and beneficial fashion.

6.15 pm

**Mr. Stringer:** With the leave of the House, I wish to reply to some of the points that have been made.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) asked several direct questions. Some of them were hypothetical, but others were not. His first question was whether the Government would give a commitment to accept any amendment that the Committee agreed should be incorporated in the new regulatory reform order. I clearly cannot give such a commitment; it was a hypothetical question. The answer depends on the nature of the amendment proposed. However, the Government have given a commitment that when the majority of the Committee disagrees with the Government's regulatory reform order, it can, in effect, kill the order. Given the consensual way in which the Government and the Committee have operated, it is much more likely that they would discuss any disagreement with a view to resolving the issues that divide them.

The hon. Gentleman's second question was about what would happen if the Committee recommended the affirmative procedure for subordinate provisions. Again, I cannot give an absolute guarantee that the Government would accept such a suggestion. Although I cannot think of them at present, detailed issues might arise that would not allow us to do that. However, if the Committee said that it preferred the affirmative procedure rather than the negative procedure, there would have to be extraordinarily good reasons for the Government to reject its suggestion. I expect that, in most circumstances, the Minister would accept its recommendations.

Thirdly, the hon. Gentleman asked whether the Government would agree not to proceed with an order if there had been a Division in Committee. The Government would not agree not to proceed on that basis because it does not necessarily relate to the definition of controversy that we used when we said that we would not take large and controversial matters through this process. A Division would show that a majority in the Committee were in favour of the order, and the procedures allow for a debate of an hour and a half on the Floor of the House in such circumstances. As my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) explained, that procedure has been used on one occasion in the past.

**Mr. Page:** The Minister must realise that such a procedure could be used on a party political basis to drive forward changes to legislation that may not be in the general interest or to which a certain section may not agree. To my knowledge, the Public Accounts Committee has operated for the past 10 or 15 years without ever holding a Division. It proceeds with a recommendation only when there is consensus. That is the approach and thinking that we want in this Committee. Everything that it sends to the House should have a consensus. Once it is subject to a Division, the purpose and reasoning behind the Deregulation Committee will be finished.

**Mr. Stringer:** I accept the spirit of the hon. Gentleman's comments, but if one Member divides the Committee, it will not be sensible for the Government to decide not to test its decision for an hour and a half on the Floor of the House. I am happy to repeat that the Committee and the Government have used deregulation orders on a consensual basis, and that we intend to use regulatory reform orders in the same way. We will not introduce large and politically controversial measures as part of the regulatory reform order process.

**Mr. Pike:** I can assure my hon. Friend that the absence of Conservative Members from Committee proceedings concerns me for exactly that reason: I never wanted it to take a decision with only Labour and Liberal Members present.

**Mr. Stringer:** I thank my hon. Friend for that useful contribution.

While accepting that it is the Committee's role to consider the simple and plain use of English without detracting from the accuracy of legislation, the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire asked whether it would be part of its remit to consider the simplification of regulation. In one sense, that does not need to be in its terms of reference. The core reason for the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 was to enable the Government to introduce regulatory reform orders to consolidate many aspects of legislation, such as fire regulations, which were discussed at length in Standing Committee. In that way, all

regulations that apply to fire could exist in one regulatory reform order, which is bound to be a simplification when one considers the number of regulations and the amount of legislation that apply to fire.

**Mr. Bercow:** I cannot help but think that the choice of example is not well advised. In apparently celebrating the fire regulations, is the hon. Gentleman aware that they are the subject of growing controversy? I received only a few days ago a detailed and persuasive complaint about them. I suggest that he is a little more cautious in his praise.

**Mr. Stringer:** In publishing the list of possible regulatory reform orders, which we did when the Bill was introduced, we quoted fire regulations as an example of what an order could simplify. Many people involved in commerce and business are not satisfied that fire regulations are clear. In many cases, that is also true of the fire service. They exist in more than 120 pieces of primary legislation and 120 pieces of secondary legislation. What makes them ideally suitable for a regulatory reform order is the fact that people are dissatisfied with them, not that they are very politically controversial.

The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) outlined the details of the Committee's procedures and explained some of the difficulties that might be encountered. He asked two direct questions: first, whether the Committee would have the resources to enable it to carry out its business, and the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire made a similar point; and secondly, whether the Committee would have the right and power to force Ministers to attend. Both issues are a matter for the House. I understand that extra legal resources have been made available to the Committee. I also understand that, in the past, the House has exempted hon. Members from an obligation to attend when they are asked to do so. However, it would be an unwise Minister with responsibility for a regulatory reform order who refused to attend to say why he or she wanted it.

**Mr. Bercow:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way; he has been most generous.

I am well aware that it is part of the Minister's style—not dissimilar to that of his celebrated colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office—to act as an impartial umpire, if such a person exists. I wonder whether I can tempt him to express an opinion on the vexed question that was highlighted by speech of the hon. Member for Weston-super-Mare (Mr. Cotter) and in the interventions of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). Should members of the newly formed Committee enjoy security of tenure from the start of a Parliament to its end, or should that be attendance dependent?

**Mr. Stringer:** That is a matter of resource and, like the ability and right of the Committee to force hon. Members to attend, is a matter for the House. When the House has appointed Members to this and other Select Committees, it has done so for a full parliamentary Session. I cannot remember the exact words used, but they are to the effect of "until the House otherwise decides". So the House reserves the right to remove Committee members—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman repeats from a sedentary position that he asked for my opinion. I believe that it is for the House to determine such issues. I am sure that it would be annoyed if I told it what to do. I see the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) nodding.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley for his work on the Committee. I also thank the Committee for its work on the Standing Orders. I am not at all embarrassed to agree with it on most things and to take its opinion into account when the Government reach their conclusions.

In proposing the amendments, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst demonstrated an almost perverse and paranoid attitude towards the consensus building that the Committee uses when it accepts deregulation orders. Members from all parties have worked on a consensual basis, which has made for some good deregulation orders. He criticised my comments by saying that it is conservative to rely on what has happened in the past. If that was all we were doing, I would agree with him, but it is not.

We have considered whether the superaffirmative process that creates deregulation orders, which was established by the previous Conservative Government, has produced good law. The evidence overwhelmingly shows that that is the case. If he really wants to make an argument based on the evidence, he has to show that the procedures on which we are building have failed because of the quorum of five that has been applied to the Committee since its inception. Clever though the right hon. Gentleman's speeches are, he failed to show that the previous process had failed. The fact that we are building on that process bodes well for the future of the Committee under the 2001 Act.

The right hon. Gentleman gave away what he really wants. He is paranoid not only about consensus but about legislation—

**Mr. Forth** *indicated assent.*

**Mr. Stringer:** The right hon. Gentleman agrees. The third amendment in his name, which the Speaker did not select for discussion by the House, would have given a minority of members of the Committee, from the Conservative party or any Opposition party, a right of veto. He proposed that if Opposition Members did not turn up, the Committee could not work. That would not be a sensible or democratic way to proceed.

The right hon. Gentleman said that there was a problem with the sub-Committee having a quorum of only two because that is not a satisfactory number of people to make law. However, the sub-Committee has to report to the Committee, which has to lay the orders before the House.

I ask the House to support the proposals before it.

*Amendment negatived.*

*Main Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That the following changes be made to the Standing Orders of the House—

A. That Standing Order No. 141 (Deregulation Committee) be repealed and the following new Standing Order be made—

### *Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee*

(1) There shall be a select committee, called the Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Committee, to examine—

(i) every document containing proposals laid before the House under section 3 of the Deregulation and Contracting Out Act 1994 (the 1994 Act) or under section 6 of the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 (the 2001 Act);

(ii) every draft order proposed to be made under section 1 of the 1994 Act or section 1 of the 2001 Act; and

(iii) every subordinate provisions order or draft of such an order made or proposed to be made under sections 1 and 4 of the 2001 Act.

(2) The committee shall report to the House, in relation to every proposals document referred to in paragraph 1(i) of this order, either

(a) that a draft order in the same terms as the proposals should be laid before the House; or

(b) that the proposals should be amended before a draft order is laid before the House; or

(c) that the order-making power should not be used in respect of the proposals.

(3) The committee shall report to the House, in relation to every draft order referred to in paragraph 1(ii) of this order, its recommendation whether the draft order should be approved.

(4) The committee may draw the special attention of the House to any subordinate provisions order or draft order referred to in paragraph 1(iii) of this order, and may report its opinion whether or not the order or draft order should be approved or, as the case may be, annulled.

(5) The committee may report to the House on any matter arising from its consideration of the said proposals, draft orders or subordinate provisions orders.

(6)(A) In its consideration of proposals the committee shall consider in each case whether the proposals

(a) appear to make an inappropriate use of delegated legislation;

(b) remove or reduce a burden or the authorisation or requirement of a burden;

(c) continue any necessary protection;

(d) have been the subject of, and take appropriate account of, adequate consultation;

(e) impose a charge on the public revenues or contain provisions requiring payments to be made to the Exchequer or any government department or to any local or public authority in consideration of any licence or consent or of any services to be rendered, or prescribe the amount of any such charge or payment;

(f) purport to have retrospective effect;

(g) give rise to doubts whether they are intra vires;

(h) require elucidation, are not written in plain English or appear to be defectively drafted;

(i) appear to be incompatible with any obligation resulting from membership of the European Union.

(B) In the case of proposals presented under the 2001 Act, the committee shall also consider whether the proposals:

(j) prevent any person from continuing to exercise any right or freedom which he might reasonably expect to continue to exercise;

(k) satisfy the conditions of proportionality between burdens and benefits set out in sections 1 and 3 of the Act;

(l) satisfy the test of desirability set out in section 3(2)(b) of the Act;

(m) have been the subject of, and take appropriate account of, estimates of increases or reductions in costs or other benefits which may result from their implementation; or

(n) include provisions to be designated in the draft order as subordinate provisions;

and in the case of the latter consideration the committee shall report its opinion whether such a designation should be made, and to what parliamentary proceedings any subordinate provisions orders should be subject.

(7) In its consideration of draft orders, the committee shall consider in each case all such matters set out in paragraph (6) of this order as are relevant and the extent to which the Minister concerned has had regard to any resolution or report of the Committee or to any other representations made during the period for parliamentary consideration.

(8) In its consideration of any subordinate provisions order the committee shall in each case consider whether the special attention of the House should be drawn to it on any of the grounds on which (in accordance with paragraph 1(B) of Standing Order No. 151 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee)) the Select Committee on Statutory Instruments may draw the attention of the House to a statutory instrument; and if the committee is of the opinion that any such order or draft order should be annulled, or, as the case may be, should not be approved, they shall report that opinion to the House.

(9) The committee shall consist of eighteen members.

(10) The quorum of the committee shall be five.

(11) Unless the House otherwise orders, each Member nominated to the committee shall continue to be a member of it for the remainder of the Parliament.

(12) The committee shall have power—

(a) to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom, and to report from time to time;

(b) to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the committee's order of reference;

(c) to appoint a sub-committee, of which the quorum shall be two, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom;

(d) to communicate its evidence and any other documents relating to matters of common interest to any committee appointed by this House and to any committee appointed by the Lords to examine deregulation and regulatory reform proposals and draft orders.

(13) The committee and the sub-committee shall have leave to meet concurrently with any select committee appointed by the Lords to examine deregulation and regulatory reform proposals and draft orders and any sub-committee thereof.

(14) The committee and the sub-committee shall have the assistance of the Counsel to the Speaker and, if their Lordships think fit, the Counsel to the Lord Chairman of Committees.

(15) The committee and the sub-committee shall have power to invite Members of the House who are not members of the committee to attend meetings at which witnesses are being examined and such Members may, at the discretion of the chairman, ask questions of those witnesses; but no Member not being of the committee shall otherwise take part in the proceedings of the committee or sub-committee, or be counted in the quorum.

(16) It shall be an instruction to the committee that before reporting either

(a) that any proposal should be amended before the draft order is laid before the House, or

(b) that the order-making power should not be used in respect of any proposal, or

(c) that any draft order should not be approved,

it shall afford to any government department concerned an opportunity of furnishing orally or in writing to it or to the sub-committee appointed by it such explanations as the department think fit.

(17) It shall be an instruction to the committee that it report on every draft order (not being a subordinate provisions order) not more than fifteen sitting days after the draft order was laid before the House, indicating in the case of draft orders which it recommends should be approved whether its recommendation was agreed without a division.

B. That the following amendments be made to Standing Order No. 18 (Consideration of draft deregulation orders)—

(1) Title, after 'deregulation', insert 'etc.'.

(2) Line 1, after 'Deregulation', insert 'and Regulatory Reform'.

(3) Line 3, after 'Deregulation', insert 'and Regulatory Reform'.

(4) Line 5, after '1994', insert 'or under section 1 of the Regulatory Reform Act 2001'.

C. That the following amendment be made to Standing Order No. 98 (Scottish Grand Committee (delegated legislation))—

Line 15, after 'order', insert 'or regulatory reform order'.

D. That the following amendment be made to Standing Order No. 115 (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (delegated legislation))—

Line 15, after 'order', insert 'or regulatory reform order'.

E. That the following amendment be made to Standing Order No. 118 (Standing committees on delegated legislation))—

Line 14, after 'order', insert 'or regulatory reform order'.

F. That the following amendment be made to Standing Order No. 151 (Statutory Instruments (Joint Committee))—

Line 25, after '1994', insert 'or under section 1 of the Regulatory Reform Act 2001, or any subordinate provisions order made or draft proposed to be made under that Act'.

G. That the following amendment be made to Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments)—

Line 33, after 'Deregulation', insert 'and Regulatory Reform'.

## Working Group on Provision for Former Members

6.34 pm

**The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett):** I beg to move,

That this House is aware that many Members who leave the House, whether by retirement or otherwise, would welcome the opportunity to remain in contact with each other; believes also that former Members might benefit from being in touch with sources of personal advice and assistance with difficulties arising once they have left the House; and suggests that a small informal group be set up to consider how these issues might be addressed, to report to the Speaker and the Leader of the House.

I shall be extremely brief because the motion is an initiative of my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) and others, and testament to their dogged determination. My hon. Friend wants to provide means by which retired Members could, if they wished, remain in contact with one another. He is also conscious that there might be a case for modest advice or support for those who were Members and who have found difficulties, for example, in obtaining employment. The motion does not commit the House to take such steps; it merely allows us to establish a working group to consider what provision, if any, should be made and to report to the Speaker and the Leader of the House.

At present, there is no way in which ex-MPs can keep in touch with the House, and no provision for the small amount of funding that might be required. There are many routes by which that might be made possible—for example, I believe that there has been a suggestion that the scope of the Members' fund could be changed and that Members could each pay a small additional contribution to the fund. The current contribution is £24 a year. That, of course, would require legislation, which itself has some attendant disadvantages. Those complications make it clear that we need to think about these matters properly, and the motion invites us to set up a group to do so.

6.35 pm

**Mr. Joe Ashton** (Bassetlaw): This is a rather unusual motion, and I am deeply grateful, as are the colleagues who have worked with me on this, to the Speaker, who provided guidance on how to set about tabling it, and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who has been admirably supportive. The Labour Chief Whip has supported us, as have the Chief Whips of the other two main parties. Everybody has been very willing to try to do something about this serious problem.

Every MP has to face the fact that sooner or later they will no longer be a Member of this House. If the voters do not see us off, old age or the boundary changes will. That applies to me, because I am leaving after 32 years. Since 1986, approximately 660 MPs have left. Half of them retired and the others were rejected by the electorate. In the last election alone, 178 Conservative MPs lost their seats. The average stay of an MP today is eight years.

What happened to the MPs who left? Few people know. We know that democracy demands many victims. In the nine Parliaments that I have served in, there have been many anecdotes of ex-Members who have suffered nervous breakdown, divorce, heart disease, alcoholism,

*[Mr. Joe Ashton]*

depression, serious debt and even, in two cases, suicide. Where is the evidence? It exists, but it is mainly hearsay because few, if any, losers want to parade their unemployed grief or poverty in public, especially if local newspapers have featured pictures and headlines about them, perhaps exulting in their defeat. Their children may be verbally abused in the playground and end up in tears. There are some sad, sorry stories.

The proposals came about because a couple of years ago, in response to a request from a publisher, I started to write a book of memoirs. I tried to trace old comrades and opponents to check on facts such as times and places, and I found it impossible to do so. I could not get their address and telephone number or any other information. The Fees Office and the pensions unit were helpful and sympathetic, but unfortunately the Data Protection Acts prevented them from giving out addresses or telephone numbers and even from confirming that an ex-Member was still alive. They said that they were sorry about that, but occasionally, such as in June 1999, told me that if I were to check *The Times* obituary column I might find the information that I sought.

I then began to try to form an all-party lobby to compile that information on a voluntary basis, but we could not get the names and addresses—the database was not available. People outside the House, such as Norman Atkinson and Frank Allaun, came to me and said that they badly needed an organisation to speak up on their behalf but that they could not get the names and addresses of ex-MPs. I contacted old friends in the House, including my hon. Friends the Members for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) and for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours), the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery), and the hon. Members for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), for Billericay (Mrs. Gorman), for Southport (Mr. Fearn) and for Argyll and Bute (Mrs. Michie). I am sure that they would all be in the Chamber, had we started at 10 o'clock as we intended. Some of them had rallied round, but the earlier start has put us in a rather difficult position. However, a few have managed to make it.

**Mr. Peter Snape** (West Bromwich, East): Even though I am not one of the distinguished Members on my hon. Friend's list—but I think that I should have been—I am here.

**Mr. Ashton:** Many people have said that; it just so happened that three Members were sitting in a tearoom when I made the suggestion, and that is how the group was formed.

To give a couple of examples, Ossie O'Brien, the head of a further education college, came to the House after winning a by-election in Darlington. He was in for only three months because a general election was held after that period and he lost his seat. He gave up a good job. The local newspaper said that it was a cheat that he should get six months' money for only three months' work; he had to face that sort of abuse. I was talking to my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar) today about trying to get in to the House. He had had five months in the House before losing his seat in a by-election. If, in a democracy, we want able and talented people to stand for Parliament, who will take that risk, especially if they are 35 or 40 and have two or three children? We should ask questions like that.Because of the turnover of Members, we do not know the traumas that they may have experienced.

The Speaker pulled everything together. Our group went to him for advice and he said that unless we put a motion on the Order Paper, we had no chance of achieving our aims on a voluntary or party basis. He said that we could not expect any accommodation, help and so on. He had had a lot of experience of dealing with his redundancy in his previous job. As a young woman, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House lost her seat in Lincoln, so she understands what that feels like. As a young woman, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Mrs. Taylor), lost her seat in Bolton because of boundary changes. The Speaker and my right hon. Friends therefore had experience of what can happen to MPs and understand that it is time to set up a group.

Obviously, the group needs accommodation, clerical staff and a database, so that people can ring in and get information. It was plain that the Speaker was right; we could not expect money from the taxpayer. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury said that as well. However, we are not asking for taxpayers' money, even though it would take only a small sum to pay for a part-time secretary to organise the database and make arrangements. We talked to the chairman of the pension fund and other experts to discuss funding the small number of staff who are needed.

There is a Members' fund in the House, and we all pay £2 a month into it. I have been paying into the fund for 30 years and I was astonished to find out how much money was in it. However, we could not use that for our purposes; legislation is needed to make that change. We therefore got to the stage where we had to set up a working group to analyse those problems and talk to people. Members need to remember that those who are pushing the proposal will not be here after the election, as they will have retired and will have no clout or status.

Thanks to the Speaker and my right hon. Friends the Leader of the House and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury, a motion was tabled. I am sorry about the difficulty with timing, but it may be better to run the debate past 7 o'clock; I am sure that many people want to do that. I am willing to take the mood of the House on whether it wants to have a vote at 7 o'clock. However, now that a few people are in, it is as well to let everybody have their say. The matter should be discussed, as it has never been before.

We ran into the problem of a May election. It took time over Easter to organise things; we had a week off, so getting people together was difficult. A May election looked as if it would knock the proposal sideways, but we have had a stay of execution, so to speak, which has enabled us to have a motion put on the Order Paper.

In the past, the Whips' offices have undertaken certain duties. I was a Whip when a Labour Government was 17 Members short of a majority in the mid-1970s. People die; there have been cases of people committing suicide, even in the House and even during this Parliament. What a job it is to deal with those deaths. Very often there is a delicate situation in which the party wants to have a by-election as quickly as possible and choose a candidate within, perhaps, a few days of the man or woman dying.

The family is aggrieved, and says that things are being rushed and there is no dignity or respect for the dead. It is a difficult job for any Whip to organise such things.

Even with the funerals of people who have left the House, including some very good friends of mine, there are problems. Having read their obituary or got news that they have died, I have tried to find their addresses. They may have moved house after leaving Parliament, and sometimes I have found their addresses after the funeral. However, I had sent a letter to their previous addresses or addressed it care of the House, so it never reached their families. There have been embarrassing situations at the funerals of former MPs who had not been long retired, when not one single Member has turned up. The funeral was held only five, six, or seven days after the person's death, so there was not time to get information across and spread the news.

There have therefore been embarrassing scenarios. I do not want to identify people because no doubt the media, who have already been on to me, would want to know who had committed suicide and who had had to sell their house. People want to keep their privacy; they are no longer MPs and do not want their circumstances reported. However, 1992 was a bad year for people who lost their seat because it was the year of negative equity. A lot of people who had been in the House had bought a flat or other accommodation in London; or perhaps they had taken on a long lease. They then found themselves without a job, and could not sell or rent their property. When the Labour party lost in 1979, we did a check a year later and found that 38 MPs still had not got a job.

It is not easy. If someone has been the MP for a small town and has been a well-known bigwig, to go for a job on offer at the Benefits Agency is tremendously—and understandably—embarrassing and demeaning. Such people will say that they are going to move to another town. At the last election, for the first time, a large number of women stood as candidates. Some of them won their seats, although they may not have expected to do so in 1997. They were simply going along for the experience but, lo and behold, they won a seat with a majority of a few 100 or a couple of thousand votes. A woman in that position would have had to tell her husband that they would have to move to midtownshire, for which she was the MP. They would have to move 100 miles and buy a house; the kids would have to move, the husband would have to give up his job and get a new job in midtownshire. I understand that one or two husbands have even become researchers, which may have been the only job that they could get. Four years later, however, such MPs may be out. Everybody knows that there is a winding-up allowance, but it is not much, especially for people under 50. All that they will get is six months' severance pay. It is not a happy situation.

When I have talked about that, people, especially the media, say that candidates know what they are doing when they stand for Parliament. Of course we do; we all know the old adage, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen." However, in any battle, there will be casualties. Boundary changes can result in even worse problems. There may be a long, drawn-out, horrendous process of three local MPs chasing two seats; that can be worse and more stressful than an election.

I am sorry to go on, but I have a lot to say. If the House does not mind, I shall keep going until 10 o'clock—*[Interruption.]* Okay, I shall take notice of the House by speaking for another few minutes and then conclude my remarks.

I have described some of the problems that we have had.

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough): I very much support the hon. Gentleman who has talked about serious matters. However, I have often thought about one small matter. United States Congressmen who are defeated or have retired can go to any part of the building, apart from the floor of the debating chamber. Here, we are very restricted; former Members can go to the canteen, but not other parts of the building. I do not know why retired Members, especially those of pensionable age, are not allowed to go wherever they want in the building. It is cruel for somebody who has been sitting around all those rooms for 20 or 25 years to be told that they have to carry a pass, and can go here, but not there. Can we not be more open-minded?

**Mr. Ashton:** That is exactly one of the problems that the working party should consider. Everybody could ask, "What about this or that? How will it work? What are the questions? What are the answers?" We do not know. We must meet and probe. The media say that Vauxhall make mass redundancies, as do the pit villages, and the workers who lose their jobs must put up with it. However, those people can go down the road and meet in the pub, but defeated Members of Parliament cannot. They are scattered all over the country. They do not have the telephone numbers of other former Members, and may not want to spend the money coming down to London. They may meet up at the party conference. People in other trades and jobs—for example, a skilled fitter made redundant by Vauxhall—can go down the road and get a job somewhere else. A Member of Parliament cannot do that. It is four years before he gets another chance, and then he may have to move house again.

None of us are whingeing about our circumstances. We know how they come about, but a serious analysis of what happens and why has never been undertaken by a Committee of authority. After the election, everybody forgets about the matter until the next election, when a motion such as this is proposed. The single factor that has brought it about is the data protection legislation, which prevents us achieving our aims on a voluntary basis.

I shall make one last point. The same problems are faced by staff. What a horrendous situation when staff must sit watching the count at 1 am, not knowing whether they have a job to go to the following day. When *The Sunday Times* and the unions arranged a meeting in the House for secretaries not long ago, 350 of them packed Room 14. I know, and people find out only when they leave, that it is impossible to get any information from the Fees Office. It cannot give such information until a decision is announced that Parliament is to be prorogued. Once that decision is made, the Fees Office can provide information about pensions, possible redundancy pay for staff and so on. The matter needs looking into, and the Committee could undertake that.

With the backing of the Speaker, the Leader of the House and many others, the Committee will not just be the equivalent of an old British Legion meeting for a drink

*[Mr. Ashton]*

twice a year, to spin old yarns. It needs to be a bit more than a social get-together. It must undertake a serious analysis of what the House should be doing, like every other big company in the country—running a personnel department to help people who have worked here for a large part of their life.

6.52 pm

**Mr. Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield): The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) has done the House a good turn by raising the matter. I warmly welcome his remarks, which make eminent good sense. I know that my late father greatly enjoyed the informal contact that he had with his colleagues after leaving the House. He had the advantage of being able to come back to a number of dining clubs.

On the hon. Gentleman's last point, I was horrified by the number of requests that I received after the last election from former members of staff to come and work for me, in secretarial capacity or otherwise. They clearly had serious difficulties, and the situation must have been traumatic for them.

The hon. Gentleman has raised a number of important issues, and the sensible way of taking them forward is as he suggests. I appreciate that he wants to formalise matters for sensible reasons such as the requirements of the data protection legislation, and I hope that the informal group will come up with creative ideas which will make service in the House appear more attractive and, above all, ensure that we look after those who have gone on and left the House. All of us would say that the House is an enormously friendly place on a cross-party basis. A great deal of support is provided by other hon. Members to their colleagues. That must make it all the more difficult when people are turned out and cast adrift, so I am happy to welcome the motion.

6.54 pm

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): I should like to know, if possible, whether the House wishes to conclude the debate by 7 o'clock. [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] In that case, I shall not speak long. I entirely support the motion and the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton). He has done a great service to the House and for former Members.

I speak as one who was defeated in 1970, when there was no resettlement grant and the salary ended when the election was called. There is one matter that I want to emphasise, and which I raised at Business questions: the pension. I asked the Fees Office for the average pension paid to former Member and their widows in 1987. The sum was just over £4,000. Although I appreciate that the sum would have been plussed up since 1987 because of inflation, and that that is an average, we should bear in mind that there are many former Members whose pension is a pittance. When we compare that to the pension that many hon. Members will now receive, even if their service is somewhat limited, because of the salary there is a vast difference.

If it were possible, would it be desirable for the Committee to consider whether the pension could be plussed up by more than inflation? Obviously, if that were done for former Members, it would also have to be done outside the House. There are many former Members who left as they were approaching retirement age or who were already of retirement age. Even if they had 20 years' service, bearing in mind the level of the salary in 1987 and before, the sum involved would not amount to much. I hope that the matter can be looked into.

6.56 pm

**Sir Peter Emery** (East Devon): To help the House complete the debate by 7 o'clock, I shall be brief. I have been assisting the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) with his proposal, and it should be made clear that Conservative Back-Benchers strongly support it.

There is something that we can do to help the House. I understand from speaking to the Chairman of the Catering Committee that he would be delighted if former Members would dine in the Dining Room on a Thursday night or a Friday lunchtime. That would greatly assist hon. Members.

I have one question to put to the Leader of the House. Can we be certain that there will be some former Members on the Committee, which will appointed under the aegis of the Speaker? It is important that their views should be heard.

**Mrs. Beckett:** The right hon. Gentleman makes a very sensible point, which I shall certainly take on board. It will be a matter for Mr. Speaker, but I am sure that he will agree.

6.57 pm

**Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): *[Interruption.]* I sense the mood of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, so I shall resume my seat.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), as is the House, I am sure.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House is aware that many Members who leave the House, whether by retirement or otherwise, would welcome the opportunity to remain in contact with each other; believes also that former Members might benefit from being in touch with sources of personal advice and assistance with difficulties arising once they have left the House; and suggests that a small informal group be set up to consider how these issues might be addressed, to report to the Speaker and the Leader of the House.

6.58 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

# City of London (Ward Elections) Bill
## (*By Order*)

*As amended, further considered.*

7 pm

**Mr. John McDonnell** (Hayes and Harlington): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My point of order, of which I gave you notice, concerns the application of the Human Rights Act 1998. I appreciate that we have trawled over this ground before, but matters have moved on since our previous debate. You will recall that, during the previous debate, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Ms Hughes), quoted a written answer from the President of the Council, which stated:

"Section 19 of the Human Rights Act 1998 does not apply to Private Bills."

We were aware of that. It went on:

"However, like all legislation, any Act resulting from the passage of such a Bill can be judged in the courts, either in the UK or in Strasbourg, for its compatibility with the ECHR."

We were assured:

"In future, when Private Bills are deposited, promoters will be asked to undertake a full assessment of the compatibility of their proposals with the ECHR and to make a statement setting out their conclusion as to whether the Bill is compatible or not. A Minister in the Government department within whose policy responsibilities the subject matter of the Bill falls will make a formal statement saying that he believes that the promoters have undertaken a full assessment and that he does not (or, if necessary, that he does) see any need to dispute their conclusions."—[*Official Report*, 11 January 2001; Vol. 360, c. 1304-5.]

Today, we have received another statement from the Bill's promoter that contains no reference to whether the Bill complies with the Human Rights Act. Are we tonight to receive a statement from the Minister in that regard? I accept that this is not a new Bill and has not been introduced today, but in the spirit of the statement made during the previous debate I would expect some statement to be made. If not, yet again, there would be no guidance from any Law Officer or the Government that the Bill complies with the Human Rights Act enacted in this Chamber.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill):** Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It may be for the convenience of the House if I make the following statement.

Hon. Members present for the previous debate on the Bill will recall that the Under-Secretary gave a commitment to make a statement on Third Reading on behalf of the Government in relation to the Bill's compatibility with the European convention on human rights.

A copy of the legal assessment procured by the promoter of the Bill on its compatibility with the ECHR was sent to the Government by the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) on 29 January 2001. The assessment concluded that the Bill is compatible with the ECHR, as has been stated in previous debates on the Bill.

Having now considered the papers, I can report to the House that I believe that a full assessment of the Bill's compatibility with the ECHR has been undertaken by the City of London corporation and I see no need to dispute the conclusions of that assessment.

**Mr. Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Has the statement of compatibility with the ECHR been placed in the Library, in the domain of hon. Members? I have not seen it and I have been present throughout virtually all the debates on the Bill and took part in the debate on this very matter. If the Minister is to refer to a document that claims that the Bill is compatible with the ECHR, at the very least we should be privy to it. It has already passed from the Bill's sponsor, on behalf of the promoter, the City of London corporation, to the Government, and such an important document should not remain as private correspondence between the sponsor and the Government and we should not have to take their assurance on the matter. We should also have the right to see it.

**Mr. Peter Brooke** (Cities of London and Westminster): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think that it is generally agreed that a further debate on this subject is not likely to be in order for long. I simply remind the House that the lengths to which the promoter has gone to demonstrate compliance with human rights, including an opinion obtained from leading counsel, is a matter of record. I have shared that advice with the Under-Secretary who was on the Front Bench during our previous debate, in accordance with the invitation that she extended to me on that occasion; the Under-Secretary present this evening, the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), has confirmed that.

The promoter has complied with the relevant Standing Orders and will continue to do so. Moreover, provided that the House's authorities are content, the promoter has no objection to the inclusion of a statement on compatibility appearing on the front of the Bill when it is reprinted, even if that is not a requirement of the revised Standing Orders when reprinting is undertaken. I am conscious of the Standing Order that will come into force on 27 November 2001.

I have to say in a gentle voice to Labour Members that the advice that the Government receive that enables them to say that a Bill is compatible with the appropriate convention is not subject to scrutiny in the way that has been described.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** I am not persuaded that the matter can continue to be pursued on a point of order. In view of the procedures that have now been followed after exhaustive earlier debate, it is a matter for the House to determine, at the appropriate moment, whether it is satisfied with the statements that have been made. That can be dealt with in the further proceedings of the House. There is no further point of order for the Chair.

**Mr. Corbyn:** Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You were the occupant of the Chair during the previous debate on the question of the Bill's compatibility with the ECHR. We have now heard that the document has passed from the promoter to the Government, but this is a private Bill, not a Government Bill. The Government are merely responding to it; it is the House's property.

*[Mr. Corbyn]*

Is it in order that the House should not be aware of the contents of private correspondence claiming compatibility between the promoter of a private Bill and the Government, when many hon. Members are extremely concerned that the convention might have been breached by the Bill, which does not allow free and unfettered elections as required under the convention? This is an important matter concerning the role of private Bills. I do not like the rules that apply to Government Bills, but I understand them, but this is not a Government Bill.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I am satisfied that there is nothing out of order that should concern the House. This should now become a matter of debate that may influence the House's attitude to the Bill. Therefore, we should proceed with consideration of the Bill.

## Clause 2

INTERPRETATION

*Amendment moved [11 January]*: No. 7, in page 1, line 18, at end insert—

'business electoral college'' means a body comprising voters appointed under section 3(1)(c) with responsibility for electing the business voters entitled to vote in ward elections.'.—*[Mr. McDonnell.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 8, in page 1, line 19, at end insert—

'employees' electoral college' means a body comprising voters appointed under section 3(1)(d) with responsibility for electing the employees' voters entitled to vote in ward elections.'.

No. 19, in clause 3, page 2, line 33, leave out from 'person' to second 'a' and insert—

'elected from the business electoral college comprising voters appointed by'.

No. 56, in clause 3, page 2, line 33, leave out from 'person' to 'ordinarily' in line 34 and insert—

'elected from the business electoral college comprising voters appointed by qualifying bodies which are'.

No. 22, in clause 3, page 2, line 37, at end insert—

'(d) is a person elected from the employees' electoral college comprising voters who are employees of a qualifying body which is ordinarily in occupation for relevant purposes as owner or tenant of the whole or part of a hereditament situated in that ward which is shown in the local non-domestic rating list as having a rateable value of not less than £200.'.

No. 58, page 2, line 37, at end insert—

'(1A) The business electoral college shall reflect the range of business activity within the City, and shall comprise relevant business operational constituencies for which a qualifying body must register based upon its principal business operation; and the proportion of voters to be elected from a business operational constituency will be determined in proportion to the number of qualifying bodies registering for a particular business operational constituency in relation to the total registrations.'.

No. 57, page 2, line 37, at end insert—

'(1B) The employees' electoral college shall reflect the range of occupations operating within the City of London, and shall comprise relevant occupational constituencies for which an employee must register based upon his/her principal occupation as defined under the DFEE Standard Occupational Classification Major Groups; and the proportion of voters to be elected from an occupational constituency shall be determined in proportion to the number of employees registering for a particular occupational constituency in relation to the total registrations.'.

No. 23, page 2, line 37, at end insert—

'(1C) The number of business voters elected from the business electoral college shall be no more than 2000.'.

No. 24, page 2, line 37, at end insert—

'(1D)The number of employee voters elected from the employees' electoral college shall be no more than 2,000.'.

No. 59, page 2, line 41, at end insert—

'(2A)—(1) For the election of voters to represent the business operational and occupational constituencies within the electoral colleges, each vote in the poll shall be a single transferable vote.

(2) A single transferable vote is a vote—

(a) capable of being given so as to indicate the voter's order of preference for the candidates for election as members for the constituency; and

(b) capable of being transferred to the next choice when the vote is not needed to give a prior choice to the necessary quota of votes or when a prior choice is eliminated from the list of candidates because of a deficiency in the number of votes given for him.'.

No. 29, page 3, line 18, at end insert 'subject to subsections (1C) and (1D) above'.

**Mr. McDonnell:** At the weekend, we all filled in our census forms. When mine asked who I work for and what my job entails, I said that I work for my constituents and that my job is to represent their interests and to legislate in their interests. Tonight, we have the opportunity to legislate in the interests of all of London, and that is why I have tabled the amendments. We have the opportunity now to retrieve this flawed Bill—some would say fatally flawed—to save the Bill from itself and to rescue the City of London corporation, whose promotion of the Bill has been unacceptable, both in Committee and now. We are now in our third year on the Bill, during which time there has been ample opportunity to respond to the amendments, which were before the House previously.

I wish to rescue the Bill's chance of instigating a proper reform of the City of London corporation. The amendments seek to institute a reform to enable all those who live and work in the City—and, yes, who possess property—to have a say about their environment and community. I accept that the City is not only a single community, but many communities. The amendments seek to reflect the complex, diverse and yet interdependent communities that the City comprises. That includes the residents, the workers—the "employees" to whom the amendments refer, who spend their working hours in the City—and the businesses that occupy or tenant the City area.

The amendments are compromise proposals that could allow the Bill to pass through the House in a form that would make the new structure of local government and the governance of the City of London corporation so robust that it would render the City sustainable for another 800 years. They are a compromise. I recognise that they move away from the principle of one person, one vote, and accept that a business vote will continue in the City.

I understand that some of my hon. Friends will be anxious about such a compromise, but the amendments also ask for a compromise from the City of London corporation and the Bill's supporters in the House. Although they accept the continuation of the business vote, they also ask for an acceptance of workers' right to vote for the City of London corporation. That is a compromise that would not achieve what I would like—the establishment of a soviet in the centre of London—but which would balance the different communities: the residents, business and workers.

I ask the City of London corporation to advise its representative—some would add the words "on earth"—the right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster, the Bill's sponsor, and its friends in the Government, to accept these compromise amendments and to let the Bill soar on to the statute book. Failure to accept the amendments will mean that one of the key communities in the City—employees and workers—will remain disfranchised. It creates the wealth on which the City's reputation is founded, but it currently has no voice.

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): On the question of workers' votes, I would like to get some answers at this early stage, as there could be some problems later. Will the workers vote on the basis of one member, one vote? Will the trade unions allow block votes? Will everybody vote on the principle of one member, one vote, or will some unions supposedly use block votes, if they want to do so? Would such votes be made on the basis of the parliamentary Labour party votes, which are divided into thirds? Finally, are we talking about the same City that 6,000 people were trying to get rid of yesterday? Is that the same City that we are trying to prop up?

**Mr. McDonnell:** When I commenced discussion of the amendments in our previous debate, I proposed to begin by taking hon. Members through them. My hon. Friend raises issues of detail that I shall address in due course. We are referring to the City of London. The City of London corporation covers what we euphemistically call the square mile, so he is right about that point, and I give him that assurance.

7.15 pm

**Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): My hon. Friend might recall an intervention that I made in our previous debate, in which I said that it might be easier for him to give us a general overview of how the amendments fitted together before he spoke in detail. Having re-read *Hansard* this afternoon, I am even more concerned that we are getting the detail before the overview. I am being given a lot of detail, but I am finding it difficult to fit that information together without getting the bigger picture first. I know that he has prepared his speech along those lines, but perhaps he could look further into his notes and make some comments of a more general flavour, so that we can see how it all fits together before we discuss the detail.

**Mr. McDonnell:** Let me address the structure of the debate and resolve this matter. I suggested that I should proceed by taking hon. Members through the amendments and examining the implications of each one. I proposed to explain their role and how they operated together to introduce the electoral college mechanism, and then to explain their purpose and the principles on which they are based: that is, the basic premises on which they were promulgated.

Some of my hon. Friends were anxious about that approach and wanted me to give the bigger picture before I set about the detail. However, the very hon. Members who were concerned about getting bogged down in the detail then participated in a rather lengthy debate about white van men and so on—a discussion that was tedious at times. I do not want to take that route, tempting though some hon. Members might find it. Instead, I want to take a clear, decisive and expeditious route, and to set out the principles that underlie the amendments.

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): I find the position that my hon. Friend outlines somewhat confusing. The batch of amendments that we are considering begins with amendment No. 7. We are being given details about the nature of the electoral college, but the lead amendment asks for further consideration of the Bill to be delayed for six months. I am concerned about the arguments, because that proposal sounds somewhat different from the suggestion that he is trying to accommodate the City in order to advance the Bill's progress.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I should explain to the hon. Member that we are not discussing the proposition to which he refers and that it is not the practice of the House to do so. We are discussing the amendments whose numbers were read out at the beginning of the debate.

**Mr. McDonnell:** My hon. Friend is confused because of the numbering of the amendments on the amendment paper. Amendment No. 7 seeks to introduce a business electoral college. The establishment of the overall electoral college of businesses, employees and so on flows from that proposal.

**Mr. Barnes:** I should like to clarify the position. When I entered the Chamber, I collected an amendment paper for 2 May, the first page of which is numbered as page 201. Amendment No. 7 states that on further consideration of the Bill—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I have already ruled on this matter. I must say to the hon. Gentleman that the number 7 appears on the amendment paper in parallel with the name of the hon. Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) and refers to what follows. All that appears above is a motion that is not part of the group of amendments.

**Mr. Barnes:** I apologise for being so slow, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I now understand the point that has been made.

**Mr. McDonnell:** Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I do not want to speak in too much detail at this stage, but I should like to set out the principles that underlie the amendments—I shall, of course, explain their detailed implications in due course—and then argue a justification for their adoption on the basis of addressing the key concerns of each of the main political parties in the House. I hope fairly swiftly to send all hon. Members skipping through the Lobby in support of the

*[Mr. McDonnell]*

amendments. I hope that they will sing the "Marseillaise", even if I cannot persuade them to sing the "Internationale". Although I could explain at length to those who do not understand it the difference between the underlying principles of the two anthems, I shall not. If they wish to understand the difference, which is relevant to the amendments, between a bourgeois democracy and a workers' democracy, I simply refer them to Karl Marx's writing on the Paris Commune and V.I. Lenin's "Left-wing Communism: an Infantile Disorder".

The Bill is basically undemocratic: that is the difficulty with it and the ground on which many of us oppose it. It undermines the principle of one person, one vote. The amendments maintain that principle at least in part. I accept that the City corporation does not want to give up its undemocratic—some would say anti-democratic—franchise, which allows for a business vote. In the Bill and the amendments, that vote is based on a property qualification, which runs contrary to every other method of democratic election in this country.

The amendments try to take account of the strong argument that has been presented in favour of maintaining the business vote. It has been argued that it is justified by the intensity of business activity in a small area. The City is a business district and I therefore accept that, to make progress, we need to create a structure of governance for that area that includes a business vote. However, I also want that structure to reflect the rights and responsibilities of the other stakeholders in the City of London corporation area.

The amendments define the stakeholders as the employees—the workers—and the residents. I am trying to develop an argument that enables us to reach a compromise and leads to a swift passage for the Bill.

**Mr. Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton, North): I have followed the debate with interest on previous occasions. My hon. Friend used the word "compromise" often this evening. Will he reassure me that he has not devised a compromise too far and that he is not conceding too much to those who take a different view from my hon. Friend and me about providing a genuinely democratic system for the City of London in future?

**Mr. McDonnell:** If the franchise is to be reformed, the City corporation has made it clear in statements to the House and through the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster, who sponsors the Bill, that there are some steps that it will not take. It will not relinquish the business vote or allow an amendment that provides for a straight residential vote or a combination of residential and employees' votes. In tabling amendments to provide for an electoral college, I am searching for a compromise that takes account of the three elements in the stakeholder society.

**Mr. Corbyn:** Will my hon. Friend remind us of the number of residential voters and the number of business votes that will be added to it by the Bill and the amendments?

**Mr. McDonnell:** I am told that there are approximately 5,000 residential voters, although I am open to correction. They are currently swamped by the business votes. In the amendments, I am trying to create an electoral college, which means that residential votes are never outweighed by business or workers' votes.

**Mr. Dismore:** Under my hon. Friend's proposals, would residents have at least half the votes so that their votes would equal those of businesses and employees, or would each group have a third of the votes, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) suggested?

**Mr. McDonnell:** As we develop the debate, my hon. Friend will realise that I am trying to introduce a mechanism whereby the residents will have a permanent majority over the combined votes of business and employees. That would provide some protection for the residents.

**Mr. Dismore:** I am reassured by that. However, my hon. Friend said that he was trying to provide for all the stakeholders in the City. One group—customers—has been left out of the equation. If we use modern parlance and "stakeholder", customers constitute one of the most important groups. When we discuss railways or the tube, we hear about customers. However, the electorial college that my hon. Friend proposes makes no provision for the consumers of City services.

**Mr. McDonnell:** In a subsequent group of amendments, I have tried to provide at least the opportunity for shareholders to have a vote. I could not devise a method of including a customer vote in the amendments that we are discussing because of problems of definition, inability to register and the cost that such a vote would incur. Perhaps one day, if the City publishes its accounts, we can ascertain the exact amount that it could afford for those administrative matters.

**Mr. Skinner:** What about the Commission for Racial Equality? Will black business men or stakeholders have a specific proportion of the votes? Will that also apply to women? Those are the two big issues of the day. Will people have to sign a document? What chance have we got if someone on the other side will not sign it? A hell of a lot of people in the stock exchange and elsewhere in the City may not sign such a document. Another almighty row would follow.

**Mr. McDonnell:** The Bill and subsequent amendments make some attempt to ensure that the voters reflect the composition, including gender and ethnicity, of the companies' work forces. That matter needs to be tackled. There is a dearth of women and members of ethnic minorities on the City corporation and its various committees. However, the amendments that we are considering do not deal with that, and I shall move on.

The amendments would establish electoral colleges, comprising businesses and employees. Each would be able to determine the eventual composition of the City corporation's common council. If the amendments were

accepted, the electorate would comprise the residents, the voters elected by the business electoral college and those elected by the employees electoral college.

**Mr. Robert N. Wareing** (Liverpool, West Derby): I understand that the Port of London health authority is in the City of London corporation. Would the amendments encompass it?

**Mr. McDonnell:** I believe that any organisation that is defined as a separate business entity and has property or employees in the City of London area would be covered by the business electoral college. There may be problems, for example, in the case of City corporation functions that are contracted out. If the contract is won in house, the workers are employees of the City corporation, not a separate business. However, a private company or separate agency that operated a service on behalf of the City corporation would be defined as a separate business and, in my view, would fall in the remit of the business college.

7.30 pm

Let me explain how the amendments that I have tabled fit together—the overview for which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) asked. I shall consider the amendments individually and examine how they hang together. The amendments are tabled in my name and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), and he and I have now worked together on them in four or five debates. I shall describe each amendment and how it contributes to the new stakeholder edifice.

Amendment No. 7 establishes the definition of a business electoral college as

"a body comprising voters appointed under section 3(1)(c)"—

of the Bill—

"with responsibility for electing the business voters entitled to vote in ward elections."

This is an indirect system of election, and there are two stages to the process. The amendment proposes that the qualifying bodies defined in lines 12 and 13 of clause 2 should be gathered together into a business electoral college. The qualifying bodies would then be enfranchised to nominate—I have retained "in writing" from the original Bill—a person or persons to represent them and vote on their behalf in the business electoral college.

Amendment No. 19 amends clause 3(c) to bring about that form of indirect election of the voter, who will eventually cast his or her vote on behalf of the qualifying bodies. The definition of "qualifying bodies" follows shortly, and basically covers the businesses themselves and certain other organisations. Those voters will then cast their votes in the overall City corporation ward elections. Amendment No. 19 therefore empowers the qualifying body to nominate its voter or voters, who will serve in the business electoral college, which will, in turn, elect the voters who will be qualified to vote.

This will be a two-stage, indirect election—there have been arguments about its complexity, but it is no more complex than the constitution of the United States of America, which provides for similar electoral colleges—which will also involve the election of a council, council leader and chairs of committees under the existing systems of local government. I reject the insinuation that this is closer to the election of a Pope or the canonisation of a saint. It is a straightforward indirect election system.

**Mr. Skinner:** I want to bring this debate up to date. I do not know whether my hon. Friend has thought this through, but he sounds as though he is nominating people's peers. This would be no different. There would be people nominating someone to nominate someone to nominate someone else and, despite all my hon. Friend's best intentions of getting some decent people on to this body, we know what would happen. We would get the great and the good again, and the people at the bottom of the street would get left out.

**Mr. McDonnell:** I understand my hon. Friend's concerns, particularly as both our applications to be people's peers were rejected. Never mind.

The selection of people's peers—or however we like to describe them—was carried out by a committee constructed by the Prime Minister under advice. The committee then nominated the peers—that is true. Under the mechanism that I propose, there will be nomination but there will also be forms of election. There is a difference between the two examples. I accept that this is a form of indirect election, but at the end of the day the route will lead to an election, particularly within the employers' electoral college. I accept that there is an element of nomination in the business electoral college.

**Mr. Dismore:** Following the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), I wonder how the aldermen and the mayor fit into the picture. As I understand the rather convoluted arrangements that exist now, they are chosen from among the councillors of the City—the members of the common council—who would be chosen by the people chosen by the college, who would be chosen by the college, which would be chosen by the electorate. There could be five or six different stages before we got to the most senior positions in the council, which are the Lord Mayor of London and the aldermen. Is my hon. Friend perhaps saying that they could be the people's aldermen, elected directly under his proposed arrangements?

**Mr. McDonnell:** I am surprised at this lack of understanding of the arrangements by someone who has been in the Labour party for so long. The party has had the mechanism for electoral colleges for nearly a century. The amendments reflect that mechanism. The electoral college determines the voters, who turn up at a conference and elect a national executive committee, which then elects a Chair and has, in previous times, worked with the parliamentary Labour party to elect the leader of the party who has gone on to become the leader of the Government and of the country. My proposal is a reflection of a democratic practice that has gone on for some time in this country. I accept that businesses have not nominated representatives to the Labour party conference, but who knows?

Amendment No. 56 would amend clause 3(c) and, as a result, a person would become entitled to vote in any ward of the City if, on the qualifying date, that person was

"elected from the business electoral college comprising the voters appointed by the qualifying bodies which are"—

ordinarily in occupation of a hereditament. I prefer the French pronunciation of that word, as it has a French origin, although other hon. Members prefer the English

*[Mr. McDonnell]*

pronunciation. Amendment No. 56 is a tidier and more comprehensive amendment than amendment No. 19, and it warrants support on that basis. It represents a slight variation on a theme.

Amendment No. 58 deals with the composition of the business electoral college. Its objective is to ensure that the business electoral college—the BEC—reflects the range of business activity in the City corporation. Hon. Members will understand that I am keen to ensure that the City corporation has a balanced form of representation drawn from the expertise available to it in the different professions, business operations and companies operating within the square mile.

**Mr. Dismore:** One thing that is starting to trouble me about this method of dealing with the issue is the question of nationality. To be a residential elector in an ordinary election in the United Kingdom, one has to be either a British or Commonwealth citizen, a citizen of the Irish Republic, or—in certain elections—a citizen of other European Union countries. It is not clear to me from the amendment whether my hon. Friend has addressed the issue of nationality. For example, in this new global economy, a business in the City whose head office and main operations were in the United States might have no real interest in the United Kingdom except for its business premises, which might be an offshoot of a conglomerate based in New York or Washington. Is my hon. Friend saying that such people should have a say in the democratic elections of the United Kingdom?

**Mr. McDonnell:** I am seeking to find in the Bill—perhaps its promoter can help me—a restriction that states that the voter who is eventually elected to cast a vote on behalf of a company has to be a British citizen. I accept, however, that that does not mean that the company has to have its main interest in this country. It could be a multinational corporation based elsewhere, and I accept my hon. Friend's concerns about such a company's interest in the future and in its stake in the City corporation and in this country. That is perhaps a matter that could be examined subsequently, and I am sure that the City corporation would welcome amendments to that effect.

In amendment No. 58, the City corporation is required to establish a structure of business operational constituencies within the BEC. Those constituencies would be operational, not geographical, and they should reflect the various business operations that take place in the City. Only the City corporation itself could draw up such a constituency structure, as only it has at its fingertips the required expertise and knowledge of the variety of business operations undertaken in the square mile.

The corporation would establish which groupings and businesses were interested in appointing voters to the BEC. They would be invited to register for their particular operational grouping or business operational constituency and my amendment, based on the number of businesses registering for particular operational constituencies, would ensure that voters elected from a constituency were allocated proportionately. Voters would be distributed to the various operational constituencies in proportion to the number of qualifying bodies registered for each business operational constituency.

**Mr. Skinner** *rose—*

**Mr. McDonnell:** I have obviously lost my hon. Friend.

**Mr. Skinner:** No, I have sussed this out—it is pretty clear. My hon. Friend has gone a long way to accommodate the people in the City. I know that he has a long-standing interest in London and all the rest of it, but something tells me that some people will get more than one vote. We have had that problem with block votes and electoral colleges; it has always been difficult to live with.

Before I go into the Lobby, I want my hon. Friend to give me an assurance. Would people in the City of London get more than one vote if they had more than one business interest? As sure as night follows day, we know that the Tories and their pals do not meddle in one business; they have their fingers in every conceivable pie. They would pile up votes left, right and centre while Joe Soap would not get one.

**Mr. McDonnell:** I accept that there is a weakness in the proposal. An individual shareholder or owner of a company could participate in a number of companies. As a result, he could register in not one business operational constituency in the electoral college, but several. That is a definite problem, but this is a compromise Bill. However, there is further a difficulty in that a resident with a vote could hold shares in a business, which could also have a vote. The Bill is not perfect, so I am simply trying to improve it.

**Mr. Barnes:** Presumably, such a person could also be a City employee, so the electoral college could have three categories. A person might be involved in each and may have multiple votes.

**Mr. McDonnell:** The proposed voting systems are similar to those relating to the constitution of the Labour party. People may have multiple votes, depending on their membership of and affiliation to the Labour party. There is an inherent problem here, but we have identified a series of problems with the Bill and the amendment represents an attempt to arrive at a situation for which we could garner support in the Chamber. Perhaps amendments to the review mechanism, which I hope to debate later, could be tabled.

**Mr. Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton, North): I have been worrying for some minutes about my hon. Friend's reference to determining the operational and geographical constituencies according to which the election would be held. He suggested that those would be decided by the City of London corporation, but I am anxious that an external independent monitoring organisation such as the Local Government Commission has not been mentioned, even in respect of operational constituencies in the business community. Will he elaborate and reassure me? We do not want friends to be scratching each other's backs while the constituencies are determined.

7.45 pm

**Mr. McDonnell:** The amendment deals with operational, not geographical, constituencies. Operational constituencies are defined as the different elements of the business electoral college that reflect the different businesses that operate in their different ways in the City. I have confidence in the City corporation, which would be able to provide an accurate definition.

Like any other organisation that acts in the public realm, the City corporation would be open to judicial review should it offend against reasonable behaviour. The Wednesbury principles, which provide that all relevant factors have to be taken into account and all irrelevant factors dismissed in determining a reasonable decision, would obviously apply to the City corporation's delineation of the business operational constituencies. Therefore, protection would be given to individual businesses and their members, residents and employees. I understand the argument for external verification, but the reality is that external verification could easily be pursued in the courts.

**Mr. Dismore:** I am becoming confused about the reference to operational and geographical constituencies. It is not clear whether my hon. Friend is saying that there should be an operational constituency for each ward or one for the whole City. Establishing an operational constituency for each word would be complex and a different kettle of fish. Indeed, it could lead to multiple voting of the type described by my hon. Friends. Would there be one operational constituency for the whole of the City's borders?

**Mr. McDonnell:** My view is that we are discussing one for the whole of the borders on the basis that elections would have to be run according to slates of candidates rather than lists of individuals. That would be manageable, given that there are only 5,000 residents. The amendment would also overcome some gerrymandering of ward boundaries, although we were given assurances by the City corporation that there would be reforms in that respect. However, I do not believe that any have been carried out.

**Mr. Dismore:** Now I am becoming worried. My hon. Friend referred to slates. Did he mean open party lists or closed party lists? Did he mean any kind of party list?

**Mr. McDonnell:** My remarks represented only a supposition, not a proposal. Rather than use geographical districts, we should pay regard to the reality of what is a business district in total. Therefore, rather than define geographical constituencies, we should define constituencies of interest in terms of the work force and the businesses. I have confidence in the City corporation being able to draw up a list of the various business operational constituencies adequately to reflect the range of activities that go on in the City of London.

**Mr. Dismore:** If my hon. Friend is referring to slates of one sort or another, could a particular occupation dominate in the City? Could there be a solicitors' slate, whereby a batch of solicitors could outvote all the other occupational groups? Could the stockbrokers have a slate? We would end up with what we have already, so how would the reforms help?

**Mr. McDonnell:** With great respect to my hon. Friend, no protection against solicitors is known to man or beast or other, but let me explain by exemplifying how the structure would work. I shall draw on the City corporation's latest report on London's contribution to the UK economy, which was published in November 2000 and commissioned from the Centre for Economics and Business Research.

In examining the financial contribution of London and the City, the report defines the major activities and business operations in the London and City economy. Therefore, it describes the industrial or business composition of the City of London area. It also shows that operational constituencies could readily be drawn up, although I accept that they could be numerous.

The report says, for example, that separate operational constituencies could be established for banking, finance, insurance, business services and leasing as well as for service sectors including communications, transport, storage, distribution, hotels and catering. The amendment would allow for that. Alternatively, business operational constituencies could be constructed that would delineate a company with multiple roles and then determine which role was dominant within that company, or the company could opt for a particular business operational constituency.

The corporation may wish to group businesses in broader and less numerous business operational constituencies. For example, banking and finance might form one group, insurance a second, business services a third, and distribution, communications, hotels and catering a fourth. If the amendment were accepted, the corporation's town clerk would invite all qualifying bodies—by advertisement and by letter—to register, allowing them to opt for a particular business operational constituency. The town clerk—I believe that the City corporation describes him as the chamberlain—could be required to investigate the appropriateness of a qualifying body's registering within a particular operational constituency, if the registration was challenged. There would therefore be an element of protection against abuse of that kind, and against practices that would constitute manipulation of votes.

**Mr. Corbyn:** I apologise for having missed part of my hon. Friend's speech: I had to pop out briefly.

In the case of a business involved in multiple operations and performing a number of different functions, how would the clerk decide on the sector to which that business should be allocated?

**Mr. McDonnell:** I think that it would be open to the business to opt for a sector, and to demonstrate that it was opting for the sector in which most of its activity lay, by reference to its accounts. Its trading practices could point to the operational constituency in which it would fit.

**Mr. Corbyn:** I take the point, but the profitability of one sector or another might well not be synonymous with the labour-intensity involved—the number of people employed. The Bill might give more votes to fewer people because those people produced more cash for the company, rather than giving more votes to a larger

*[Mr. Corbyn]*

number constituting, essentially, a service within the company. The latter group might well be disfranchised, or at least have a reduced franchise.

**Mr. McDonnell:** Registration in the business electoral college is based on status as a business, not as an employer. Employees will be eligible for the employees' electoral college under the proposed system.

**Mr. Skinner:** What happens when there is a takeover? We know that business is global now. That means that foreign firms become involved, but presumably they will not have votes at the outset. How will they get votes distributed once they have taken over British firms? This sort of thing is happening all the time. Moreover, banking firms are moving into production, consumerism and so forth.

The more I hear about this proposal, the more I perceive that it contains the seeds of its own destruction. I am not all together happy with the great effort that my hon. Friend is making in regard to the electoral college. Furthermore, I want to know whether there will be a cap on political spending in the so-called constituencies, because I envisage a lot of fiddling.

**Mr. McDonnell:** I would expect the normal rules pertaining to local government elections to apply to expenditure controls. As for takeovers, mergers and the like, they are an inevitable part of commercial life. In the event of a takeover, if a business changed its operation it would move into another category at a subsequent election.

**Mr. Dismore:** What worries me is the possibility that a business would plump to go into an operational group that was under-represented, thus maximising its vote, perhaps out of all proportion to its real operational activity.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) mentioned election spending. Election spending is calculated, per voter, on the basis of residential qualification. How can that possibly work in terms of employees, of whom there may be a million? Will there be a million 10 pences to be spent, or will the system be run in a different way?

**Mr. McDonnell:** That could well come within the remit of the new Electoral Commission, which is examining electoral practices overall. I think that the calculation should be done on the basis of a straightforward single amount for a business, rather than a quota basis relating to employment or turnover, but that is a matter for subsequent discussion.

Certainly the issue of plumping between business operational constituencies needs to be tackled. I think the town clerk should be responsible for ensuring the appropriateness of a location within a business operational constituency, although that is open to challenge. A business might try to disguise its overall operation illegally: it might apparently be operating in one field but plumping in another. That would be a matter for the town clerk to investigate.

**Mr. Hopkins:** Is there not a striking similarity between the system proposed by my hon. Friend and the system adopted by the TUC general council in regard to industrial groups? The difference is that the earlier arrangement was determined by a democratic set-up, elected by ordinary people year on year. Any irregularities or changes were monitored, and voted on democratically. This proposed system, however, is open to abuse: that is suggested by all that has been said so far. The problem is that the City corporation, rather than an external, independent body, will determine the arrangements.

**Mr. McDonnell:** As we are both ex-TUC apparatchiks, my hon. Friend and I understand the flaws in the TUC system. However, when I deal with the employees' electoral college my hon. Friend will note that it strongly reflects the TUC's voting structure and occupational groupings.

**Mr. Dismore:** My hon. Friend said that the town clerk would determine whether a business was plumping. Would the determination be on the basis of the town clerk's own inquisitorial powers to look into the matter following a complaint from an aggrieved person, and would a business feeling that it had been ruled against unjustly have the right of appeal?

**Mr. McDonnell:** According to normal practice in local government, when a matter is drawn to the attention of the chief executive or the monitoring officer—in this case, the town clerk—that is done on the basis of a complaint. Generally, however, that person will have powers of inquiry. Any further appeal is normally made either to the courts or, in some instances, to the Secretary of State. I think there is an opportunity here at least to instigate some form of appeal.

**Mr. Corbyn:** I am sorry to return to the issue of the Human Rights Act 1998, but my hon. Friend will be aware that under that Act every citizen who feels aggrieved about any matter has a right to have the matter determined by an independent body—independent, that is, of those making the decision in the first place. Clearly the town clerk, as an employee of the council, can hardly be deemed independent of his own decisions and therefore able to take an objective view of them. There must either be recourse to the courts, or recourse to a similarly constituted, duly independent body. That is now a provision in the European convention on human rights, and in the 1998 Act, with which the Bill must comply.

**Mr. McDonnell:** Any business person, any employee and any resident could, under the amendments, challenge the wrongful registration of a business within a business operational constituency. The town clerk would operate in the same way as the monitoring officer within local councils. The monitoring officer is seen to be independent, not operating at the behest of the political officers of the council or on behalf of the council itself, in undertaking a review and therefore a decision. My hon. Friend is right, however: there is a right of appeal to courts of law under the amendments, as there would be in other circumstances.

Votes in the business electoral college will be allocated to each operational constituency on the basis of the proportion of registrations for each business operational constituency.

I was tempted to introduce a market performance incentive to the system by suggesting that the allocation of votes could be based upon the financial contribution of that particular sector to the City economy, or even more radically upon how many staff the businesses or a particular sector employed—but economically incentivising democratic participation was rejected as being too challenging and almost too Thatcherite.

8 pm

Amendment No. 23 limits the number of voters elected from the business electoral college to no more than 2,000. There will be about 5,000 residential voters—residents qualify under clause 3(1)(b) of the Bill. They will still continue to qualify for votes in City corporation elections. It is important that we protect the residents from being swamped by either business or employee voters, or a combination of the two. The amendment would cap the number of business voters elected from the business electoral college at 2,000, but I emphasise that it would not cap the number of voters eligible to be nominated by qualifying bodies to the business electoral college itself at the first stage of the indirect elections.

**Mr. Skinner:** Will those be recorded votes? If so, people with tons of money will be buying them. It only needs someone like, say, Maxwell to come on the scene and to buy votes and all the rest of it. If they are recorded votes, he has got them in his pocket. He could be switching pension funds left, right and centre; he could be running the show before we could say Jack Robinson.

**Mr. McDonnell:** I have not addressed in these amendments the issue of whether the votes will be recorded, or whether they will be by secret ballot. I have taken it as inherent in the democratic system of this country that all elections for a section of local governance of any nature would be by secret ballot, although that matter may be addressed in subsequent amendments. Alternatively, if we pass the Bill tonight, it may be addressed in the subsequent first report that is instigated under the legislation to review the operation of the new system.

**Mr. Dismore:** I pick up my hon. Friend's point about the balance between the business vote, the employee vote and the residential vote. It was my impression that the residents would still continue to work in the historic wards that go back to mediaeval times, with those wonderful ancient names. Is he effectively saying that the amendments would sweep away all those great traditions of history and that residents would have to vote as part of the overall amorphous square mile mass, breaking down the historic traditions of the little wards in which they live?

**Mr. McDonnell:** I would not wish to break down the honorific functions of the individual wards. I have maintained that tradition, which has been built up since mediaeval days. However, I envisage one single entity: the City corporation voting area. It is not, to be frank, unlike one of the individual wards of any particular borough within London. In fact, the residential population in an individual borough ward is probably higher than it is in the square mile as we know it.

**Mr. Barnes:** If I understand my hon. Friend correctly, he is saying that there would be about 5,000 votes for residents. His amendments give 2,000 to businesses and 2,000 to employees, so there is a possibility that residents could rule the roost if they acted together. That has some attractions, but normally under electoral college provisions, especially those taken from the Labour party, which has seemed to influence a great deal of my hon. Friend's ideas, the practice is a third, a third, a third—no single group begins to dominate another. Can he explain why he has not picked up that particular position?

**Mr. McDonnell:** Let me go through it step by step. I am sure that hon. Members would welcome the idea that the objective is to protect the residential vote—the residents themselves. The amendment would ensure that no stakeholder group—my hon. Friend is right—was able to predominate over the residential voters. That would set in the constitution of the City corporation what in effect is being set in the Bill: the primacy of the residential qualification as against qualification by business presence or ownership, and qualification by presence in the City as an employee.

My hon. Friend is correct: it is primus inter pares. The residents are prime in terms of their status within the hierarchy. We need to protect the residential vote. That protection would be in the Bill if the amendments went through. It is an acceptance that the residential vote, because it reflects the overall tenure of democracy and every other section of government structure in this country, must be primarily protected.

**Mr. Corbyn:** I support the amendments and, as my hon. Friend will know, I have endorsed them in any event, but another amendment perhaps needs to be considered: whether there should be a positive disbarment on people voting in both the residential and the business sector. It does not seem clear whether the amendments cover that issue. People could have two votes.

**Mr. McDonnell:** There may be some opportunity to draft such an amendment at a later date or during one of the regular reviews. I have not undertaken that task with this batch of amendments, largely because I felt that it was too complex and unwieldy.

The point of the first group of amendments is that they go some way towards a compromise, acknowledging that the electoral principles of the City corporation have come partly into line with those underlying the remainder of local government in this country: the primacy of the residential vote. The electoral qualification is and should be based on residency but, because we accept that it is a business district, other factors should be taken into account when determining qualification to vote—business operation and employment.

**Mr. Dismore:** Can I put a suggestion to my hon. Friend? It seems that he is creating an enormous, complex bureaucracy that will no doubt cost a lot of money to administer. Has he considered simply using existing City structures to corporate the business college: the City livery companies and the guilds? There is already a prototype format. It would not take a great deal to tart them up a bit to meet the basic principles that he is trying to advance.

**Mr. McDonnell:** Later, I shall address that issue. In effect, this group of amendments does that. They are a

*[Mr. McDonnell]*

reconstitution in a democratic form of the old system of guilds, but within what we describe as business operational constituencies.

Amendment No. 8 defines an employees' electoral college as a body comprising voters who have been appointed—again, indirect election—and who have responsibility for electing the employees' voters, who are then entitled to vote in the ward elections for the City corporation. By ward elections I mean the election overall: the general election within the City corporation for the common council. The employees' electoral college is a straight comparison with the business electoral college.

Amendment No. 22 amends clause 3 by inserting a description of how the employees' electoral college will be formed. The electoral college will be based on a form of employees' or workers' suffrage. The amendment enfranchises employees who are employed within the City of London. They will be eligible to elect from among themselves their colleagues, who will then serve in an electoral college reserved solely for employees: for workers.

Those members of the employees' electoral college will in turn be eligible to elect voters, who will be qualified to cast their votes in elections for the City corporation for the first time since the original days of the guilds. It returns to the mechanism originally envisaged when the City corporation was established and empowered under the monarchy.

**Mr. Dismore:** Is the definition of employee that my hon. Friend is using for the purposes of his franchise the same as that which commonly applies in employment law, or has he another in mind?

**Mr. McDonnell:** We should maintain a consistency across legislation, and the definition will be that which is within employment law. My hon. Friend will have some points to make on that, but consistency is important as the matter has an impact on registration.

**Mr. Hopkins:** I am interested in my hon. Friend's description of the employees' electoral college. I am concerned about whether the employee representatives will be independent of their employers. In other industries and the business world, we have trade unions, which guarantee protection for workers. Where trade unions do not exist, we see token representative organisations and staff associations, which are under the control and influence of the employer. How independent will the representatives be, and what guarantee will we have of their independence?

**Mr. McDonnell:** It is not for this Bill to encompass those forms of protection, but there is the potential for protection in law for employees against intimidation by employers in no matter what respect of their activities. Some of this Government's trade union legislation would provide some protection, but I would welcome any further amendments that my hon. Friend might feel were needed.

**Mr. Dismore:** On the definition of employee, I am sure that my hon. Friend has had many letters—as have I—about the people affected by IR35, whose employment position is somewhat anomalous in terms of employment legislation; they are not technically employees but, for taxation purposes, they seem to be becoming employees. Bearing in mind how many people in the City are probably working under the terms of IR35, where would they fit into his mechanism? Are they employees or not? If not, will they be disfranchised?

**Mr. McDonnell:** Under that definition, they would be seen as employees; otherwise they would fall outside the system altogether and would not be eligible for membership of the employees' electoral college. They might then be eligible for membership of the business operational constituencies of the business electoral college because they would be seen almost as self-employed. My own view is to corral them into the employees' electoral college.

**Mr. Skinner:** What are we talking about here? Is it sweetheart unions? Is it just one union? Is it unions without strikes? Is it a works council? My hon. Friend chose his words carefully in response to the earlier intervention about the trade unions from my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins). We ought to get this straight; is this the German system, or what is it?

**Mr. McDonnell:** Within the City corporation, very few employees operate within trade unions. Much as my hon. Friend and I may wish employees in the City to be trade unionists and their trade unions to represent them in some form through the employees electoral college, I do not believe that that is feasible at this stage. However, our proposal may be an incentive for trade union organisation within the City corporation, so that employees can come together and mobilise colleagues' votes to pursue policies through the City corporation.

**Mr. Dismore:** It seems to me that my hon. Friend is actually proposing a disincentive to join a trade union. If the employee franchise were organised around the trade union system, that would be an incentive to join, as those concerned would get their vote within the system. What my hon. Friend proposes means, effectively, that it does not matter whether someone is a member of a trade union or not; they still get the vote. It would be much simpler to ask the trade unions to organise the franchise vote—they are used to organising elections, under the control of the Electoral Reform Society—to get rid of all the enormous superstructure that my hon. Friend seems to be creating, at great public expense.

**Mr. McDonnell:** It may well be that that mechanism could be used in future, but it is open to us at the moment to facilitate the trade union role within the City of London corporation through this Bill, although that might be an incentive for a form of organisation at a subsequent date.

8.15 pm

**Mr. Dismore:** I wish to refer to the status of office holders who are not employees within the terms of employment legislation. For example, police officers who work for the City of London police are not employees, but hold the office of constable. Also, some of those who

work for the Port of London Authority are, I suspect, office holders rather than employees. Throughout the City, one finds all these ancient offices—.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. Interventions are becoming far too long. An intervention should be brief. If hon. Members wish to develop arguments about this group of amendments, they should seek to catch my eye later.

**Mr. McDonnell:** Thank you for your protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Hendon makes a valid point about office holders. I have sought in another amendment to delete the reference to office holders from the Bill, as that could produce a problem of corrupt practices. I understand that it might have a deleterious effect on others. The indirect form of election in the employees' electoral college mirrors that of the business electoral college, except in one instance.

Amendment No. 57 seeks to ensure that the employees' electoral college reflects the range of occupations operating within the City of London. My aim is to ensure that there is a balance between the occupations and the expertise that can be drawn upon in electing the employees' voters. I propose that the employees' electoral college be composed of occupational constituencies. Under the amendment, employees will be invited to register for their respective occupational constituency.

The constituencies that I have suggested are not geographical but occupational and should be based upon the Department for Education and Employment's standard occupational classification major groups. This classification categorises the various occupational groupings within our economy. These were recently changed. The changes received a fair amount of publicity because they were relatively contentious in terms of definition. Naturally, some of the groupings will be less relevant to the City of London or, in some instances, totally irrelevant: for example, agricultural occupations. If so, there will be either few or no employees registering in these categories.

As the amendment would ensure also that votes allocated within the employees' electoral college—the EEC; a provocative title if ever there was one—are to be in proportion to the number of employees registering for each category, set against the overall total registered, it can be seen that categories of no or low registration do not undermine the concept or structure of the electoral college. This goes back to the roots of the City of London corporation in the original guilds. Here we have occupations grouped within occupational constituencies; in fact, we are now re-establishing the guilds in all but name. It is a form of guild socialism developed by Pannekoek, the Dutch socialist, in the last century.

As with the business electoral college, I am proposing that the number of employee voters elected from the employees' electoral college be limited to no more than 2,000. This will mean, under the amendment, that the employees will not be able to swamp the residential voters or combine with the business voters to swamp the residents' interests. However, there will be opportunities of combinations between residents and employees versus business interests, or vice versa; that is the fair play of democracy.

Rateable value is an issue addressed in the Bill, because qualification will be based on it, in some form.

**Mr. Wareing:** I am a little mystified about how some of the people who work in the City will be categorised. My hon. Friend mentioned those who work in banks and in transport, but what about cleaning ladies? Where do they fit in? For example, would a cleaning lady employed by a bank fit into the banking and finance section? What about academics who teach in colleges in the City of London?

**Mr. McDonnell:** I apologise to my hon. Friend, but I have left behind the note that I received from the Library which lists the major groups in the Department for Education and Employment's standard occupational classification. It classifies people not with regard to their business operations but in relation to their profession, such as solicitor or teacher. I can supply my hon. Friend with the information later, but I am not sure which category cleaners would come under. However, the categorisation reflects the intent of his comments. It ensures that the electoral college reflects comprehensively all those activities that the employees undertake and is grouped according to the work that they undertake, rather than the business that employs them.

**Mr. Wareing:** It seems to me that no matter what work is done by an individual in a bank, say, it would make sense for him to cast a vote in that section, because he would know the people involved. I gave cleaning ladies as an example, but there are many others who are spread out over diverse operations and should cast a vote within the operation that employs them.

**Mr. McDonnell:** That is exactly what the amendment will achieve. It will group people who have a commonality of interest as a result of the work that they do, not as a result of the company for which they work. However, my hon. Friend may wish to examine subsequent amendments on qualifying bodies that consider how other groups of employees could exercise their vote.

**Mr. Dismore:** How does my hon. Friend envisage the nationality qualification applying to employee votes?

**Mr. McDonnell:** The City corporation has been helpful on that point in the past—anyone entitled to vote in the City of London area also has to qualify under the national and local government legislation that applies elsewhere with regard to citizenship. It is open to debate, now that our society is changing, whether other forms of citizenship will arise at a later date, especially in relation to the European Union.

In terms of the business electoral college and the employees electoral college amendments, I have adhered to the requirement of the original clause in the Bill that the qualifying body should be ordinarily in occupation for relevant purposes as owner or tenant of the whole of or part of a hereditament situated in that ward that is shown in the local non-domestic rating list as having a rateable value of not less than £200. I have done that for simplicity's sake and in a spirit of compromise. My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) has criticised that level as too low in previous debates. However, my amendment, which caps the number of

*[Mr. McDonnell]*

voters derived from each electoral college, would serve more effectively to balance sectional interests than a crude hike in the rateable value qualification.

**Mr. Hopkins:** I worry about the robustness of the democratic arrangements for the employees' electoral college. I am concerned about whether individuals will feel free to put themselves forward, lest they incur the displeasure of managers and those representing employers. When people cast their votes, will they feel genuinely free to do so, and will they feel that the secret ballot is genuinely secret?

**Mr. McDonnell:** There will be opportunities for abuse, as exist in any electoral system. That is why the City corporation should have opportunities to examine codes of practice by which companies, individuals and others will have to abide in the operation of the system. For the GLA elections, hon. Members will recall that we endorsed a set of electoral rules to apply to those elections—

**Mr. Brooke** *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now proposed.

*Question put,* That the Question be now proposed:—

*The House proceeded to a Division.*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal):** I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the No Lobby.

*The House having divided:* Ayes 99, Noes 36.

**Division No. 201]** **[8.26 pm**

**AYES**

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Colman, Tony
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Donohoe, Brian H
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hawkins, Nick
Hill, Keith
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Timms, Stephen
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Tyler, Paul
Walter, Robert
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mrs. Jacqui Lait and**
**Mr. Peter Bottomley.**

**NOES**

Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Godman, Dr Norman A
Golding, Mrs Llin
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Michie, Bill *(Shef'ld Heeley)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pickthall, Colin
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salter, Martin
Skinner, Dennis
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Trickett, Jon
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Wyatt, Derek

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Andrew Dismore and**
**Mr. John McDonnell.**

*It appearing on the report of the Division that fewer than 100 Members voted in the majority,* MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Question had not been decided in the affirmative.*

**Mr. McDonnell:** I am glad that we have been allowed to continue the debate on the amendment because it is so critical. I am a third of the way through my speech and wish to present my arguments to the House. I believe that they will enable me to engender sufficient support to ensure that the Bill will be amended in a suitable form.

**Mr. Corbyn:** On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I notice that you said that fewer than 100 Members had voted in the Division and that the debate must continue. That is absolutely right. However, we seem to have been here before with this particular miracle number of 99. Can you assure me that you are satisfied that the figure is correct and that someone is not about to run into the Chamber with a piece of paper saying that a hanging chad has been found in the Aye Lobby and that, by some miracle, a Jeb Bush lookalike will announce that 100 Members actually voted? Are you satisfied that we are in order in continuing this interesting debate with the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell)?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** It is a not question of whether the Chair is satisfied; it is a matter for the Tellers.

**Mrs. Jacqui Lait** (Beckenham): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I reassure the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) that I personally counted everyone through the Lobby? The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) did not disagree with my figure at any stage.

**Mr. Stephen Pound** (Ealing, North): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I assure you that as I was in no way involved in the telling, it is almost certain that the figure is accurate?

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that comment.

**Mr. Dismore:** Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I can certainly confirm what my fellow Teller, the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait), said. I watched very closely—particularly when we got into the 90s—to make sure that the count was accurate. I absolutely confirm that 99 is the correct figure.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** I thank the hon. Gentleman. I am sure that hon. Members are reassured that both Tellers are satisfied with the figure.

**Mr. McDonnell:** It is further evidence of the achievements of the Government's educational policy that mathematics has improved so dramatically in this country in the space of just three months.

**Mrs. Lait:** May I inform the hon. Gentleman that I learned my mathematics in Scotland when the Conservatives were running the country?

8.45 pm

**Mr. Tony Benn** (Chesterfield): That is why the Conservatives have no Members in Scotland.

**Mr. McDonnell:** There is a problem with counting the Conservative party's votes in Scotland, but it has never been one of large numbers.

Let me proceed with my description of the amendments by returning to discussion of the employees electoral college. An argument has been made by the City corporation and by hon. Members that a college of the composition as determined in amendment No. 59 is not feasible because it is not practical to construct a register of employees eligible to vote for the members of the college. They also argue that such a register is not verifiable, is too costly or is too cumbersome to construct. That case has been advanced during informal discussions and formal debate in both the Committee and the Chamber.

I find that argument extraordinary, and want to confront it now and knock it out of court. Let us grind our heels in the face of it. Numerous mechanisms exist not only to record the employment of individuals by a particular company, but to be used by statutory bodies on a regular basis to effect the implementation of laws enacted by Parliament.

**Mr. Tony Benn:** I am sorry that I did not hear the earlier part of my hon. Friend's speech, but how would self-employed freelancers find a place on the register?

**Mr. McDonnell:** They would register under the business electoral college as individual self-employed businesses and would not be covered by the employees' electoral college. I forgive my right hon. Friend for not following all of my speech, exciting though it may have been. I could revisit some of the issues for him, but that might not be appropriate.

To comply with existing legislation, every firm will have a record of its employees—its work force—for national insurance and taxation purposes, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon referred earlier. Every firm has a record of its employees for health and safety purposes. In addition, many have a record of the trade union membership of their employees. Those records are readily available, and the construction of an employees' register would be no more difficult, costly or cumbersome to establish. Recent legislation makes it possible to draw on such information for industrial relations matters and other purposes.

**Mr. Dismore:** Is there a qualification for the length of employment, in the same way as someone has to be employed for a certain number of months before he receives the employment rights that entitle him to redundancy pay? Does my hon. Friend envisage that an employee would have voting rights from day one, which is when many employment rights apply, or would the employee have to work in the City for a given period before acquiring them?

**Mr. McDonnell:** Amendments on qualifying bodies and the qualifying period relate to the length of time for which a business or director has a connection with the City. Indeed, the City corporation is covered by provisions on such connections. My firm opinion is that employees should have rights from day one.

**Mr. Wareing:** My hon. Friend has not mentioned part-time workers. Do the amendments cover them?

**Mr. McDonnell:** Any employee is eligible for registration under the scheme, including part-time workers. A growing number of people work part time in the City. My hon. Friend mentioned cleaners and other workers. They would be open for registration.

The registers demonstrate the facility to construct a register of employees. Even if the records did not exist or were not accessible, it would not be beyond the wit of employees to compile a register within their firm of people who were eligible to vote. That could be organised by trade unions, as was mentioned earlier. I am sure that they would assist in the role of registration.

The registration list would be open to verification or investigation by the City corporation's town clerk on demand, or as a result of a challenge by any individual or qualifying body, similar to the way in which the business electoral college could be challenged.

**Mr. Hopkins:** I am concerned about the assembly of the register of employee voters. In normal elections it can be difficult to persuade people to put their names forward to be electors. There may be a large number of employees who would not bother to do so, and that might undermine the whole democratic basis of the elections and effectively invalidate them. If only a tiny minority of people chose to become electors, the situation would be like that in

*[Mr. Hopkins]*

Britain before the 1832 Reform Act was passed. What mechanism would exist to ensure that all employees were properly registered and exercised their right to vote?

**Mr. McDonnell:** I do not believe that voluntary registration by employees would be a problem. It imposes no burdens on the person registering and would be seen as an entitlement. Many people would consider it an honour to be registered as an elector in the City of London corporation area.

**Mr. Tony Benn:** It has been strongly argued that the whole basis of the Bill, as promoted by the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), is the unique nature of the City which arises from the nature of the work that goes on there. That being so, is there any reason why retired workers should not have a vote? Someone who has retired will have retained the expertise that he acquired at work. As I understand it, my hon. Friend is trying to move from a catchment-based to an experience-based electorate, so has he given any consideration to the possibility that retired workers should be entitled to put their experience at the disposal of those who are elected to serve in the wards?

**Mr. McDonnell:** It is interesting that my right hon. Friend raises that point, because I have based the employees electoral college on the TUC model for the registration of unions and individual memberships, which was mentioned earlier. The trade union movement has debated whether retired members should not only be able to maintain their membership in the retired members section, but have an entitlement to a full vote in all trade union activities. Interestingly, trade unions have dealt with that problem in different ways.

I have not addressed that matter here, but it is open to debate. As my right hon. Friend suggested, it is clear that there will be a need, particularly as we move beyond the fixed retirement age, for greater flexibility to enable people to participate in democratic structures, especially within the City corporation. That needs to be considered, but I have narrowly defined an employee as someone who has a formal contract with a particular firm and is therefore registered with it for taxation and national insurance purposes.

The amendment does not place a duty on the individual to register, but provides that the employee can exercise his right to register. That addresses the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins).

**Mr. Barnes:** Is not voluntary registration a dangerous precedent? In this country's election system generally, it is obligatory to register if one meets certain conditions. To mix up the different elements of the college so that some people, as residents, would have a duty to register and others could voluntarily do so would create a dangerous precedent.

**Mr. McDonnell:** My hon. Friend, who is an expert on electoral systems, has over two decades developed ideas for electoral registration reform, and I appreciate his point. I am trying to argue that we are not placing a duty on the individual. However, he is right to say that this is different from every other registration arrangement for local or national elections in this country, in which there is a legal duty to register and failure to do so is punishable in law by a fine.

**Mr. Skinner:** Who will pay for the elections? Will there be free distribution of literature? What about the homeless people in the City? As a result of the efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), we have just legislated to enable homeless people to vote for the first time. Is my hon. Friend telling me that, in 2001, he is proposing a system that will give a vote to all the homeless people who hang around the City in the naive belief that people with a lot of money will give them a handout—although, of course, they will not? Will homeless people get a vote? By the way, will the Opposition get Short money? My hon. Friend has to think the whole thing through, otherwise people will not buy it.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman is going slightly beyond the scope of the debate.

**Mr. McDonnell:** May I deal with the question of homeless people and knock the matter on the head? In the residential vote, residents—people with a residential qualification who live within the area—will be entitled to vote. Arthur Scargill, for instance, has a flat in the Barbican—socialist that he is, he would be able to register to vote. People sleeping rough on the streets of the City of London would be eligible to vote as residents of the City. Legislative changes promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for North–East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) enable rough sleepers to register to vote elsewhere in the country and, similarly, they would be able to vote in the City. That would overcome the problem.

With respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover, the matter that he raised does not relate to the amendment. With regard to funding the whole system, as I have said in previous debates, City cash available to the City of London corporation is never audited and is never published in accounts. It should be audited in published accounts to pay for the new electoral system.

**Mr. Wareing:** I look forward to the day when Arthur Scargill becomes Lord Mayor of London. I understand how the provision would work within geographical boundaries at a by-election. However, what provision would be made in the event of one of the employee representatives in the electoral college passing away?

**Mr. McDonnell:** The electoral college would come into being prior to the City of London corporation election. Under the amendment, the employees' electoral college would meet to elect voters who would eventually vote for the City of London corporation. Because the college would be elected by groups of employees within occupational constituencies, it would be open to a group of employees to elect a replacement within the relevant time scale. That would be the norm under any electoral system that is established. There would be one meeting of electoral college voters who would then determine the voters who elect the corporation.

**Mr. Corbyn:** My hon. Friend inadvertently slipped into a difficult area a few minutes ago. He mentioned that the costs of the election would be borne by the City of

London. In fact, the norm in all United Kingdom elections is for the Home Office to bear the cost of electoral registration and, I believe, of electoral administration. Is there a different proposal for the City of London? Would an extra burden be placed on it or would it be borne by the Home Office, as is normal with other elections?

**Mr. McDonnell:** I believe that an exception should be made for the City of London corporation because it is awash with money. No one can get their hands on that money and no one knows where the City cash is tucked away. It is treated as a private fund inherited from mediaeval times and is not audited publicly. In my view, the amendment could be a lever that opens those books for inspection.

**Mr. Tony Benn:** On the question of money, it is a principle of the residential vote that residents pay council tax, so they get represented. There is no taxation without representation. Does my hon. Friend's amendment introduce the idea of representation without taxation? Surely, there must be mutuality. If somebody is entitled to vote in an election, he or she should also contribute by paying council tax. As I understand it, the business electoral college proposed by my hon. Friend does not lay upon electors with the right to vote any personal responsibility for council tax, which is a significant breach of the basic electoral principle.

**Mr. McDonnell:** It does not breach that principle because two thirds of local government expenditure comes from national Government. The businesses therefore have a right to exercise their vote at the local level as well, because of their contribution through the business rates to the national coffers, which is distributed down to the City corporation and others. The individual employees contribute through national taxation, which funds local government by two thirds. In some ways, the system of employees electoral colleges could root out some of the rotten borough corrupt practices which continue to be reported and alleged. It would give greater transparency to business and employee registers and would assist in overcoming the registration of voters at accommodation addresses. I shall not go into the detail of the reports of the corrupt practices that need to be eradicated, but I refer hon. Members to the *City of London and Dockland Times* of 22 May last year.

9 pm

**Mr. Dismore:** My hon. Friend spoke about the people elected to the college casting their vote at a meeting. Can he explain how those arrangements fit in with the new arrangements for postal and proxy voting? The regulations are, of course, much more liberal now. Can he also tell me whether employees voting for their representative in the college will be entitled to a personal or proxy vote, as that raises certain questions, and whether members of the college will be entitled to a personal or proxy vote?

**Mr. McDonnell:** The same regulations that pertain to national and local government personal and proxy votes would pertain to votes within the electoral colleges and to the votes exercised by the voters elected from those electoral colleges, which go on to elect the City corporation.

The final amendment, No. 59—

**Mr. Hopkins:** Before my hon. Friend goes on, I am concerned about elections within the employee's constituency and the employer's constituency, and I am worried about my hon. Friend's comments about rotten boroughs. One of the mechanisms that makes our democracy work is the party system. If people do not know candidates as individuals, at least they know which political party they represent. Does my hon. Friend envisage political parties being given rights to campaign in both the employers group and the employees group to make the system meaningful and democratic, so that those voting would understand who the candidates were?

**Mr. McDonnell:** There are problems relating to the scale of the election. I understand that. The issues must be addressed, and that could be done in the review report for which the legislation provides. The report would come before the House. My hon. Friend may wish to take up the matter in three years, when my further amendment takes effect and provides for that report.

**Mr. Skinner:** How does my hon. Friend propose to deal with the problem of voter apathy? Perhaps he will tell us all the answer. If we crack the problem in the City of London, we have a chance everywhere else.

**Mr. McDonnell:** There is no problem of voter apathy in the City of London. The measure would provide the opportunity to serve in a form of local government that controls vast sums, exercises massive powers, beyond some of the powers of existing local councils and London boroughs, and provides possibly the greatest opportunity for municipal travel in all of local government. I do not believe that there will be any shortage of candidates coming forward to stand for election or any shortage of voters.

**Mr. Skinner:** There is a further issue. How much will the representatives be paid? My hon. Friend just mentioned that the City was awash with money.

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the House is discussing not candidates, but the electorate.

**Mr. Skinner:** There will eventually be candidates—successful candidates. Before I enter the Lobby, I want to know how much they are to be paid.

**Mr. McDonnell:** The amendments do not deal with the payment of candidates. The payment of councillors elected to the City corporation is not covered by the Bill, but I shall try to provide my hon. Friend with the information after the debate.

**Mr. Skinner:** My hon. Friend will write to me.

**Mr. McDonnell:** I will write to my hon. Friend.

Amendment No. 59 proposes that, for the election of voters to represent the business operational and occupational constituencies within the electoral colleges, the poll will be conducted under a single transferable vote system. It is put forward in a spirit of compromise to

*[Mr. McDonnell]*

garner the consensus of the House. The amendment contains a description of a single transferable vote taken from the Northern Ireland (Elections) Act 1998 enacted by the House. I do not wish to give an elaborate description of the system; I included it because it more readily allows one to be confident that the people elected have the majority consent of the electorate whom they seek to represent.

In establishing a new system that seeks to balance interests and to bring together individuals, groups and organisations which have never worked together in such structures before, it is important to have an electoral system that garners majority support for the elected representative. The single transferable vote system set out in the amendment does just that by comprising a process which, by transferring preference votes as individuals either meet or fail to meet a quota for election, ensures that a majority is, in due course, as part of the process, assembled behind the elected representatives.

**Mr. Barnes:** I understand that the single transferable voting system in Northern Ireland that has been described applies to the multi-Member constituency. We are discussing not the single transferable vote which operates within a single constituency, but a complex system. Some would argue that it is a form of proportional representation, but I do not think that anyone can explain how it works in a proportionate way.

**Mr. McDonnell:** My hon. Friend obviously seeks to be constructive. For more detail on the system, I refer hon. Members to the House of Commons Library research paper 98/113. It was upon examination of that paper that I came to table the amendment. I would ask for a separate vote on the amendment. Amendment No. 29 is a consequential amendment.

I come now to the supporting arguments for the amendments—the meat of my speech tonight.

**Mr. Dismore:** I beg to move, That the House do sit in private.

*Question put:—*

*The House divided:* Ayes 2, Noes 109.

**Division No. 202]** **[9.9 pm**

**AYES**

Bailey, Adrian
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mr. Andrew Dismore and**
**Mr. Jeremy Corbyn.**

**NOES**

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hanson, David
Hawkins, Nick
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hill, Keith
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McWilliam, John
Madel, Sir David
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Pike, Peter L
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Wareing, Robert N
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Noes:**
**Mr. Dennis Skinner and**
**Mr. Harry Barnes.**

*Question accordingly negatived.*

**Mr. McDonnell:** Having dealt with the detail of the amendments in this group, I now turn to the meat of my speech and the supporting argument for the principle of the amendments.

I want to persuade hon. Members to support the amendments by showing how they fit in with the philosophy and principles of each of the major political parties represented in this House and how they are congruent with the manifesto commitments given by each of those parties at the previous election.

**Mr. Pound:** I shall be interested to see how my hon. Friend intends to win over the Ulster Unionists.

**Mr. McDonnell:** My hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) mentions the minority nationalist parties. I shall not deal with their philosophies in this debate, although we may wish to consider them at a later stage.

I also wish to convince hon. Members who support the Bill unamended, out of loyalty to the City Corporation, that the amendments are in line with the history of the City Corporation and with more recent statements by its senior representatives on the role of the City and on its future.

First, let me address the Liberal Democratic arguments on these amendments. Liberalism has been the dominant ideology of this country for more than 300 years, from John Locke and J.S. Mill through to de Tocqueville. The liberal theory of what Macpherson described as possessive individualism has been the intellectual justification for the political and economic structures of this country. They have been adapted in support of the City corporation.

**Mr. Corbyn:** My hon. Friend is getting slightly carried away. There is a history of undemocratic practices in elections in and around the City in the not-too-distant past. Indeed, I draw his attention to the fact that John Wilkes was the last radical to represent the City. He was removed from the House.

**Mr. Brooke** *rose—*

**Mr. McDonnell:** I am not sure that an intervention can be made on a Member who is intervening, but one can be made on the main speaker. I give way.

**Mr. Brooke:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is most courteous, as he has been throughout proceedings. I hesitate to correct the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn), but Wilkes, though a great man and though Lord Mayor, was never Member of Parliament for the City of London.

**Mr. McDonnell:** I suggest that my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North visit Hogarth house on the A4 to see the picture of Wilkes by Hogarth, which portrays a demon who did not necessarily support the democratic system overall.

**Mr. Corbyn:** I must insist on intervening again. The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) was hasty in attempting to intervene while I was intervening. Of course, he was not entitled to do so any way. My point was that Wilkes represented Middlesex and campaigned for a just electoral system, which did not apply, even in those days, in the City of London. Indeed, Wilkes represented the area that I represent, and the slogan was, "Vote for Wilkes and Liberty".

**Mr. McDonnell:** May I return to my appeal to the Liberal Democrat Members in the Chamber to support the amendment? My argument has at its heart the fact that liberal theory identifies the individual as the basic unit of society. To quote the excellent book "Using Political Ideas" by Barbara Goodwin, the

"preservation of the individual and the attainment of individual happiness are the supreme goals of a liberal political system".

My amendment reflects the liberal philosophy of the primacy of the individual and it would recast the City corporation franchise not only by protecting and promoting the rights of the individual resident voters who qualify to vote by living in the geographical area of the City of London, but by establishing the democratic rights of the individual as worker or employee.

**Mr. Edward Davey** (Kingston and Surbiton): To help the hon. Gentleman, I should say that he has already convinced me and my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell).

**Mr. McDonnell:** I thank the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Skinner:** My hon. Friend did not convince them earlier. He is trying to woo the Liberal Democrats with his tin pot idea, but let me remind him that 99 Members went through the Lobby during the Division on closure. If 100 had gone through, his speech would have been cut short and he could never have referred to liberal democracy. The Liberals entered the Lobby with the rest of them.

**Mr. McDonnell:** I say to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) that, although we may have convinced him personally, a number of Liberal Democrat Members have consistently voted against such amendments at previous stages. In particular, in the previous Session of this Parliament, the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) was happy to accept a business vote. He even said that he was willing to accept a business vote in Southwark, which represented an astounding admission in respect of anti-liberal theory.

My amendment would protect and promote individual rights. Those rights would protect against the power of business by limiting the voting strength of voters enfranchised only by the possession of property, thereby reflecting the arguments made by those promoters of liberal pluralist democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville and Hamilton, the advocate of a liberal American constitution and author of "Federalist". Indeed, the constitutional arrangement that I propose for the City corporation is based on Hamilton's book.

My amendment reflects the liberal philosophical principle of the protection of minorities or potential minorities. Under the existing electoral methods of the City corporation, the residents are a minority under political siege. In promoting the Bill, the City corporation proposed, nay promised, that a raft of measures would be voluntarily introduced to protect the residents. I do not believe that any such measures have been introduced, hence the need for my amendments. I argued for de Tocqueville-like amendments that would enshrine protection of the electoral and democratic rights of the residents, who are a potential minority.

9.30 pm

At the root of liberal philosophy—modern liberalism, and Liberal Democratic party politics—is the importance of a voting system that not only protects the individual, but ensures that the Government, councils and, in this context, the City corporation are elected with the demonstrable support of the majority of the respective electorates. I have sought to go some way towards that objective with amendment No. 59, which introduces the

*[Mr. McDonnell]*

single transferable vote system—that is, proportional representation—to the business and employees' electoral colleges.

**Mr. Dismore:** Does my hon. Friend propose that the STV system should also apply to the residential element of the electoral college? If not, there would presumably be a rather mixed system—

**Mr. Corbyn:** A mongrel system!

**Mr. Dismore:** A mongrel system, indeed. We would have a system in which the residents would be voting according to the traditional first-past-the-post system, while the other elements of the college would be voting according to the STV system. Does such a mix of systems create a democratic process? Will my hon. Friend also say whether voting for members of the council will take place according to first past the post or STV?

**Mr. McDonnell:** I am happy to compromise with the Liberal Demoerats so far, but only so far. That is why I have restricted my proposal to the first stage of the indirect election in the employees' and business electoral colleges, and have not applied it to the second stage, which involves members of those colleges' casting their votes for members of the City corporation. It is also my reason for not extending my proposal to the residential vote.

**Mr. Tony Benn** (Chesterfield): The American constitution and the philosophy of the Conservative party contain a principle of equal access to the law. When the Supreme Court came to consider the question of districts in the United States, it put to them the argument that equal access to the law meant equal access to the lawmakers—in other words, one man or one woman, one vote. Once we depart from that principle, we deny equal access to the law. That is a constitutional principle that I would expect every Member to accept.

**Mr. McDonnell:** I would as we!", but we have discovered during our debate not only that the promoter and its protector the City corporation do not accept that principle but, regrettably, that despite a century of Labour party tradition a Labour Government no longer accept it. That is why a succession of Labour Ministers have come here, fairly cravenly—I naturally include the Minister who is present now—to justify the Government's reassessment of their position. Let us put it no more strongly than that.

**Mr. Pound:** Before my hon. Friend proceeds with his stealthy seduction of the Liberal Democrats, may I counsel him to be slightly circumspect? By seducing the Liberal Democrats, he may lose the adherence of some Labour Members.

**Mr. McDonnell:** My aim is to go from party to party represented here, and to identify a consensus on the basis of which we can all support the amendments.

**Mr. Corbyn:** May I assist my colleague in his eternal search for consensus? He said that the Minister had been "craven". Can he tell us whether the Government have had discussions with him, or with the City, about the amendments and his attempts to reach some form of compromise? Are they party to the compromise, or have they yet to be hauled on board?

**Mr. McDonnell:** We have yet to receive a ministerial response to my amendments. I suggest, however, that the lines of communication between the City corporation and No. 10—and the Government overall—provide rather more access than those between the Government and me.

As I have said, I have sought to go some way towards achieving our objective by introducing a transferable voting system. Proportional representation systems have now been introduced for the election of the London mayor, the Northern Ireland and Welsh Assemblies, the Scottish Parliament and the European Parliament. My amendment is potentially a victory for the Liberal Democrats in what they describe as their campaign for "a fair voting system".

**Mr. Dismore:** For the sake of completeness, my hon. Friend would presumably wish to add the Greater London Authority to his list of bodies elected by proportional representation.

**Mr. McDonnell:** I apologise to the members of the Greater London Authority. The omission has nothing to do with the effect, or lack of effect, that they may have had as an authority to date. I simply forgot them.

If the amendment were passed into law, it would potentially be a victory for the Liberal Democrats in their campaign for a fair voting system. I appeal to all Liberal Democrat Members, including the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey, wherever he is in his taxi at the moment, to support my amendments on the ground that they are congruent with and based on the mainstream of Liberal political theory. In addition, the amendments flow directly from the statements by the Liberal Democrats in their last general election manifesto in 1997.

**Mr. Barnes:** In the attempt to gain Liberal Democrat support with spurious proportional representation arguments about the single transferable vote in multi-member constituencies, Liberal Members need to be aware that 55 per cent. or so of the votes within the City of London elections would not be covered by the arrangements under the amendments.

**Mr. McDonnell:** I was hoping that the Liberal Democrats had not noticed that, but never mind.

The amendments are directly in line with the statements in the last Liberal Democrat general election manifesto. They fulfil the desire, as stated in their manifesto to

"modernise our politics and give people more say."

They are based upon that belief that

"every citizen shares rights and responsibilities"

and that

"power . . . should be widely spread."

My amendments fulfil most effectively that worthy Liberal Democrat vision of modernising "Britain's outdated institutions", tackling Britain's "unrepresentative" political institutions—these are all direct quotes from the

manifesto—and thus renewing democracy. The argument that the Liberal Democrats advanced at the last election are the arguments of the amendments—that we should give people more of a say in decision making. If Liberal Democrat Members still believe in their manifesto statements of 1997, it behoves them to support the amendments.

I turn to the reasons why Conservative Members should support the amendments.

**Mr. Skinner:** I am getting a bit fed up of this big tent philosophy. My hon. Friend has tried to get the Liberal Democrats in. Now he is moving on to the Tories. Where will it end? Ever since he opposed the measure many years ago in this Parliament, and a sterling job he has done, opinion poll ratings for Labour have gone sky high, which points to the fact that we do not need the Liberal Democrats and we do not need the Tories. According to *The Sun* today, we will get 420-odd Labour Members. Forget the big tent.

**Mr. McDonnell:** That is the form of political tribalism that the Prime Minister warns against.

I turn to the reasons why Conservative Members should support the amendments. It is difficult appealing for support for the amendments on grounds of Conservative philosophy or ideology, largely because there is a Conservative tradition that generally rejects notions of explicit philosophies. However, I wish to seek the support of Conservative Members on the basis of their association with and support for what can be described as liberal conservatism—that one nation Toryism that stems from the radical zeal of Disraeli and which the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) has shown throughout his career. My amendments seek to protect the individual while conserving the overall structure of the City corporation's electoral edifice.

By its very name and nature, conservatism is against wholesale change. My amendments seek to introduce a variation to the existing electoral structure. Nevertheless, they do not constitute wholesale change and preserve most of the corporation electoral practices in the City.

These amendments are very much in the mould of Edmund Burke, that great Conservative philosopher—or, as someone called him, "that drunken sycophant"—in that, in maintaining the existing corporation structure, they acknowledge the Burkeian argument that existing social and political forms have special virtue because they have been refined and sanctified by tradition. Having evolved over time, the conservative would argue that the existing structures have proven their success and viability.

**Mr. Tony Benn:** Edmund Burke was my predecessor as Member of Parliament for Bristol—a little while before I came here—but I hope that my hon. Friend remembers that his most famous phrase was when he referred to the public as "the swinish multitude", which triggered Tom Paine to write "The Rights of Man". Of the two, I must confess that, despite my civic connection with Edmund Burke, I am a supporter of Tom Paine.

**Mr. McDonnell:** The record of my right hon. Friend in representing that constituency expunged the stain that Edmund Burke laid upon it.

**Mr. Pound:** On the subject of Burke, I was wrestling with Hazlitt the other night. In one of his essays—on the difference between great speakers and great writers—Hazlitt described Burke as "the dinner bell", as whenever he rose to speak in the House of Commons, the Chamber emptied. I am reluctant to compare my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) with the late Member for Bristol, but praying Burke in aid may not serve my hon. Friend best, as Burke was noted for very seldom convincing anyone, including himself, of his arguments.

**Mr. McDonnell:** I am trying to ensure that members of each party know that when they vote for the amendments, they do so on the basis of the philosophy of their party, as well as the modern principles on which they stand. That is why I referred to the Burkeian argument.

By maintaining the residential vote and the business vote and by accepting the concept—and even the level—of property qualification for many of the electors in the City, the amendments err towards the Conservative ideal of preservation of the status quo. The amendments do, however, ask Conservative Members to take a radical leap forward in terms of accepting the right of employees working within the City to have a role in electing the corporation.

In doing that, I appeal to two elements of traditional and modern Conservatism. The first is the promotion of the individual and the protection of his or her rights; the other is the radical Thatcherite tradition of empowering the individual in economic and political structures. My amendment that provides the right to the employee to vote in these elections is related to, and directly comparable to, the rights introduced by Baroness Thatcher's Government, who bestowed on members of trade unions the right to have a ballot before industrial action. My amendments—which empower employees, to a certain extent—are akin to the rights and powers that were provided by that Government, in which so many current Conservative Members served and to which so many look back as a golden age of radical conservatism.

I accept that there are some amendments with which many Conservative Members will not be happy, and I would be happy if they sought the Speaker or Deputy Speaker's permission to vote on these amendments separately. In particular, I expect Conservative Members not to be happy with amendment No. 59, which proposes the introduction of a form of proportional representation to the business and employees electoral colleges. If there can be no separate vote, I would urge Conservative Members nevertheless to vote for the amendment, while metaphorically holding their noses.

**Mr. Barnes:** The amendments should appeal to traditional Conservatives—including the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke)—because they attempt to reconcile conflicting interests, which is an approach and tactic of traditional conservatism.

**Mr. McDonnell:** That philosophy also appeals to the more modern Conservatism as displayed in recent manifestos.

**Mr. Pound:** Surely the quintessence of Conservatism was expressed in the opposition to the Reform Act 1832, and the Conservatives' love for rotten boroughs can lead

*[Mr. Pound]*

them only to oppose the amendment, because we are dealing tonight with nothing more than one great rotten borough.

9.45 pm

**Mr. McDonnell:** That is why I have appealed to the Disraeli wing of the Conservative party, which formed a radical, reforming Government who addressed some of the abuses of power of previous Governments.

In appealing to Conservative Members to support the amendments, I draw their attention to the congruity between the intent and content of the amendments and the policies set out in their party's manifesto at the last election. In particular, I draw their attention to the statement that strongly supports my compromise amendments, which reads:

"Radical changes that alter the whole character of our constitutional balance could unravel what generations of our predecessors have created. To preserve that stability in future—and the freedoms and rights of our citizens—we need to continue a process of evolution, not revolution.

Conservatives embrace evolutionary change that solves real problems and improves the way our constitution works."

On that basis, I argue for support from Conservative Members and for them to embrace the evolutionary changes set out in the amendments.

I now seek to persuade my comrades in the Labour party, or colleagues in new Labour, to support my amendments tonight.

**Mr. Dismore:** Does my hon. Friend propose to advance two different arguments or the same argument with two different spins on it?

**Mr. McDonnell:** This is a legitimate attempt to demonstrate that the amendments can straddle the different political philosophies, and the more modern manifesto statements, of the three major parties that are represented in this Chamber.

The Labour party and its members and Government are not impermeable to rational debate, persuasion and conversion.

**Mr. Tony Benn:** I am not sure about that.

**Mr. McDonnell:** Let us not put the issue to the vote. I take the view that the amendments are the direct products of more than two centuries of socialist philosophy and a century of practical and pragmatic Labour party political activity.

**Mr. Corbyn:** My hon. Friend is trying to appeal too widely. I recall some strong debates in the Labour party during the late 1960s and early 1970s about the role of independent, working-class, socialist organisations and the incorporation of those within the state, hence the debate on works councils versus independent trade unions. Does not my hon. Friend think that there is a danger that we are going down the road of incorporation?

**Mr. McDonnell:** There is an argument that stakeholder democracy may be a form of incorporation. My view is that we need to engender support in the House on this day and for these amendments to enable us to legislate effectively. On a philosophical basis, I appeal to all the different political parties, and to the different strands in the Labour party, for support.

The Labour party is a democratic socialist party. I know so not only by my own experience, but because the Prime Minister tells me so in the excellent text that he produced in 1996, "New Britain: My Vision of a Young Country". Indeed, the Prime Minister is a socialist: he told us so in his maiden speech in 1983.

In my right hon. Friend's work, he sets out the analysis on which my amendments are based, and marshals the arguments and the justification for them. They would begin the process of constructing a stakeholder constitution for the City of London.

In his book, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister described stakeholder politics, building on the concept of the late John Smith that we should aim for

"a citizens democracy where people have rights and powers and where they are served by accountable and responsive government."

**Mr. Dismore:** How does my hon. Friend square talk of giving people rights and powers with the amendment, which would give votes to businesses?

**Mr. McDonnell:** Later in my speech, I shall demonstrate that the argument for democratic socialism under this Government is based on stakeholder participation. The compromise in this Bill is the extension of stakeholder participation to businesses in the City of London. We may not like that, but we have the opportunity to legislate on it tonight.

John Smith died before he could embark, in government, on the task of establishing a responsive local democracy. However, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it clear that amendments of the sort under discussion this evening represent the mechanism by which the stakeholder society could be created. He argued that people are disaffected with local government because they feel no sense of ownership and because they have no stake in the political process. My amendments would extend the franchise to employees, and give them a stake in the new structure in the City corporation that may loosely be described as democracy.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister supported my view when he stated:

"If we are to renew our democracy, we must start with local government—the government closest to the people."

My amendments strike at the heart of the renewal of democratic local government. They would make a reality of my right hon. Friend's vision of a stakeholder democracy—if this does not get me a job, nothing will—that involves residents, businesses and employers. All of them would have a stake in the successful operation of the City of London and its corporation.

My amendments would empower the many, and not just the few.

**Mr. Skinner:** My hon. Friend has been at it since 7 o'clock, as near as dammit, and has never yet mentioned the word "class". There are bosses, and there are workers. I know that he wants to get everyone all lovey-dovey and

touchy-feely, but to this day bosses still sack workers. I hope that he will bear that in mind, despite his new-fangled ideas.

**Mr. McDonnell:** There is an opportunity for lateral thinking when we look at the constitution of the City corporation and its powers in the future.

**Mr. Corbyn:** I am getting quite alarmed. As I said earlier, I believe that there is a danger in incorporating just about everything into the new City of London. Would my hon. Friend be prepared to support a later amendment that may be tabled, which would simply put the process on hold? That would mean that all local government in the UK could be adequately consulted on the radical departure that my hon. Friend proposes in local electoral law and in its systems and administration. I realise that the amendments have been designed to fit the general ethos of the Bill, but does not he agree that there is a case for pausing and thinking a little more widely about the matter?

**Mr. McDonnell:** As I am just getting going in my speech, I do not want to debate the contents of other amendments. However, there will be an opportunity to table further amendments, and I should be happy to discuss them then.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) mentioned the conflict that has gone on in the past in the City corporation area, and in capitalism in general. In developing a stakeholder democracy, employees and residents may gather together to widen the powers of the City corporation to intervene in disputes between bosses and workers, as my hon. Friend described, which would effectively enhance the powers of employees.

**Mr. Dismore:** My hon. Friend talks about stakeholder democracy and follows the point of my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) about consultation. The essence of stakeholder democracy is consultation with all relevant parties. My hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. O'Donnell) has described how his amendments evolved, but he has not told us what consultation he has had with employees' representatives, such as trade unions, or with business in the City. He has mentioned the discussions that he has had with the City but not what other consultations he has had.

**Mr. McDonnell:** The problem with this legislation is that because it was not dealt with as a draft under other procedures in Committee, I do not think that the Committee process allowed for adequate consultation. I accept that. It behoves us to take time to consult the various interest groups further, not over these amendments, because I hope to legislate this evening, but possibly on the first review of the new structure that will be in place three years after the introduction of this legislation.

**Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): I have been listening with interest to the hon. Gentleman. Was his amendment inspired by a reading of "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist"?

**Mr. McDonnell:** Later in my speech we may be able to deal with the exploitative relationship between workers and their employers, using the example of "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist" and the workers in the decorating industry. I am trying to avoid class conflict in the amendment and build a stakeholder consensus for the first time.

**Mr. Brooke** *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now proposed.

*Question put,* That the Question be now proposed:—

*The House divided:* Ayes 91, Noes 34.

**Division No. 203]** **[9.56 pm**

**AYES**

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hawkins, Nick
Hill, Keith
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Opik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Randall, John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Timms, Stephen
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

**Tellers for the Ayes:**
**Mrs. Jacqui Lait and**
**Mr. Peter Bottomley.**

**NOES**

Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cousins, Jim
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Donohoe, Brian H
Golding, Mrs Llin
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jenkins, Brian
Kilfoyle, Peter
McDonnell, John
Mackinlay, Andrew

| | |
|---|---|
| Mahon, Mrs Alice | Skinner, Dennis |
| Mallaber, Judy | Taylor, David *(NW Leics)* |
| Marshall-Andrews, Robert | Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)* |
| Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)* | Vis, Dr Rudi |
| Pickthall, Colin | Wareing, Robert N |
| Pike, Peter L | Watts, David |
| Pound, Stephen | |
| Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)* | **Tellers for the Noes:** |
| Quinn, Lawrie | **Mr. Jeremy Corbyn and** |
| Sarwar, Mohammad | **Mr. Andrew Dismore.** |

*It appearing on the report of the Division that fewer than 100 Members voted in the majority,* MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *declared that the Question had not been decided in the affirmative.*

*It being after Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.*

*Debate to be resumed on Thursday 10 May.*

## PETITION

## Health Workers (Dorset)

10.9 pm

**Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): I wish to present a petition from thousands of health workers in Dorset which is also supported by the Dorset Healthcare NHS trust and all my parliamentary colleagues in Dorset. The petitioners complain that when they were part of the Wessex health authority they were eligible for a cost of living supplement, which they enjoyed with their colleagues from Wiltshire and Hampshire, whereas now, as a result of changes made by the Government, although nurses and health workers in Wiltshire and Hampshire remain eligible for a cost of living supplement, it has been taken away from those in Dorset. It is no exaggeration to say that Dorset health workers and their supporters are extremely angry about that and want the Government to think again.

The petition states:

This is absolutely unacceptable having regard to the cost of living in Dorset and will result in an exacerbation of the shortfall of nurses both in the community and hospitals in Dorset.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House shall urge the Government to include Dorset within those areas eligible for the cost of living supplement for National Health Service employees.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

*To lie upon the Table.*

## School closures (Coventry)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

10.11 pm

**Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): I want to draw the attention of the House and the Minister to the proposed amalgamation and closure of schools in Coventry. I shall touch on the consultation that has been carried out; on the formula that has been applied; on the location of some of the schools; and on the questions whether there is an independent adjudication process, whether any new formulas have been proposed by the Government and who makes the final decision. Those issues arise not only in my constituency but in other parts of Coventry.

I asked for the debate because I am concerned about the closure and amalgamation of schools in my constituency. The areas where those closures are to take place have in the past had high unemployment—for example, Hillfields, Willenhall and parts of Westwood. Much has been done in those areas, but the momentum should be kept up because there is a still a need for jobs and training, particularly for young people who for many years were unable to get a job. I readily acknowledge that the Government are trying to do something about that.

It may help the Minister in her reply to the debate if I tell her the name of some of the schools concerned. In Hillfields, the two schools to be amalgamated are St. Mary's and St. Benedict's, with the new school on the St. Benedict's site. In Willenhall, Corpus Christi and St. Anne's are to be amalgamated on the Corpus Christi site. In Westwood, the schools affected are Alderman Harris and Sir Henry Parks. Those schools will close and a new one will be built on a new site. There is a new proposal for Howes Lane school in the Cheylesmore area of Coventry, and there are plans for an additional community centre and structural changes to the school.

I readily acknowledge that a lot of work has been done by the local authority to improve the quality of life and the environment in those areas. In some instances, the Government have also provided assistance, which I may touch on later. However, there is certainly still a need for community facilities in those areas. More health care facilities, environmental improvements and, as I mentioned earlier, more employment opportunities are needed. May I pay tribute to the tremendous work of the residents' associations, which have done a professional job in responding to the local authority's consultation document? At public meetings that I have attended, they gave a professional response and used graphs, charts and other methods to outline their case. Most people who attended those meetings were very taken with those efforts.

At the same time, one must acknowledge that Coventry city council has helpfully made available grants and, as I said earlier, there has been Government support, for in the last year or two, a new shopping area has opened in Hillfields, the funding for which was provided by the Government and the city council. In addition, new houses have been built which have been badly needed in that area for some time. Residents' groups have made major efforts to combat problems such as crime. Another environmental improvement in the offing is the relocation of Coventry

City football ground. There are all sorts of traffic problems and lots of congestion in the Hillfields area on a Saturday. Members whose constituencies include a football ground in a densely populated area know exactly what I am talking about. The new football ground will be located in the old gasworks site in Foleshill—not in my constituency—which has lain derelict for about 30 years. So there is improvement not just in my constituency, but in constituencies outside my area.

As I said earlier, the consultation was carried out by the Department for Education and Employment and has now been completed. Parents' groups have produced their own alternatives to the city council's proposals because they feel that the present base formula sometimes works against them. They think that there is a case not only for the retention of the schools, but of other amenities such as playing fields, libraries and nurseries at some of those schools. Parents feel that the present formula needs to be more flexible. The assessment management consultation document is still out to consultation. Will my hon. Friend the Minister say what progress has been made on it and what responses she has had? Once the consultation is over, does she have a date in mind when its findings will be implemented? Lots of people would be interested in that.

Some ideas have been incorporated in public thinking concerning experiments in primary education in the United States of America, in which infant classes were reduced to 18 to 20 pupils. I do not know whether my hon. Friend has seen that research, but I should be interested to hear her comments. When my hon. Friend responds to the debate, will she say whether there is an independent appeal body that can settle any disputes, either between the education authority and the parents or between the governors and the authorities? Many people would like to know the answer to that. Many parents think that schools like St. Anne's and St. Mary's could be retained on a part-teaching basis, in which the premises are shared with, for example, community facilities. That would enable those schools to respond not only to teaching and educational needs, but to other community needs.

In conclusion, will my hon. Friend enter into a fact-finding discussion with the local education authority, to try to save some of the schools? Will she say whether she is satisfied with the present formula? Will she ensure that serious consideration is given by the authority to the parents' views and to the documentation produced by parents to support alternative proposals?

10.20 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Jacqui Smith):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) on gaining the opportunity for this debate. I know from previous conversations with him that he feels strongly about the matter and has already made representations to Ministers, as have his fellow Coventry Members. I am glad to have the opportunity to respond to some of the points that my hon. Friend made, and to emphasise the fact that the Government's approach to the organisation and funding of school places puts quality and raising standards at the heart of all our policies to support schools, teachers and pupils.

As well as dealing with teaching and learning, those policies focus on a quality learning environment suited to the needs of the 21st century. That is why the Government are investing more than £8.5 billion in school buildings over the next three years. The investment for this year is three times the amount in the last year of the former Government, in addition to more than £5 billion invested over the four years since 1997. Like my hon. Friend, we are committed to raising standards of education for all our children. In Coventry, as elsewhere, we are taking action to drive up standards and ensure that school buildings are fit for children to learn in and teachers to teach in. I know that my hon. Friend is concerned about that.

My hon. Friend mentioned the importance of class sizes. Since 1997, we have taken action to reduce the numbers of infant pupils educated in classes of more than 30. In Coventry, that means that in January this year only 63 infants—that is, 0.6 per cent.—were in classes of more than 30. That is 3,157 fewer children than in January 1997, when 30 per cent. of Coventry's infant pupils were in large classes. Capital funding of nearly £300,000 has been provided by the Department for six new classrooms to help to achieve smaller class sizes in Coventry.

That is part of the unprecedented national level of investment in school buildings, of which Coventry has received total capital allocations of £31.275 million over the four years since 1997-98, with a further £5.6 million for 2001-02. I know that my hon. Friend is aware of examples in his constituency of our commitment to improving school buildings with projects allocated funding under the new deal for schools. That has brought about improvements at Bagington Fields school, Bishop Ullathorne Roman Catholic school and St. Thomas More Roman Catholic primary school, the refurbishment of design and technology accommodation at Ernesford Grange school and community college, and improvements to science accommodation at Bishop Ullathorne and Ernesford Grange schools. That shows the Government's commitment to high quality accommodation for our children's learning.

The main issue of this debate is local concern about the reorganisation. The school organisation plan published last October by the Coventry local education authority identified the need to reduce the number of school places in its primary schools because of actual and projected overcapacity. The need to rationalise school places was endorsed by Ofsted and the Audit Commission in their report on the authority last autumn.

We believe that resources that are locked into maintaining surplus places in schools can and should be freed up wherever possible and directed towards improving standards. What we want, as my hon. Friend emphasised, is high-quality education provided in the most cost-effective way. The resources released when surplus places are removed can and should be spent on priority areas such as books and teachers.

As my hon. Friend is aware, the authority has conducted a review of primary provision with a view to reducing surplus places by some 2,900 by January 2004, while leaving sufficient flexibility to allow for parental preference. It has drawn up proposals to reduce the size of some schools and amalgamate others for initial consultation locally. We understand that the authority will be considering the outcome of that consultation shortly and will decide what actions it wishes to propose in the light of that.

My hon. Friend rightly raised the important issue of the process by which such decisions are made, and the opportunities for his constituents to contribute to and raise

*[Jacqui Smith]*

understandable concerns about the process, so it would be helpful if I outlined that process, and the role of the various bodies involved in deciding statutory proposals.

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 introduced a new framework for local decision making in school place planning. Local education authorities must prepare a school organisation plan covering a five-year rolling period. That plan is subject to consultation locally and has to be approved by the local school organisation committee.

The Secretary of State is no longer responsible for deciding proposals to reorganise school provision. That role was devolved to the local level from September 1999. Decisions are now rightly taken at the local level, by local people with a far greater knowledge of the priorities, needs, concerns and character of the local area. The system is designed to involve all stakeholders and to ensure that any decision on proposals is taken in the light of a full consideration of relevant factors.

It is important that a full and informed discussion of any changes take place prior to the publication of proposals. I was encouraged to hear what my hon. Friend said about the active involvement that there has already been in consultation. It is because of that that the Secretary of State has required in, for example, sections 28 and 29 of the School Standards and Framework Act, that a full consultation process be undertaken prior to proposals being published. Further to that he has published, in circular 9/99, statutory guidance which specifies who should be consulted and the scope of such consultation.

I hope that my hon. Friend will be reassured to hear that his constituents and other interested parties will have an opportunity at that stage, and also during the objection period which follows publication of proposals—if it is decided to go ahead with the reorganisation after consultation—to make their views known and be fully involved in the process.

All proposals which attract objections are considered by the local school organisation committee. In reaching its decision, the committee must have regard to a number of factors, including the content and outcomes of any consultation and the level and content of statutory objections. However, the committee is also required to consider issues such as standards of provision, the sufficiency of provision and the balance of denominational and non-denominational provision.

The school organisation committee is independent of the LEA. It is made up of a number of groups consisting of local schools, the LEA, the diocese, and further education. A decision can be taken on proposals only if the committee reaches that decision unanimously. If that is not the case, the decision passes to an independent schools adjudicator for a decision. I hope that my hon. Friend is reassured about the independence of the decision-making process.

My hon. Friend also referred to concerns that have been raised locally about the way in which surplus school places are quantified. I understand that that relates to the primary reorganisation scheme proposed by Coventry city council and, in particular, to the sufficiency of the space requirement per pupil to meet the needs of those pupils' education.

Whether there is sufficient space at a school can be assessed through the following means. The Department issues area guidelines for schools, which are laid out in "Building Bulletin 82". The guidelines set out defined ranges of total area per pupil and give guidance on the range of areas of individual spaces inside the school. They recognise that a primary school does not consist solely of classrooms for teaching, but will include other spaces such as the hall, library and practical areas. I understand that Coventry city council has indicated that it aims to provide towards the maximum end of the Department's recommended range, which is set out in the area guidelines. For example, that will be nearer 2.1 sq m per pupil in a classroom under any reorganised provision.

As my hon. Friend said, the Department keeps those guidelines under review. We are currently reviewing the area guidelines in the light of the demands of the current and future curriculum, information and communications technology, inclusion and community use, and will consult widely later this year. I am sure that Coventry city council will want to avail itself of the latest thinking about that.

In addition, all schools are currently assessed in accordance with a measure of capacity called more open enrolment—or MOE—which takes into account the number of rooms that are suitable for use as classroom accommodation. However, once again, the hall, library and other accommodation that is not used as a base for teaching groups is not counted in the method of calculation for primary schools, as that method derives the total number of pupils that can be accommodated from the number of teaching class bases. In the current MOE method, an area in a classroom of 1.8 sq m per pupil is taken as minimum provision to accommodate up to 30 pupils. If a classroom in a modern school was built to provide 2.1 sq m or more per pupil, that would not affect the overall assessment of capacity.

That does not, of course, mean that spaces such as libraries and areas for information and communications technology and special needs cannot be provided by Coventry LEA. Quite the opposite: I understand that Coventry is aiming in its reorganisation and remodelling of schools to provide accommodation and facilities that are appropriate to the numbers that it expects to see in its schools and that the authority has indicated that the brief for any new schools arising out of the current round of consultations will be reviewed to ensure the best possible design to meet the current and future needs of children in schools.

As my hon. Friend mentioned, the Department has recently issued guidance on asset management plans in relation to the sufficiency of school buildings. The guidance gives details of a new measure of overall capacity within a school and provides examples of how that will apply to both primary and secondary schools in future. The intention is for the new capacity measure to improve existing methods of assessing capacity and to replace the more open enrolment measure to which I referred. We think that that will be a fairer and more precise measure that will take account of both teaching classrooms and necessary support spaces. The new measure is being introduced following consultations in which the majority of respondents agreed that there should be a single, revised assessment of capacity that takes into account all the usable areas within the school,

and also makes realistic allowances for special educational needs, information and communications technology and community use.

My hon. Friend rightly emphasised the importance of school buildings to the community. In rationalising accommodation, the authority could consider alternatives to disposal or demolition. For example, a local education authority might propose to transfer accommodation to other educational or non-educational uses, in line with other local and national priorities such as adult education and lifelong learning, or to another local authority service. In doing that, the authority needs to examine the benefits of alternative use, and whether it is value for money, as well as the way in which its costs will continue to be met in future. I share my hon. Friend's view that it is important for authorities to maximise their use of buildings and devise imaginative proposals.

I hope that my hon. Friend is reassured that his constituents will be fully involved in decisions about any changes that Coventry local education authority proposes, and that Government investment and policies are aimed at ensuring quality learning environments for all the children in his constituency.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes to Eleven o'clock.*

# House of Commons

*Thursday 3 May 2001*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

# Oral Answers to Questions

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

### Marks and Spencer

1. **Helen Jones** (Warrington, North): What support he is providing for those facing redundancy as a result of the planned closure of Marks and Spencer Direct. [159055]

**The Minister for Competitiveness (Mr. Alan Johnson):** The North West development agency has met the local management team at Marks and Spencer in Warrington and discussed possible assistance, including access to the rapid response fund. Other partners, including the Employment Service, the Cheshire and Warrington local skills council and Warrington borough council are also ready to provide support and guidance to the staff affected.

**Helen Jones:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that reply and for the support that we have had from his Department so far. Will he use his best endeavours to ensure that Marks and Spencer works in close liaison with the economic development department of the local council, which is doing its best to find jobs for those who will lose their current posts? Will he also tell me what funds will be available for retraining for those who need it?

**Mr. Johnson:** I can assure my hon. Friend that all the agencies will work together to ensure that we mitigate the effects of this announcement. Incidentally, Invest UK has sent details of the Marks and Spencer facilities at Warrington to its key overseas posts, which are making contact with the relevant companies in their regions that might be interested in acquiring the site. It has also achieved agreement from Marks and Spencer that all the facilities in the surrounding outlets, including the distribution centre at Warrington, will be made available. We particularly want to ensure that the call centre is taken over as a going concern, including the facility of financial assistance. My hon. Friend has represented her constituents assiduously in this case and we will do all that we can to work with her to find a satisfactory conclusion.

**Mr. David Tredinnick** (Bosworth): Is the Minister aware that closures at Marks and Spencer always have a devastating effect in my constituency, particularly in Hinckley? Will he reflect on the fact that, after four years of Labour Government, there has been an endless list of closures of firms in the hosiery and knitwear industries in my constituency, including Pex, Brookside Dyers, Smallshaw group, Stannards and Capital Leisure? There is a perception that the Government have done absolutely nothing for manufacturing in the midlands and especially in my constituency.

**Mr. Johnson:** I am aware of the job losses in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. The textiles and clothing industry has been going through a hard time. What we have done, in co-operation with the industry and its work force, is to set up the national strategy for the UK textiles and clothing industry, which includes a whole series of initiatives supported by the industry, to improve its competitiveness. We will continue that work to ensure that the kind of losses suffered by the hon. Gentleman's constituents are mitigated and that there will be a turnaround in the industry.

### Steel Industry

2. **Mr. Denis MacShane** (Rotherham): If he will make a statement on the future of the UK steel industry. [159059]

**The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Stephen Byers):** This morning, Corus has announced that it intends to proceed with the redundancies that it first outlined on 1 February. I know that many Members will understand and share the bitterness felt by Corus workers at this decision. Our priority now must be to offer practical support to the individuals affected and to put in place measures to promote economic regeneration and job creation.

For the individual steelworker, we will provide training opportunities and support from the Employment Service. In addition, to assist those individuals we will introduce a modernised form of the previous iron and steel employees re-adaptation benefits scheme—ISERBS. We shall do this under article 56 of the European Coal and Steel Community treaty. Under our proposed scheme, we will draw down European Community funds, which are available only until July 2002, so that each worker will receive an additional lump sum of about £2,500. That will complement the support for training that we are also making available and the employment credit for the over-50s.

The revised ISERBS scheme will cover not only those steelworkers affected by the announcement of 1 February, but all those made redundant from January 2000. About 12,000 steelworkers will benefit. In England, we shall put in place a package of regeneration measures at a cost of £48 million. A programme on a similar scale is being announced by the First Minister in Wales.

When Corus first announced these redundancies, we said that we would not walk away from the workers affected, their families or the communities in which they live. With a programme of action to bring hope to individuals and economic regeneration and job creation to those areas involved, today we are delivering on that commitment.

**Mr. MacShane:** Steelworkers will be sad that Corus has broken off its talks with the trade unions, turned away

from the path of partnership and put 6,000 men on the dole. It has done so in a context in which the steel industry has inherited politics that have been hostile to manufacturing for 20 years. In the 1990s, Britain was the only country in which steel consumption went down, while it went up in America and Europe.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman feels strongly about people losing their jobs, but he must ask a question so that the Minister can reply to it.

**Mr. MacShane:** Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning Corus, and will he ensure that the ISERBS money that I first suggested, I think, last year is brought quickly into play? Will he also leave on his desk, for either himself or his successor, some new thinking on how manufacturing can be supported after the election? While he and the Prime Minister are committed, the attitude in Whitehall and the City remains hostile. We need a new deal and a new manufacturing policy.

**Mr. Byers:** I will leave a memo for myself on my return to the Department. It will make it clear that manufacturing must be regarded as a priority for any country that wants a stable economy in the future.

My hon. Friend made two specific points about the modernised ISERBS. We will deliver it as quickly as we can. It is subject to approval from the European Community, but we have notified the Community of our intention to introduce a scheme, and we expect approval to be given very soon.

As for the actions of Corus, we hoped that the company was genuine when it said that it wanted to discuss with the unions proposals for restructuring to find an alternative way forward. It is a matter of deep regret, to say the least, that when the unions presented their alternative proposals on a plant-by-plant basis, they were rejected out of hand by Corus. I think that when the management of Corus reflect on their actions in this whole saga, they will realise that the trade unions were right and Corus was wrong.

**Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): The Secretary of State will know that Corus is maintaining its operations in other parts of the world. Since its decision, Motorola has also had to make a decision about whether to close plants in Britain or in Germany. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that a director of Motorola has reminded me that, during his stewardship of the Department of Trade and Industry—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I cannot allow a question on Motorola; the hon. Gentleman must ask a question about the steel industry.

**Mr. Fabricant** *rose—*

**Mr. Speaker:** Is the hon. Gentleman going to ask about steel?

**Mr. Fabricant:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

I was reminded that, during the right hon. Gentleman's stewardship, the United Kingdom's competitiveness has fallen from fourth place to 10th. Would that not have affected Corus's decision on whether to stay open in the United Kingdom, just as it affected Motorola's decision? Why is Corus closing in the United Kingdom, and not in Germany and the United States?

**Mr. Byers:** If the hon. Gentleman looks at figures showing the way in which manufacturing employment has declined in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Japan and the United States—all the major industrialised countries—he will see that the percentage fall has been broadly the same in all those countries.

What the hon. Gentleman failed to mention was that this morning Ernst and Young is publishing its latest figures on inward investment in Europe. It has said very clearly that the United Kingdom is the number one location for such investment.

**Mr. Llew Smith** (Blaenau Gwent): I welcome the package negotiated by the Government, particularly the additional money for Ebbw Vale and the additional £2,500 for each worker who has been made redundant. Does my right hon. Friend accept, however, that no package deal can compensate for the loss of more than 1,000 jobs in Blaenau Gwent, one of the poorest areas in the United Kingdom? Does he also accept that since Corus was formed, instead of concentrating their energies on building up the steel industry, Moffat and his fellow directors have done nothing but asset-strip the industry and line their own pockets? Does he agree that the honourable thing for Moffat and his directors to do now is resign?

**Mr. Byers:** There is no doubt that today's confirmation by Corus of its decision will be a bitter blow for Blaenau Gwent, and for communities in that part of south Wales. The First Minister is making a statement in the Welsh Assembly today, outlining a package of some £32 million to help Ebbw Vale and Llanwern overcome the difficulties that they will face.

My hon. Friend is right to point out that although there will be a measure of regeneration and job creation, that will not help individuals who face the prospect of losing their employment now. They need to know that they have a Government working alongside them, alongside their unions and alongside their community to find a better way forward, and that is what the package seeks to achieve.

As I said at the outset, the bitterness and anger felt by Corus workers will be shared by many Members of Parliament. What we must now do is work through this difficult period, and offer individuals, their families and communities, in Blaenau Gwent and elsewhere in Wales and England, some real hope for the future.

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Given the evidence that the Welsh Affairs Committee heard yesterday from the joint chair and chief executive of Corus that the Government have been on notice of huge redundancies since the beginning of last June and that he has met the right hon. Gentleman several times, why has no rescue package whatever been offered to the company until now?

**Mr. Byers:** I think that the hon. Gentleman is aware, because he has followed the discussion, that a package was offered to Corus, but was turned down. Sir Brian Moffat indicated very clearly that the measures that we

were prepared to put in place were not significant in terms of the overall problem that he faced, but a package was there. We have had this discussion in the House before. Corus was simply not interested in the package.

I have noted what Sir Brian Moffat said before the Welsh Affairs Committee yesterday, but I reinforce the point that I have made to the House on previous occasions—we were ready and willing to come forward with a package, but Corus was simply not interested.

**Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): Is not it contemptible that this amoral international company played off one group of workers in this country against groups of workers elsewhere? Newport will suffer severely from Corus's decision, but it is a resilient town that will start to fight back now.

Although we are grateful for the resurrection of ISERBS, will the Secretary of State and the Government look at the proposal by Newport borough council to introduce a regeneration company, which will act positively to rebuild the economy of Newport—which still remains, even after Corus's decision, the most attractive place in Wales for new business investment?

**Mr. Byers:** My hon. Friend is right. Great strengths exist in Newport which will see it through the difficulties that it will face over the coming weeks and months. He makes an important point about the valuable role that an urban regeneration company can play. In his announcement in Cardiff this morning, the First Minister will outline that that is very much one of the options that he wants to pursue with the local partners in Newport and in that part of south Wales.

**Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory** (Wells): The Secretary of State is now trying to clear up the mess in the steel industry of his own making and as usual he blames everyone but himself. It is the Government who have been in charge of economic policy for the past four years. Will he confirm that, this week, he received a letter from seven manufacturing trade associations describing what they call a downward spiral in their industries, and demanding the withdrawal of what they term the damaging and unfair climate change levy and a halt to the 10 business regulations a day that the Government have imposed on them over the past four years? Will he also confirm that, according to the Government's own figures, the productivity gap in the steel industry and in other British industries has widened since 1997? Before he denies that, it comes from his Department's expenditure report published two months ago.

In the face of the mounting job losses and all the complaints from the people at the front line of British industry, will the Secretary of State at last start to listen to what manufacturing is telling him and start to stand up for British industry against the demands of the Treasury, or is he content for manufacturing to be the sector that Labour forgot?

**Mr. Byers:** Because it suits the right hon. Gentleman's purpose, he does not mention the fact that large sections of manufacturing are desperate for this country to join the single European currency. He does not mention that because it does not fit in with his political agenda. He wants to make a broader political point, so he ignores the situation in steel. He mentioned productivity. He needs to be aware that the 6,000 people who have today been made redundant by Corus are some of the most productive steel workers in the world—that is the reality of the situation.

Steel productivity has improved dramatically in recent years. Decent, hard-working people have been affected by today's decision. As the main question is on steel, the right hon. Gentleman should consider the steel productivity figures. If he addressed that issue, he would realise that those people are productive workers who have dramatically improved their productivity.

Steelworkers across the country, whether in south Wales or in Teesside, know what happened to their industry under years of Tory rule—they were slaughtered by the Tories, and nothing was done to help them. They were the innocent victims. The Government of whom the right hon. Gentleman was a member walked away from what they did, but we will not do that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I say to the Minister and to Opposition Front Benchers that I want shorter questions and shorter replies.

## Regional Investment

3. **Ms Rosie Winterton** (Doncaster, Central): If he will make a statement on his strategy for promoting inward investment in the English regions. [159060]

**The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Caborn):** Invest UK is the Government agency that promotes the whole of the United Kingdom as the best inward investment location in Europe, and it works in partnership with the United Kingdom's development agencies.

As my right hon. Friend said, Ernst and Young's "Investment Monitor" was issued today and shows very clearly that the UK's number of inward investment projects has increased by 13 per cent. on last year. The UK enjoys investment rate growth that is more than twice that of Europe, and we are Europe's favourite investment location. Our market share has also gone up by 2 per cent., so that we now receive 26 per cent. of all investment into Europe.

**Ms Winterton:** Almost 6,000 jobs in Yorkshire and Humberside have been created as a consequence of inward investment secured by Yorkshire Forward. However, if our region is to be at the leading edge of the knowledge economy, we will have to increase the amount of high-quality inward investment in research and development. When my right hon. Friend next meets Yorkshire Forward, will he discuss with it what can be done across Government to increase such investment and to help restructure our industrial base in the region, particularly in the light of today's announcement by Corus?

**Mr. Caborn:** My hon. Friend asks a very pertinent question. Regional development agencies, particularly the one that operates in my hon. Friend's constituency in Yorkshire, have been established in the north-west and the north-east to organise inward investment from north America to what they call the greater north of England. Additionally, in our White Paper a few months ago we considered the matter of clusters. We are now rewriting

the cluster policy as an inward investment prospectus for all those who want to invest internationally in our knowledge economy. I think that that will keep us at the leading edge of technology and ensure that we continue to move manufacturing up the value-added chain.

**Mr. Tony Baldry** (Banbury): What real help is the Department of Trade and Industry giving to businesses that have already invested in the regions, but recently found their business decimated by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease? After examining the small print of the help that the Government are offering, many businesses see very little, if any, real help being offered. It is another example of all spin and no substance.

**Mr. Caborn:** There is to be a statement on foot and mouth later today—

**Mr. Baldry:** What about the Department of Trade and Industry?

**Mr. Caborn:** The regional development agencies in the four worst-hit regions have had an additional £15 million on top of the £8 million available in their own budgets. I know that they have been working very hard. Furthermore, my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce and my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment have been working with the regional development agencies to ensure that they mitigate the worst circumstances being experienced in those regions by the businesses to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

## Wind Energy

4. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What support he will give to the development of offshore wind energy generation. [159061]

**The Minister for Energy and Competitiveness in Europe (Mr. Peter Hain):** Offshore wind will be eligible for the new renewables obligation that we propose to introduce this October. Of the £260 million allocated for renewables support over the next three years, at least £49 million has been allocated specifically for offshore wind, and that sum may well increase.

**Mr. Blizzard:** I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that East Anglia is in an ideal position to develop offshore wind power. SLP Engineering of Lowestoft, a company with a fine track record in fabricating offshore oil and gas platforms, is in the right place to develop, manufacture and erect offshore windmills, and is already building a prototype offshore wind turbine at Britain's most easterly point. Given the downturn in the offshore oil and gas fabrication industry, will he consider the company's eligibility for diversification grant to provide much-needed jobs in Lowestoft, which has been designated an assisted area by his Department?

**Mr. Hain:** By all means, I will consider that. My hon. Friend is absolutely right: SLP Engineering has a fine reputation in offshore gas and oil exploration, drilling and platform construction. We would like the company, and the industry around my hon. Friend's constituency, to diversify increasingly from oil and gas—although maintaining that where appropriate—and explore the enormous potential for offshore wind development.

We recently announced 18 new projects, right around the coast of England and Wales. The forthcoming renewables obligation will provide £3 billion of investments, and the Government are supporting that with more than £250,000 of research and development project aid grant. We can drive forward the renewables agenda, bringing to it our unique expertise on the UK continental shelf.

**Mr. Nick Gibb** (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): The Minister said in *The Times* yesterday that if Labour was re-elected, he wanted a second Labour term to be more radical and left wing. Would that increased left-wing verve mean even more regulation for energy companies and industry generally? Would it mean even more levies on consumers electricity bills and increased electricity costs for both consumers and industry, as he imposes higher and higher renewables targets? Does he accept that a gloves-off second Labour term would be a disaster for the energy sector and a disaster for British industry?

**Mr. Hain:** I note that the hon. Gentleman has already conceded the general election. The answer to all his questions is no. I remind the House and the public that the Conservatives' record on renewables in 18 years of government was pathetic. We are now driving forward the agenda. More and more green energy will be the future for Britain, and, yes, I do see myself and the Government championing that. The Prime Minister has put his considerable authority behind it, with the announcement of £100 million of new support for renewables.

**Mrs. Betty Williams** (Conwy): My hon. Friend's answer is of great importance to constituencies in the north-west. Is he aware of the major significance for manufacturing in my constituency, where Cambrian Engineering, based on the Llandegai industrial estate in Bangor, is a leading company in wind farm equipment? Does he agree that offshore wind farms can also be tourist attractions and will be a benefit to the coastal strip in north Wales?

**Mr. Hain:** I very much agree. Indeed, I had the privilege of visiting Cambrian Engineering with my hon. Friend before the previous general election. I was very impressed with its desire to increase production so as to rival the Scandinavian producers of wind turbines, and towers in particular, in which the company has especial expertise. We want to harness the enormous potential of offshore and, indeed, onshore wind in Britain, and in my hon. Friend's constituency in particular.

## Consumer Rights

5. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What plans he has for reviewing the rights of consumers after *(a)* bankruptcy and *(b)* insolvency. [159062]

**The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Caborn):** I have no such plans at present.

**Mr. Hughes:** That is not good enough. With that kind of answer, the Minister may not even get re-elected.

I have a constituent on jobseeker's allowance, and another who is a pensioner, who each lost about £1,000 deposit when they paid for some furniture offered for sale by Uno for World of Leather, which went into liquidation in March 2000. They are entirely dissatisfied, as are thousands of consumers, because the companies appear to have known that they were going into insolvency when they did the business. They reformed within two weeks, having been sold on to another company, and reopened as New World of Leather.

If the customers had been able to pay by credit card, they might have been protected. As they were not able to do so—as many poorer people are not—they had no protection. The law needs fundamental change. Can the Minister be much more effective, much less complacent and promise some action from Labour, because otherwise it might have to come from someone else?

**Mr. Caborn:** The hon. Gentleman raises a serious question. Some 21,000 customers of Uno were affected and we immediately asked the administrators to submit a report to the Secretary of State. An interim report was submitted in September 2000 and our insolvency service started working on the question of disqualification. The final report was submitted in April and we shall now consider what action to take on the disqualification of directors. In conjunction with the Office of Fair Trading, we are considering a new code, and a consultation document has been issued. The Government believe that the voluntary code of practice can still play an important role.

As the hon. Gentleman said, those with credit cards have some safeguard when paying a deposit if it is more than £100, and we recommend that people ensure that it is. We are taking action to ensure that rogue traders are rooted out and, if necessary, disqualified. I remind the House that some 2,800 directors have been disqualified in the past two years.

**Mr. Andrew Reed** (Loughborough): It disturbs me to agree with the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), but he and I, like many other hon. Members, have constituents who suffered as a result of the closure of World of Leather. I urge that action be taken for the sake of the consumer and for people such as a constituent of mine who runs a small engineering business. He was recently affected by the closure of Wadkin of Leicester, which left him with a £46,000 debt from that company. My constituent's company may go under as a consequence, yet Wadkin knew full well that it was going under at the time. Much more protection should be given to small businesses and individuals in that situation, and I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to build on the code of conduct and consider further legislation in the next Parliament.

**Mr. Caborn:** As I said, a consultation document has been issued by the Office of Fair Trading, and I agree that we need to try to tighten up the operation of the code. However, we do not want to place an undue burden on business because the customer will have to pay for whatever policing we put in place. We will try to root out unacceptable behaviour through the voluntary code, and we are consulting with all parties to try to toughen the code of conduct.

**Mr. Richard Page** (South-West Hertfordshire): Instead of giving such a weak and spinning answer to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), why does not the Minister apologise for the fact that the Government have broken their promise to introduce a consumer Bill in this Parliament? Why does he not say, "We are very sorry, but we have produced only half an insolvency Bill because we were late sending out the second half of the consultation"? Why does he not apologise for spending £200,000 and more persecuting a poor hapless Sunderland fruit and vegetable trader for the heinous and terrible crime of selling 34p worth of bananas in pounds rather than in kilograms? It takes a man to apologise, and I invite the Minister to be such a man.

**Mr. Caborn:** I think that is from the World of Leather to the world of blather. The hon. Gentleman has excelled himself in probably the last Trade and Industry questions in this Parliament, and I shall treat his remarks with the contempt they deserve.

**Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours** (Workington): The first Bill on which I worked after my election in 1979 was the one that became the Competition Act 1980. We discussed this very issue during our proceedings, and for 20 years since then Back-Bench Members of all parties have pushed successive Governments on the matter. I will not be in the next Parliament, but may I express the hope that the Government will really sort the problem out? It is a major problem, and consumers all over Britain are very angry.

**Mr. Caborn:** First, may I, on behalf of the House, thank my hon. Friend for what he has done at Question Time while he has been a Member of Parliament? He has successfully probed many a Minister standing at the Dispatch Box. I know that my hon. Friend has campaigned for 20 years for consumer protections, and that is to his credit. When the Government are re-elected, I hope that we will take on board the serious comments that he has made over the years, and that we will be able to encapsulate that in the action that we take.

### Manufacturing (Vale of York)

6. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): If he will make a statement on manufacturing industry in the Vale of York. [159063]

**The Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce (Ms Patricia Hewitt):** The Government are supporting manufacturing business in the Vale of York and throughout the Yorkshire and Humber regions. We have allocated an extra £50 million a year over the next three years to regional development agencies. That includes £10 million to Yorkshire Forward to promote innovation and economic development throughout the region.

**Miss McIntosh:** Is not the Minister ashamed that the Government have presided over 350,000 job losses in manufacturing industry across the country? More than 600 such jobs have been lost in the Vale of York.

Samsung closed its plant at Flaxby Moor, and more than 100 jobs were lost. British Aerospace lost its plant at Sutton-on-the-Forest, with a loss of more than 50 jobs. The Monroe shock absorber factory closed last year and 392 jobs were lost, and 76 jobs will be lost when the Lawson Mardon packaging factory closes in June. In addition, 64 jobs are under threat at Range Powermax. Will the Minister confirm that the Government have failed manufacturing in the Vale of York?

**Ms Hewitt:** I am astonished that the hon. Lady made no reference to the 1 million jobs lost in manufacturing industry in the recessions of the 1980s and 1990s. Many of those jobs were in the Vale of York. The Government will take no lectures about manufacturing industry from the hon. Lady or from any other Conservative Member. It is a great pity that the hon. Lady does not recognise the many strengths of manufacturing industry, in her constituency and across the country.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said that productivity in the steel industry has grown, but productivity has grown in manufacturing industry in general at a rate of 6 per cent. a year. There has been an increase in manufacturing output and exports in the past three months, and forecasters generally agree that there will be further growth this year. Unlike the record of the previous Government, that is a record of which we can be proud.

## Chemical Industry

7. **Mr. Derek Twigg** (Halton): What contribution the chemical industry in (a) the UK and (b) the north-west made to GDP in the last year for which figures are available. [159064]

**The Minister for Competitiveness (Mr. Alan Johnson):** In 1997, the chemical industry nationally accounted for 2.2 per cent. of the UK's GDP, with approximately 0.5 per cent. attributable to the north-west.

**Mr. Twigg:** I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he recognise the strategic importance of the Ineos Chlor firm in Runcorn, in my constituency? It is the second biggest chlorine producer in Europe and employs about 2,000 people. Will he do all that he can to ensure that the firm's grant application comes to a successful conclusion soon? The background is that there have been 450 redundancies in my constituency, and that ICI may not have given the firm all the details and information necessary to make investment decisions before it was sold.

Finally, will my hon. Friend do what he can to help the employees and managers at Bush Boake Allen Inc. in my constituency? They are in the middle of a management buy-out at the moment, and redundancies are also possible there.

**Mr. Johnson:** We are in touch with both companies. Ineos is one of the most important chlorine producers in the country. We are in close touch with Ineos and the regional development agency in connection with future support for the company. As we speak, we are discussing a regional selective assistance application for the plant.

We are also in close contact with the other company mentioned by my hon. Friend. The chemicals industry is very important to the country, and in fact is the largest manufacturing sector. It is especially important to the north-west. Last year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State launched the north-west chemicals initiative. We intend to ensure that the sector and the region get the fullest support from the Government.

**Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Minister will know that the Government's new energy tax will hit manufacturing and chemical industries in the north and the midlands especially hard. It will not hit service industries in the south so hard. What calculations has he made of the net outflow of tax revenue from the north and the midlands that will occur because of the introduction of the climate change levy?

**Mr. Johnson:** The DTI has negotiated successfully with the chemicals industry the levy discount scheme of up to 80 per cent., which the industry has greatly welcomed. The plant that has just been mentioned—Ineos—pays no climate change levy. It is exempted because it is part of the electrolysis process, which is very important.

**Mr. Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton): E-business.

**Mr. Johnson:** Yes, but I think the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) is exaggerating the effect of a very important process in ensuring that we keep to the Kyoto commitments, which I believe all parties should fully support.

**Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Given the importance of the sector to the north-west, and the fact that, as it is a higher paid industry with lots of housing associated with former workers close by, pockets of deprivation have inevitably been created close to the industry, will my hon. Friend enter into discussions with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the industry to see what positive measures can be put in place to help to regenerate employment in areas close to the sector?

**Mr. Johnson:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. The chemicals industry is so important to the north-west because of the points that he makes. The RDA has made the chemicals industry a priority for that region. However, it is important to emphasise that the growth in chemicals has consistently outpaced the growth in the economy overall. Indeed, the growth in the chemicals sector last year was double that of manufacturing in general. The industry has a good future, but we must ensure, as my hon. Friend says, that we deal with some of the problems that we inherited from the past.

## Chester Street Holdings

8. **Mr. Alan Campbell** (Tynemouth): What plans he has to institute a DTI inspector's inquiry into the events leading up to the collapse of Chester Street Holdings. [159066]

**The Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce (Ms Patricia Hewitt):** I share my hon. Friend's concern about the collapse of Chester Street Holdings and the dreadful situation of thousands of men who are suffering from asbestos-related diseases and whose employers' insurance policies were held by that firm. We are working across Government to resolve this very complex situation as quickly as possible to help the sufferers and their families.

**Mr. Campbell:** I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Is she aware of the great sense of anger on Tyneside at the way in which asbestos victims are being denied proper compensation while directors of the company, such as Mr. Robert Hardy, are lining their pockets with huge wage rises and bonuses? What assurances can my hon. Friend give that all asbestos victims will receive proper compensation, and that lessons will be learned from this, not just for workers in other industries, but for the insurance industry as a whole?

**Ms Hewitt:** I am indeed aware of the anger and despair felt by the victims and their families. Let me make it clear that we will not allow the insurance industry to walk away from Chester Street Holdings or from the people who thought that their employers had effective insurance cover with that company. As my hon. Friend is aware, the Policyholders Protection Board will protect individuals whose employer no longer exists and whose insurance policy was compulsory. We are working with the insurance industry, as my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary has made clear, to deal with the position of employees whose employer no longer exists but whose insurance cover was not compulsory. Between us, we will ensure that lessons are learned and that matters are put right, not only for these individuals but for the future.

**Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory** (Wells): The collapse of Chester Street Holdings needs investigating. However, does the hon. Lady agree that it is no use having a report unless it is published? So before she launches a new DTI inquiry, will she reveal the information that her Department already holds on the connection between the late Robert Maxwell, the business dealings of the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson), and the funding of the Labour party? Will she confirm that that report was carried out two years ago by her Department, but it remains a cover-up because it had not been—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The question is narrower than the point that the right hon. Gentleman raises. Any right hon. or hon. Member who is attacked in any way should be given notice of that, and I hope that the right hon. Gentleman has given such notice. However, the original question was far narrower than the area that he is going into.

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** I am not attacking the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West—I am simply pointing out the subject of a report that is held by the DTI and which is not being published, in defiance of all the principles of openness and good government. Will the Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce publish that report?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. What the Minister will do is reply on Chester Street Holdings. If the right hon. Gentleman has nothing to say about Chester Street Holdings, the Minister will have nothing to say, either.

**Ms Hewitt:** I think that the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) has made clear his complete lack of interest in the victims of the collapse of Chester Street. It was the Labour Government who, in 1999, banned the importing, the sale and the use of all forms of asbestos. In relation to Chester Street, we are seeing—in those victims—the effect of years of neglect of asbestos problems by previous Governments.

On the other matter raised by the right hon. Gentleman, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has made the legal position clear. The right hon. Member for Wells does not seem interested in facts of law on that case.

## Euro

9. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What the implications are for businesses of replacing the pound by the single European currency. [159069]

**The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Stephen Byers):** Provided the five economic tests laid down by the Chancellor are met, and the Government, Parliament and the British people agree to join, we believe that there would be benefits for British business in membership of the single European currency, particularly in respect of trade, transparency of costs and currency stability.

**Dr. Lewis:** I congratulate the Secretary of State on reading out his mantra so fluently. If there are those benefits, how can he explain the discrepancy that, whereas British public opinion is against joining the single currency and scrapping the pound to the tune of two thirds of the entire population, British businesses are against joining the single currency and scrapping the pound to the tune of three quarters of British businesses? What do British businesses know that make them so much more opposed to new Labour's policy of scrapping the pound than even the vast majority of the electorate at large?

**Mr. Byers:** I do not know the source for the hon. Gentleman's view that three quarters of British businesses are opposed, but certainly the CBI and British Chambers of Commerce—*[Laughter.]* It is an interesting change in the political landscape when a mention of the CBI has Tory Members groaning. What a change we have seen! The reality is that the CBI knows that the Government's policy on the single currency is the right one—for the simple reason that we are putting the national interest first, not the interest of party. The issue divides the Conservative party from top to bottom—that is the reality. The Conservatives have therefore cobbled together a

policy that really does not stand up to the tests. The Government's policy is clear. Our view is: why not simply let the British people decide?

**Ms Sally Keeble** (Northampton, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the particular pressures of our being outside the single currency for foreign companies making investment decisions in the UK? He is aware that the US-owned company British Timkin has closed in Northampton, with the loss of 950 jobs. People in Northampton appreciated the prompt response of the Government in setting up a taskforce. I wonder if my right hon. Friend could—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may laugh, but people in Northampton appreciated that response, which was in marked contrast to anything done about job losses by the Conservative Government.

Will my right hon. Friend give two assurances? First, while trying to attract inward investment, will there be a focus on bringing high quality engineering and manufacturing jobs to Northampton to replace those that were lost? Secondly, will my right hon. Friend say what the Government intend—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I think that the Minister has enough to go on with.

**Mr. Byers:** My hon. Friend is right to say that there are major international companies, such as British Timkin, that have taken decisions in relation to the weakness of the euro vis-à-vis the strength of sterling, and that, clearly, was one of the reasons behind the decision that British Timkin took. The Government will not walk away from the difficulties created by that decision, but will work with local people, local Members of Parliament and local businesses to see Northampton through those difficulties.

My hon. Friend is also right to say that there are major inward investors who have made it very clear that, if the Government had ruled out joining the single European currency for a fixed period, inward investment decisions would not have been made in favour of the United Kingdom. The head of Nissan, Carlo Ghosn, said very clearly when he announced the investment in Sunderland that it would not have been made if we had had a policy of refusing to join the single European currency during the next Parliament—and Conservative Members and those on their Front Bench need to answer those questions. What about the effects on inward investment?

**Mr. Alan Duncan** (Rutland and Melton): If we were to join the euro, we would have not just a single currency, but a single interest rate, so the only variables left to take the strain of economic management would be taxation, transfer payments, wages and prices. Big companies could spread their activities across national boundaries, but smaller, United Kingdom-based companies would not be able to do so. For them, there would be the pain of the exchange rate mechanism all over again, with the European Union controlling taxes and grants and with domestic wages and prices taking all the pain. Will the Secretary of State explain exactly how he thinks that UK companies could, in any way, escape from that pressure?

**Mr. Byers:** Interestingly, there was no mention of the effects that the Conservative policy would have on inward investment. On the particulars of the question asked, the hon. Gentleman mentions the difficulties that arose from ERM—a creation of the then Conservative Government, especially the terms under which the United Kingdom entered it. The reason why the five economic tests laid down by the Chancellor are so important is that they will ensure that if joining the single European currency is an issue, it will be done on terms that are in the interests of British businesses, both large and small. The point is that we are not adopting a policy of ruling out joining just for political convenience; we are putting the national interest first and letting the British people decide.

## Miners (Compensation)

10. **Mr. Jon Trickett** (Hemsworth): If he will make a statement on the progress made by IRISC in the settlement of compensation claims by former miners suffering from vibration white finger and respiratory diseases. [159070]

**The Minister for Energy and Competitiveness in Europe (Mr. Peter Hain):** As at 22 April, IRISC, the Department's claims handling agents, have paid out more than £406 million in compensation for respiratory and vibration related disease. It continues to pay more than £1 million a day, and we expect that to rise sharply during the coming months.

**Mr. Trickett:** I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he recall that, for 18 years, the Conservative party did nothing for the miners in that respect, while closing the pits in a vindictive attack on mining communities? Is he aware that there are still on-going delays in the settlement of claims? Those delays, which often seem to derive from bureaucratic problems and paper chasing, can often lead to frustration and anger.

Will my hon. Friend continue to press IRISC to settle all claims as quickly as possible, while minimising bureaucracy? Will he consider informing claimants directly of the reasons for the delays, rather than doing so simply through their solicitors? The frustration often arises because the claimants are unaware of the reasons for the delays.

**Mr. Hain:** I reassure my hon. Friend that we will certainly take his comments on board. The procedure is laid down by the courts, and the claims handling agreement, negotiated thereafter, requires the solicitors to be the main conduit of communication with individual claimants. I pay tribute to the dedicated work that my hon. Friend does on behalf of retired miners, their widows and the working members of the National Union of Mineworkers. In his constituency, they have no better champion. I reassure him that more money will be paid during the next five months than has been paid during the past three years.

The whole compensation scheme is being speeded up. Widows are getting interim payments. We are prioritising the oldest and sickest miners so that they go to the top of the queue. Previously, they could find themselves way down it. We are making sure that all the problems that have beset the scheme are ironed out. It is the biggest

compensation scheme in British history. This Labour Government are delivering it, unlike the Tories who denied miners their rights of justice for many years.

**Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): The payment of compensation and individual claims is, of course, complicated. Did the Minister hear the Bishop of Wakefield yesterday saying how disappointed all the people in his diocese were who, after four years of the Labour Government's grandiose promises, expected some delivery but were still waiting?

**Mr. Hain:** That, coming from a Conservative Member, takes the biscuit. If the bishop wishes, he should by all means speak to me about this. If he had made those comments perhaps a year ago, there would have been a lot of validity in them. We have reformed the system, ironed out the problems and are driving it forward at the rate of more than £1 million a day. In Yorkshire we have paid out £115 million on the miners' compensation scheme. It is accelerating all the time and that figure will double within the next five months. That is a tribute to this Government's absolute commitment to bringing justice to the retired miners and their widows who were denied it for so long by the Tory Government.

**Mr. Martin O'Neill** (Ochil): There is a growing understanding in mining communities of the work being done and the scale of the problem. Let us not forget that week by week more and more miners are diagnosed with the condition, so are added to the books and the numbers that have to be dealt with. Many of us remember when the basis of a claim had to be made on a post mortem. Those hypocrites on the other side of the House—*[Interruption]*—did nothing to help mining communities when they faced these dreadful problems. The scale of the work and the sums involved require—

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman will wish to withdraw the term "hypocrite". There are no hypocrites in this House.

**Mr. O'Neill:** I withdraw the direct reference to hypocrites and substitute the word "hypocrisy" in the appropriate context.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I asked the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the word "hypocrite". I ask him to stand up and withdraw that remark.

**Mr. O'Neill:** I withdraw it, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Hain:** My hon. Friend, who represents a coal mining area, is well aware of the anguish during so many years of Tory rule and of the fact that compensation is now being delivered. He makes the important point that 1,000 new claimants join the compensation scheme every week. We are grappling with that pressure as well as delivering on the scheme to existing claimants. In Scotland, we have delivered £28 million so far, and people in coal mining communities there appreciate that.

**Mr. Eric Illsley** (Barnsley, Central): As I represent a constituency in the diocese of Wakefield, may I inform my hon. Friend that I am extremely pleased with the Government's delivery both of compensation for respiratory diseases and vibration white finger and on equal value claims? As my hon. Friend knows, one of the problems in relation to vibration white finger is the refusal of RJB Mining to accept liability for certain claims applying to periods of service in the company after privatisation. Can my hon. Friend confirm that the Government, with the solicitors' claims group, are looking into that under the handling agreement, to see whether the problem can be resolved?

**Mr. Hain:** Yes, we are. My hon. Friend speaks with the authority of an ex-miner. Conservative Members would not recognise a mine if they fell down one. My hon. Friend is absolutely right, whether about equal value claims or about the decision which we recently announced that there will now be no claw-back of benefit deductions from compensation paid out to 99 per cent. of claimants. That is yet another move forward that we have made in recent months.

## Universal Bank

11. **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): What progress has been made in agreeing a memorandum of understanding with banks concerning the universal bank. [159071]

**The Minister for Competitiveness (Mr. Alan Johnson):** Discussions with the banks are at an advanced stage. I hope that they will be resolved shortly.

**Mr. Blunt:** I cannot say that I am particularly grateful to the Minister for that answer. In January, the Secretary of State said at DTI questions:

"I am confident that within a few weeks we will sign a memorandum of understanding with those banks".—[*Official Report*, 18 January 2001; Vol. 361, c. 496.]

However, in March, in response to a written question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), the Department gave precisely the same answer as the Minister has just given, and stated:

"Discussions with the banks are at an advanced stage."—[*Official Report*, 12 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 456W.]

It is about time we had some answers from the Government, not least in view of the report produced by the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, which states that the Committee

"can appreciate concern expressed as to the source of funding. In evidence to us a recurring annual figure of around £150 million was mentioned by the Post Office. That is on the low side. The back office costs will indeed be substantial."

Will he tell us just how much this will cost the taxpayer? The House has a right to know.

**Mr. Johnson:** We are in discussions with the 11 major financial institutions, 10 banks and a building society—

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): Still!

**Mr. Johnson:** Yes, still. We are doing so because we have something that is worth arguing for. They are all talking constructively with us about setting up universal banking services that will allow pensioners and benefit recipients not only to draw their money in cash, in full, every week at the post office, but to access network banking there. That is an important development for the

Post Office and in the war against financial exclusion. We will continue to work on this matter over the weekend—apart from Monday, of course, which is a universal bank holiday.

**Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): Will the Minister confirm the significance of the concession that he is reported to have made to the banks, and to Halifax in particular, on not allowing branded bank accounts to be opened in Post Office branches? Does not that mean that the very large number of financially excluded people in inner-city and remote rural areas who do not have access to a bank branch will be restricted to the limited facilities of the card account and will not have the bill-paying accounts that they had anticipated?

**Mr. Johnson:** No; the hon. Gentleman is wrong. The discussions are subject to commercial confidentiality. When they are concluded, they will be revealed. Our aim is that people will not have to go to banks to open their accounts. They can start the process at their post office without needing to visit a bank. A very important point that was made in the Cruickshank report is that many people feel inhibited by having to go the banks, whereas they trust the post office.

I can assure the hon. Gentleman and all hon. Members that the universal banking services will be a major step forward, and that the very people whom he mentions—the socially and financially excluded—will be able to have the benefits of direct debit, which we assess at up to £200 usage a year, as a result of being able to access those services.

## Ballistic Missile Defence

12.33 pm

**Mr. Francis Maude** (Horsham) (*by private notice*): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Government policy towards ballistic missile defence.

**The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Robin Cook):** When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met President Bush at Camp David, he stressed the importance of taking forward proposals for missile defence through close consultation with allies and through dialogue with Russia.

On Tuesday, President Bush made a statement—*[Interruption.]* If I may say so, this is a serious matter that I am endeavouring to take seriously. On Tuesday, President Bush made a statement on his Administration's plans on how to proceed with missile defence. We warmly welcome the strong emphasis placed by President Bush on consultation with close allies. We look forward to discussions next week with the high-level team that he is sending to Europe.

We also welcome the commitment to dialogue with Russia in order to develop a new co-operative relationship that is based on openness and mutual confidence. President Putin has also demonstrated his concern about the missile threat from rogue states, and his security adviser recently briefed NATO on Russian proposals for missile defence. We will encourage both the United States and Russia to have constructive dialogue to reach agreement on how to tackle the problem that both have identified.

We also warmly welcome the commitment by President Bush to further cuts in nuclear weapons. We want nuclear arms reduction to be a feature of the new relationship that the United States seeks with Russia.

It should be stressed that President Bush's speech was a commitment to a future goal. The technology for missile defence will take some years to develop and the United States has yet to confirm which technical option it will pursue. Nor do we yet know the diplomatic context of any final decision, such as the potential for agreement with Russia.

However, we must recognise the reality that there is a growing challenge of missile proliferation. A number of states, of mutual concern to the US and the UK, are developing ballistic missile technology. At Camp David our two leaders agreed:

"We need to obstruct and deter these new threats."

In the years that it will take for missile defence to be developed, we will work closely with the US, both to reduce proliferation of ballistic missile technology and to enhance security against those ballistic missiles.

**Mr. Maude:** Ballistic missile defence is a subject of intense interest and concern throughout the House. Yesterday, the Prime Minister deliberately equivocated when questioned on the subject in the Chamber by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) and the hon. Member for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham). Not 10 minutes later, his official spokesman said that missile defence was a good idea. The House is entitled to feel extremely angry that it is treated in that way.

Next week, a delegation from Washington comes to London to discuss precisely this matter. Given the overwhelming importance of the issue, and the absolute necessity of the British Government speaking with a single and authoritative voice, will the Foreign Secretary now repeat, word for word, what the Prime Minister's official spokesman said yesterday? How otherwise can Britain expect to have influence with either America or our European partners? Does he believe that British people should have less protection against missile attack than people in America?

**Mr. Cook:** I am entirely happy to endorse everything that was said by the Prime Minister in the House yesterday when he stressed that it is impossible to give a firm answer until we have firm details. The Opposition's position is that, although we do not yet know whether the system will be sea-based or land-based, whether it will attempt to hit an incoming missile in the boost phase or in the re-entry phase, or whether it will be done with or without agreement, they know the answer that they would give. That is a betrayal of the national interest and of any influence that one may hope to have on the proposal.

Yes, I do think—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Let the Minister reply.

**Mr. Cook:** I do think that it is a good thing that the United States President should be able to say to the United States people that they are secure against any ballistic attack. It may or may not be that missile defence will play a part in that, but, as the Prime Minister's official spokesman said yesterday, nothing is inevitable and no answer can be given by Britain until we know the details; and, in that context, the position taken by the Government to look at the detail and the international context and to take a decision in the national interest compares responsibly and favourably with the position taken by the Opposition, who have adopted an attitude that plainly means that they do not expect to be in government, do not have any intention of taking a responsible approach to the issue, and would put their own party prejudice first rather than the national interest.

**Mr. Donald Anderson** (Swansea, East): Last August, the all-party Select Committee on Foreign Affairs unanimously agreed a report in which we urged the Government to make it clear to the US Administration that they should not necessarily assume unqualified UK co-operation in national missile defence and urged the Government to articulate Britain's strong concerns about NMD.

The Government, in their reply in August 2000, said, in terms, that they value the stability that the anti-ballistic missile treaty provides. Is that still the Government's position? What does consultation mean in practice? What is the agenda? Will my right hon. Friend say clearly that the position taken by the Leader of the Opposition, giving a blank cheque—a yes—to whatever the US Administration says, is absurd?

**Mr. Cook:** On the anti-ballistic missile treaty, we have constantly stressed to the United States Administration the importance of taking forward any amendment that they wish to make to their agreements with Russia by agreement and through dialogue.

*[Mr. Cook]*

The speech by President Bush was welcomed in Moscow yesterday by my colleague, Foreign Minister Ivanov, who said that he was pleased that the United States

"did not intend to take unilateral steps."

He welcomed the offer of dialogue as beginning

"an era of strategic stability consultations".

We are not a party to the anti-ballistic missile treaty; the parties to it are the United States and Russia. They must resolve between them the way in which they proceed with the new relationship that President Bush has offered. We have a legitimate interest in its progress through co-operation, not confrontation, and by agreement, not unilaterally.

My right hon. Friend is right that members of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs take their duties seriously and consider carefully the impact of their words. I wish that Conservative Front-Bench Members considered as carefully as the Conservative members of the Committee the impact on the rest of the world of the comments that they make for party reasons.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell** (North-East Fife): I apologise for having to leave shortly. I have a long-standing commitment at the Royal United Services Institute.

No matter how the Foreign Secretary describes the matter, there was a substantial difference in emphasis between what the Prime Minister told the House and the official spokesman's comments to journalists within an hour of Prime Minister's questions. It is highly unsatisfactory to reveal a change of emphasis in policy in that way; there is no getting away from that.

Should not we be anxious about the absence from President Bush's proposals of any understanding of their impact on other treaties and agreements on the prevention of the proliferation of nuclear weapons? What store can we set by consultation that takes place after rather than before a decision has been made?

**Mr. Cook:** I say to my right hon. and learned Friend—*[Interruption.]* I extend the hand of friendship to my right hon. and learned Friend. *[Interruption.]* I assure Conservative Members that I shall not describe them in the same way.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. There is too much noise. Opposition Front-Bench Members wanted a statement.

**Mr. Keith Simpson** (Mid-Norfolk): We are enjoying it.

**Mr. Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman may be enjoying it, but there is other business before the House. If there is more such behaviour, I shall bring discussion on the private notice question to an end.

**Mr. Cook:** There is no doubt that the United States Administration have made a commitment to proceed with missile defence. However, a range of decisions remain to be taken, and it is important to consult on them. I am confident that all our colleagues in Europe will give the same advice: it is important to proceed through dialogue and agreement, not only with us but with Russia.

I am glad that the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) gives me the chance to put the record straight about what was said at 4 pm yesterday. *[Interruption.]* As Conservative Members are so interested in that, I shall describe the Prime Minister's official spokesman's words in full. His statement and what was said in the House are identical. When it was put to him that we would ultimately go along with whatever the United Stated asked us to do, he disagreed, said that nothing was inevitable and that

"Our decision would depend on the detail of the US plans—something which President Bush clearly understood and accepted."

That is precisely what the Prime Minister told the House yesterday afternoon.

**Mr. Tony Benn** (Chesterfield): It is clear that the Government want to be cautious about this matter before polling day, as they know that there is widespread opposition to it world wide because of the fear of a new arms race, which could involve this country. The United States supplies us with nuclear weapons, which we pretend are independent. Those weapons are dependent upon the American satellite system and, therefore, on the basis of past experience, British Governments do not go against the decisions of the President. Did the Foreign Secretary hear that Admiral Eugene Carroll—a distinguished retired American admiral—came to the House recently and said that if the scheme went ahead, he hoped that there would be a lot of Greenham commons and a large-scale peace movement? My right hon. Friend, as a passionate and articulate supporter of CND, will understand the importance of such a campaign.

**Mr. Cook:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his helpful intervention. I can assure him that the Government will be cautious, responsible and realistic throughout the whole period after we are re-elected on polling day. That is precisely why we are taking a measured and considered approach to the question, totally unlike the Conservative party. However, I say to my right hon. Friend that we are the closest ally and one of the oldest friends of the United States. Plainly, that will be reflected in any judgment that we make if we are asked to be helpful.

**Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the early warning radar station at RAF Fylingdales in my constituency has played a crucial role in maintaining peace and security in Britain and the west for more than 40 years? Is he aware that the majority in north Yorkshire overwhelmingly support RAF Fylingdales? However, some of my constituents are alarmed at the more sensational suggestions as to what ballistic missile defence might mean for RAF Fylingdales. Will he take this opportunity to confirm that although no definitive proposals have been put to the Government by America, the clear intention is that the role of Fylingdales will remain limited to early warning radar stations and that there is no question of siting missiles or interceptors in north Yorkshire?

**Mr. Cook:** At no stage has anybody involved in the debate—either in the United States or Europe—suggested that interceptor missiles be based either in Britain or anywhere in continental Europe. The hon. Gentleman is right; no precise proposal has been put to us and no

decision has been taken on what the response would be, or indeed where any such facility would be based. It will not necessarily be Fylingdales.

**Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): I welcome the stress that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary have put on the need to insist on dialogue between the United States Administration, the Government, our other allies and Russia before the proposals are confirmed. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that the current framework of arms control treaties has played an important part in the security of the United Kingdom and will continue to do so? Are there not much easier ways of dealing with the suggested missile threat from supposed states of concern, rather than the current proposals? In particular, the steps taken by the EU to improve dialogue with North Korea are an obvious way of dealing with that missile threat. Finally, given the extreme concern shown by a large number of people across the UK about the proposals and their possible effect on UK security, will he join me in condemning the levity of Conservative Members? Obviously they are thinking only of party political issues and not the security of this country.

**Mr. Cook:** Mr. Speaker has already reminded the House that we are discussing this question because the official Opposition tabled it. As they went to the lengths of tabling it, I would have expected them to have made a serious contribution on a serious global issue, not simply to have tried to exploit for party prejudice and party interest an issue that should and will be dealt with in the national interest by the Government.

My hon. Friend is right that there are other ways in which to handle the threat of missile proliferation, although I do not know that it is necessary for us to choose between them. They all have a contribution to make. Whether or not missile defence goes ahead, I agree that it is important that we do what we can for rapprochement on the Korean peninsula and it is important that we tighten the technology regimes against the spread of missile technology. I assure her that we shall continue that work and that, as I said at my meeting with Colin Powell in March, we shall ensure that we work closely with the United States to achieve those goals as well.

**Mr. Andrew Tyrie** (Chichester): We must clarify whether there is any difference of view between the Prime Minister's press spokesman and the Prime Minister himself. I have here an extract from the lobby briefing, which says:

"Pressed as to whether we believed missile defence, broadly speaking, was a good idea, the PMOS said broadly, yes it was . . . It was now the Prime Minister and the British Government's responsibility to look at any specific policy questions which might relate to the UK."

In other words, there is clear agreement in principle and it is a question of looking at the details. It is difficult to place any other construction on what the Prime Minister's official spokesman said. That being the case, will the Foreign Secretary say whether it can therefore be assumed that the Government do not consider the United States proposals to be in breach of the 1972 ABM treaty?

**Mr. Cook:** The answer to the last point is that President Bush himself has said that the United States is constrained by the ABM treaty. After all, that is why he is seeking dialogue with Russia and why we are urging both sides to find a way in which they can go forward.

In reference to the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks, at risk of wearying the House by repeating what we have already said, that is precisely what the Prime Minister said yesterday and what I have said today. This is an issue that we are obliged to look at. We will look at it responsibly. We will look at it with the national interest in mind, unlike the Conservative party, which is looking at it irresponsibly and without the national interest in mind.

**Mr. Ivan Lewis** (Bury, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the decision is of immense strategic importance to this country, that party politics has no part to play in such a decision, which is related to the national interest, and that the British people would expect a responsible Government to wait for the detail of any such proposals before reaching a decision that will have wide-ranging implications not only for this country, but for the international community?

**Mr. Cook:** I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. Those members of the public who are watching this exchange can make up their own minds as to which side is engaged seriously in the issue and which side has treated it as a matter of levity and party prejudice. They can also resolve for themselves whether it makes more sense to know firmly what we are being asked to answer or to give the answer now, whatever the question may be, as Conservative Members are doing.

**Mr. William Ross** (East Londonderry): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that, once upon a time, this nation gave facilities to the Americans to bomb Libya and that the people in the United Kingdom who paid the highest price for that bombing were the people of Northern Ireland, who suffered because a large number of weapons were imported from Libya? Given that such consequences flowed from that decision, can we have an assurance from him that this country will fall well within any protective umbrella should missile defence be created?

**Mr. Cook:** I cannot give the hon. Gentleman such an assurance at present. Indeed, it would be odd if I were able to do so, given that there is no precise missile defence system yet proposed by the United States. However, I can assure him and the House that, obviously, that issue will be a major factor in consultations that we have over the coming months.

**Mr. Malcolm Savidge** (Aberdeen, North): The Foreign Secretary has already said that we are not party to the ABM treaty, but does he agree that we were a vital party to the nuclear non-proliferation review conference last year at which it was agreed that maintaining and strengthening that treaty was part of the agreement to which all the countries involved signed up? Surely, therefore, we have an important interest in ensuring that missile defence does not undermine the whole non-proliferation and arms control regime.

Is not it vital that the United States engage in discussions not only with Russia, but with China and other countries? Should not we consider the suggestion made by the Secretary-General of the United Nations that we

*[Mr. Malcolm Savidge]*

should call a conference of all countries, including those that are not party to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty, to discuss how best to reduce the risks of nuclear weapons?

**Mr. Cook:** I fully agree with my hon. Friend's support for the text of the NPT review conference. Indeed, the British Government were influential in securing the agreement on that text. Our problem is that the countries of greatest concern in relation to the proliferation of missile technology are outwith the NPT regime. I absolutely agree with him that if we could strengthen that regime by bringing those countries into it, a lot of the tension and anxiety would be removed from the United States' debate. We can all continue to press those countries to sign up, and to point out to them that if they do not do so, there will unavoidably be consequences. However, the United States has to take account of the countries that have not signed up, and continue to develop the means of missile delivery of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction.

None of that is inconsistent with the further cuts in nuclear offensive missiles to which we committed ourselves in that text, and I welcome the fact that President Bush's speech on Tuesday repeated that commitment on behalf of the United States. I hope that he will be able to take it forward through bilateral dialogue with Russia.

**Mr. Christopher Gill** (Ludlow): Are not the divisions in the Labour party and the hard left anti-defence lobby that sits on the Benches behind him the real reasons why the Foreign Secretary will not say whether he, in principle, favours missile defence?

**Mr. Cook:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government will take a collective decision when the time comes, in which we will all participate. The reason that we are not saying now what our answer will be when we are asked a question is that we are in government, we are responsible and realistic, and we want to know what the question is first. The fact that Conservative Members are prepared to answer the question without knowing what it is demonstrates that they do not really ever expect to be in government.

**Mr. Peter Kilfoyle** (Liverpool, Walton): Can I tell my right hon. Friend how welcome his reaffirmation is of the Prime Minister's position, as set out in the House yesterday? Will my right hon. Friend also join me in condemning the Conservative party for once again showing its knee-jerk enthusiasm for as yet non-existent proposals purely and simply for electioneering purposes?

**Mr. Cook:** I do not think that anybody studying the text of these exchanges or watching them this afternoon will come to the conclusion that a single thing has been said by Conservative Members that would enhance the security of Britain, or strengthen the security of her alliance.

**Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): Does the Foreign Secretary recall—on the day on which he is possibly making his last outing as Foreign Secretary—those happy, carefree times when he used to describe it as nonsense on stilts for Britain to pretend to be a nuclear power? Does he recall his reactions when the American President of the day originally proposed ballistic missile defence? Will he accept the sympathy of those Conservative Members who have consistently supported nuclear deterrence for his position now, as he finds himself attacked from his own Back Benches by people who stick to the views that he used to stick to but has now abandoned? Does he realise that many of us understand why he has recently taken to lowering his voice when he answers these embarrassing questions?

**Mr. Cook:** I am happy to say to the hon. Gentleman that I can resist the temptation to accept his sympathy in any circumstances whatsoever. I invite him to reflect on the proposal that I understand him to be supporting, which is that we should support missile defence. Will he reflect on the fact that missile defence is a clear statement that the many people in the United States who support it no longer have the faith in nuclear deterrence in which he still seems to be mired?

**Mr. Dennis Skinner** (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Bush got elected with the help of a massive amount of money from the defence industries, principally in America, and that he fiddled his way to victory on the back of that money? Is he aware that now is payback time? I suggest that he should be very careful about how the Government tread in the next few weeks. I believe that the Tories are as wrong on this issue as they are on the economy, and on almost every other political issue.

**Mr. Cook:** I have no problem in assenting to my hon. Friend's proposition that the Conservatives are wrong on a range of issues. I find it startling that there are still Conservative Members who appear to believe that the Government's real success is not in substance, but in spin. The reason why the Conservatives are in opposition is that they presided over the two worst economic recessions in British history, and the reason why they will stay in opposition is that this Government have presided over a sound, healthy, growing economy. Those are issues of substance, not of spin.

**Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): All hon. Members will agree on the importance of this issue, but when we are reduced to considering how effective Mr. Bremner is as a parody of Government and when Downing street is acting as a parody of Bremner, is it not about time that the Government stood aside for people who will deal with the issue in a serious fashion?

**Mr. Cook:** I am conscious that we are appearing in the House of Commons now, and seeking to debate these matters seriously. I will not enter into any studio comedy with the hon. Gentleman.

**Ms Oona King** (Bethnal Green and Bow): May I record the grave concern felt by many of my constituents, and shared by me, about missile proliferation and the threat posed by rogue states? Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that the Government's position remains that we will await a firm proposal from the Americans before deciding on the merits of any such proposal? Will he put clear blue water—or clear red water—between the parties, by confirming that we will not do what the Conservatives

have done and blindly rush in to support any proposal that the Americans come up with before they have even decided on a proposal?

**Mr. Cook:** I am happy to confirm that the answer to both questions is yes. We will of course consider the details that are put to us—it would be irresponsible to do otherwise—and, as the Prime Minister's official spokesman said yesterday, our answer is not inevitable.

**Mr. Francis Maude** (Horsham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. I shall take the point of order after the Business Question.

## Business of the House

1.2 pm

**Mrs. Angela Browning** (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the Leader of the House please give the business for the coming week?

**The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett):** The business for the coming week is as follows.

MONDAY 7 MAY—The House will not be sitting.

TUESDAY 8 MAY—Motion to approve Ways and Means Resolution on the Finance Bill.

Remaining stages of the Private Security Industry Bill *[Lords]*.

WEDNESDAY 9 MAY—Remaining stages of the International Criminal Court Bill *[Lords]*.

THURSDAY 10 MAY—Opposition Day [9th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

FRIDAY 11 MAY—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will include:

MONDAY 14 MAY—Remaining stages of the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Bill.

Consideration of Lords amendments to the Health and Social Care Bill.

TUESDAY 15 MAY—Opposition Day [10th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 16 MAY—Debate on Defence on a motion for Adjournment of the House.

THURSDAY 17 MAY—The Chairman of Ways and Means is expected to name opposed private business for consideration at 4 o'clock.

FRIDAY 18 MAY—Private Members' Bills.

**Mrs. Browning:** I thank the Leader of the House for announcing what will clearly be a fun-packed week—possibly the last week of the current Parliament. It has been a fun Parliament for some. The Government began, four years ago, with a party in Downing street, and proceeded to that great party down at the dome at the change of the century; but, as with all parties, they have left behind a lot of debris. I wonder whether some of that debris can be cleared up in the coming week's business.

One important fact is that the Government have yet to devote any Government time to a full debate on foot and mouth on the Floor of the House. There have been statements and one is to follow but, surely, given the nature of the crisis and the fact that the Prime Minister has taken personal control of it, one could have at least expected the Government to allocate time to discuss foot and mouth next week.

There are other matters of great importance that I hope the Leader of the House will consider fitting in before the end of next week. The Government have made statements and indeed have set up a taskforce to help to support businesses not directly involved in agriculture, but there is a growing problem for all the businesses that have appealed for a temporary reduction in their rating assessments.

*[Mrs. Browning]*

On 6 April, the Paymaster General informed the House in a written answer that there were no fewer than 23,000 new applications as at 6 April. It does not seem that those are being processed; indeed, the Treasury has been unable to give up-to-date figures. I hope that the Leader of the House will find time for the Paymaster General to answer questions in the House on how those applications are to be expedited.

We have still not had an annual debate on small business, which the Government promised when they came to glorious victory in 1997. Nor have there been any statements on the Floor of the House on, for example, many matters to do with procedure. The fact that we have just had a private notice question based on what the Prime Minister said at Prime Minister's questions yesterday and what was said in contradiction subsequently by his press officer surely merits some debate before the end of the Parliament; and what about a statement from the Government about their so-called modernisation programme, which has been inflicted on the House during the Parliament?

The Government have failed to reintroduce the Criminal Justice (Mode of Trial) (No.2 ) Bill despite its being a high priority for them and being announced in Her Majesty's Gracious Speech last December. Has that Bill now been taken off the party invitation list? The Government have only published a draft transport Bill, even though they promised to develop a fully integrated public transport system. I wonder whether the Leader of the House could tell us exactly what the intention is so that the House can question Transport Ministers on that subject.

There has been no legislation to enforce the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development convention on bribery, which makes it a criminal offence for a United Kingdom national to bribe a foreign public official. On that subject, not much time appears to have been allocated for the House to discuss very important matters that have been considered by Select Committees in respect of the hon. Member for Coventry, North-West (Mr. Robinson) and the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), for whom the party has been so exciting that he has had to go home and spend a bit of time getting over it. It is important that such matters be discussed on the Floor of the House. I hope that the Leader of the House will assure us that those important matters will be tidied up before the party is over at the end of next week because, clearly, for the Government, the party will be well and truly over.

**Mrs. Beckett:** The hon. Lady complains that there has been no debate in Government time on the foot and mouth outbreak, which, if I recall correctly, first came to light in February, so we are talking about a comparatively short period, during which there have been, as she rightly acknowledged, extensive statements. I remind her that we went through at least two years, if not three or four, when the Conservative party was in government without any debate in Government time on health, which is an on-going issue and which was in crisis at the time. It is not unusual for there to be pressure on Government time, but, by contrast with the Conservative party, we have made extensive statements covering those issues.

The hon. Lady raises a valid point about the handling of applications with regard to rate relief. I believe that we have Treasury questions next Thursday, but in any case I will draw her remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I had not heard the concerns that the hon. Lady expressed, but clearly it is a matter of some interest. We already have in mind the issue of a small business debate.

As for the hon. Lady's remarks on procedure, I am not quite sure to what she is referring, although she complains about the handling of statements. It is a matter of record that, in this Parliament, on average, the Government have made a statement every two sitting days. We have certainly made substantially more statements—just as we have taken substantially more questions at Prime Minister's Question Time—than the previous, Conservative Government made. I therefore do not think that it lies in the mouths of Conservative Members to complain about that matter.

The hon. Lady then gave a list of matters that she felt should be debated, including some Select Committee reports. She treated us again to her views on the Modernisation Committee, but I remind the House that a consequence of the work of that Committee is that we now have four to five times as much time for debating Select Committee reports, and more time for Back Benchers than was available under the previous Government.

In her list of matters not covered, the hon. Lady also included a draft transport Bill that she wanted to discuss. I am not quite sure where she was last year, but it is my recollection that we had a Transport Bill which became the Transport Act 2000.

As for the party being over, it sounds very much to me like the hon. Lady's party is definitely over.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): For all those who are genuinely concerned with the national interest, should it not be a matter for congratulation that foot and mouth is now well under control? Everyone involved should be congratulated on what has been done. May I also make what I hope will be seen as a helpful suggestion, relating to what we have just been discussing? Would it not be much better for statements on very serious policy matters to be made by the relevant Minister and not outside the House? Not only would that save a lot of perhaps unnecessary work, but the Opposition would of course have less to exploit.

**Mrs. Beckett:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to say that the whole House should take pleasure—although I am not sure that everyone does—in the very considerable success in handling what has undoubtedly been a very difficult outbreak. I think that most sensible people congratulate all those who have been involved on the enormous work and effort that they have put in—often with a huge amount of second-guessing. Action that was demanded one week was criticised the next, and a great deal of undeserved abuse was heaped on the unfortunate heads of those who were doing most of the work to tackle the impact of the disease. My hon. Friend is entirely right about that.

As for how statements are handled, I hope that my hon. Friend will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Agriculture Minister hopes to make a statement shortly. Additionally, he answered a written parliamentary question on the matter this morning.

**Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): Does the Leader of the House accept that Ministers must be accountable to the House rather than to the media for the actions of Government? Does she accept that, despite what the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) has just said, there are still very real concerns—in my part of the country, if not in his—about the devastation left by the foot and mouth outbreak? There is therefore absolutely no room for complacency about the outbreak; nor is there any room for complacency about the way in which the Government have handled the whole episode.

May I draw the right hon. Lady's attention specifically to the fact that there are still real problems with co-ordination of the Government's activities in their different forms to deal with the outbreak? That is why, on several previous occasions, I have asked that the Prime Minister—as he has insisted that he had to take personal charge of the whole exercise—should himself come to the House and answer questions on the co-ordination of Government activity to deal with it.

May I particularly draw the right hon. Lady's attention to the problems that obviously will arise if we do not have a swift public inquiry into the matter? I accept that she may well be able to say that the previous Government refused a public inquiry into the BSE scandal, but two wrongs do not make a right, and that is not an excuse for inaction now.

Specifically, we want to know whether the Agriculture Minister was right when, on 27 March, he told the House that entry into this country—presumably through the ports—of the foot and mouth virus had still to be examined and established. Is that true? If it is, why have we had no further statement on the matter?

Moreover, why have the efforts that my colleagues and I have put into trying to see what is happening at our entry ports been blocked at every stage, to the extent that civil servants themselves have told me that we have been given the Whitehall runaround? We have been wanting to go and see what checks are being made at our ports into illegal meat imports, and we have been told by the Association of Port Health Authorities that large quantities of such meat are coming into this country. Why have we been blocked from seeing exactly what is happening, and when will we have the remit for that public inquiry?

**Mrs. Beckett:** The hon. Gentleman says that matters should be reported to the House. Perhaps he failed to hear me say to my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) that a parliamentary question was answered this morning. He will know that successive Speakers have ruled that that is a perfectly acceptable way of making an announcement. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food intends to make a statement later.

I wholeheartedly endorse, as does everyone, the idea that although, to nearly everyone's relief, the disease is apparently on a downward trajectory, there is no cause for complacency. Indeed, nobody feels complacent. The remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North were timely, in that a great deal of abuse has been heaped on the heads of those who have been attempting to deal with the outbreak, not least the officials, and it is right for us to place on the record our real gratitude for their efforts.

With respect to the hon. Gentleman, he frequently asks for the Prime Minister to make a statement on this, that or the other.

The issue of what inquiry should be held, and in what form, will continue to be considered. Perhaps in calling for further statements the hon. Gentleman has overlooked the fact that some of the issues may become a matter for prosecution, which always means that what is said in public must be handled with caution. He will have the opportunity to put many of these questions to my right hon. Friend later.

**Mr. Kevin Barron** (Rother Valley): Can we have a statement next week on the slow progress of the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill? It completed its stages in the House of Commons on 13 February, about 11 weeks ago, had its First Reading in the other place the following day and then took some five weeks to get its Second Reading, since when there has been no progress whatever. Along with many of my hon. Friends, I am concerned about the situation. We made a commitment in the Labour party manifesto to ban tobacco advertising. Can we have a statement to find out whether the Bill will make further progress, especially considering the rumours that abound suggesting that we may be embarking on a general election campaign very shortly?

**Mrs. Beckett:** Of course I understand the concerns that my hon. Friend expresses. He has been a strong and ardent campaigner on the issue for many years. He will know, however, that there is a great deal of business in the other place and that the Government do not control the business there: it is a matter for that House itself to decide what business to take and how long to spend on it. There are always problems and pressures.

My hon. Friend will know that, in the event of any change in business, there are long-established parliamentary conventions on how the issues may be handled. I am not aware of any reason to suppose that those conventions will not be observed.

**Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): Will the Leader of the House find time next week for a debate on the financial situation faced by hospices that care for the dying, of which we have 102 in this country? Information just published shows that, over the past three years, the proportion of hospices' funding that is public has gone down from more than 35 to just under 30 per cent. Will she pay particular attention to the independent report that has just been published showing that half our hospices now face serious financial problems? If we had not raised a great deal of additional money over the past year, Southend, too, could have been in that position. Does she agree that this is an urgent and important matter that deserves parliamentary attention?

**Mrs. Beckett:** I am not aware of the report to which the hon. Gentleman refers, nor do I know whether the change in percentage may not, at least in part, be due to

*[Mrs. Beckett]*

the substantial efforts made to raise funds for hospices from the private sector. The whole House strongly applauds the excellent work done in hospices and would not want it to be undermined in any way. I will certainly draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, but I fear that I cannot find time for a special debate on them in the near future.

**Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Those of us who were present in Westminster Hall on 11 July 1996 were afforded the great honour of listening to one of the greatest statesmen of our time address both Houses of Parliament; I refer, of course, to Nelson Mandela. May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 643, which seeks to commemorate that event?

[*That this House notes the historic importance of the speech delivered to both Houses by President Mandela and of EDM 1155, tabled on 11th July 1996, supported on a cross party basis; and calls upon the House authorities to install a permanent reminder of the occasion by the setting of a brass plaque on the steps of Westminster Hall.*]

I realise that the solution to that request is not entirely in the gift of my right hon. Friend, but I would be grateful if she would bring it to the attention of the Lord Chancellor, who is one of the people involved.

I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that you will recognise the sentiments expressed in the motion on a cross-party basis, as you are one of those able to take action on the matter.

**Mrs. Beckett:** My hon. Friend is partly right in saying that I do not have entire responsibility in the matter, because I do not have any responsibility for what happens in Westminster Hall, which rests with the Lord Great Chamberlain, the Lord Chancellor and the Speaker. However, I fully recognise the important point that my hon. Friend makes. The tremendous warmth of the cross-party welcome for Nelson Mandela was evident on the occasion that my hon. Friend mentions, and I am confident that those who have responsibility for the matter will hear his remarks with sympathy.

**Sir Peter Emery** (East Devon): Does the right hon. Lady agree that there is no great pressure of massively important legislation next week and that therefore—if necessary after 10 o'clock—the Government should bring forward the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body on the new level of salary for Members of Parliament? They will not affect me, but they should not be held back until after the election by people who fear that voting in favour of them might affect their position at the polls. One section of the House will be affected—those who are retiring or who are defeated at the election and have only a low level of pension. That pension is based on Members' final salary when they leave the House, so to hold back a recommendation based on what has been supposedly earned over the past three years is to be unfair to a host of Members of Parliament in terms of their pensions. The Government should have enough strength to overcome any opposition and get on with it.

**Mrs. Beckett:** Although the right hon. Gentleman says that there is no pressure of legislation next week, the House will in fact discuss some very important legislation. He will know that the issue has been raised with me, and I fear that I cannot undertake to bring the matter forward in the near future. I shall take the opportunity to say to the right hon. Gentleman that it is characteristic of his many years of service in the House that he should raise the issue on behalf of other people.

**Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): Has the Leader of the House had time to read early-day motion 619?

[*That this House believes that the Halifax, Yorkshire's biggest financial company, must keep its headquarters in Halifax, the town whose name it takes; does not accept that all major financial centres in the UK should be located only in capital cities; notes that Leeds is a growing centre of financial excellence and that if the headquarters are moved to Edinburgh this would be a major blow to the Yorkshire Region as a place in which to invest and locate.*]

It has been signed by 87 Members and opposes the relocation to Scotland of the headquarters of the Halifax bank, in the event of a merger between it and the Bank of Scotland. Feelings are running so high in my constituency against such a relocation that the Halifax *Evening Courier* produced a special edition to oppose it. Will my right hon. Friend ask the Government for a statement on the issue, which is vital to investment in Halifax and the wider Yorkshire region?

**Mrs. Beckett:** I understand my hon. Friend's clearly expressed concern and the *Evening Courier* deserves praise for ensuring that an issue of such importance to the local community is raised in that way. My hon. Friend and others also deserve praise for the way in which they have raised the issue. We are keen for organisations to take factors such as the impact on local communities into account when they make their decisions. I fear, however, that those decisions are ultimately a commercial matter for the company, although I will draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of any of my right hon. Friends who have any standing on the issue.

**Mr. Peter Brooke** (Cities of London and Westminster): Historically, the Government have purported to support the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill, but Government Whips last night were actively discouraging Ministers from voting for further progress on the Bill.

**Mr. Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): If only that were true.

**Mr. Brooke:** Effectively, that prevented the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), who heard the debate, from stating the Government's current position with regard to the Bill. In the circumstances, may we have a statement on the Government's position?

**Mrs. Beckett:** With respect to the right hon. Gentleman, who I know has long campaigned on this matter on behalf of his constituents, he will have heard my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) say, "If only that were true."

**Mr. Mackinlay:** In the period of quarantine that will prevail during the general election and until the following

Queen's Speech, will it be possible for the Government to reflect on the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill and decide that it should not be resuscitated? If a motion on that matter is put to the House, should not it be subject to a free vote? There is no majority in the House in favour of this squalid little Bill, and the sooner it is consigned to the dustbin, the better.

**Mrs. Beckett:** With respect to my hon. Friend, the Bill is private business. Its resuscitation is therefore not a matter for the Government. It has always been subject to a free vote, precisely because it is private business. That will no doubt remain the case if it is reintroduced.

**Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): Will the Leader of the House find time next week for a debate on the extraordinary actions of Barnet council, which is under joint Labour and Liberal Democrat control? Last year, it targeted the half of the borough in which it thought that its greatest support lay, and sent a letter encouraging postal voting to every householder. At the beginning of the year, it promised to do the same for the other half of the borough. It printed the letters, but then took the political decision not to take any further action. Will the right hon. Lady at least condemn what is political gerrymandering of the worst type?

**Mrs. Beckett:** I am not precisely familiar with the situation in Barnet to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but, in the light of what he has said, I wonder whether there was a great deal of criticism of the council for taking the steps that it did, and whether that has anything to do with his question.

**Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): Bearing in mind the expeditious way in which the House has dealt with business this week, will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate next week on today's announcement by Corus, which makes it clear that the company never had any intention of changing its plans to sack 6,000 workers in the United Kingdom? Such a debate would give us the opportunity to show that Plaid Cymru was more concerned to back Corus in this matter than to support the Government's attempts to get the company back on track and keep workers in jobs. It would also give the House a chance to show how effectively the Government have responded to the Corus debacle—for example, they have provided some £66 million in Wales to try to ensure that steelworkers receive adequate compensation and the opportunity for new jobs.

**Mrs. Beckett:** I share my hon. Friend's view that it would be desirable to find time for such a debate, as it would make plain how much the Government have done to try to help people in that difficult situation. It would also expose those more concerned with scoring political points. However, I fear that I cannot undertake to find time for such a debate next week.

**Mr. Stephen Day** (Cheadle): The right hon. Lady is assiduous is carrying out her duties as Leader of the House, and enjoys the respect of hon. Members. However, I hope she will agree that it is wrong that major policy announcements should be made by the Prime Minister's press secretary when, 10 minutes before that announcement, the Prime Minister had steadfastly refused to do make the same announcement in the House. The same is true of announcements by any press secretary and any Minister. The right hon. Lady has always stood up for the House's rights; will she do so on this occasion by agreeing with me?

**Mrs. Beckett:** That is a good try, but no such major announcement of a change in policy was made. That has already been made plain, and I remind the hon. Gentleman that the issue was aired earlier today.

**Mr. Gwyn Prosser** (Dover): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on asylum? That would give the House an opportunity to discuss the success of the Government's Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, particularly the success of the civil penalties, which have had a dramatic effect on the numbers of illegal immigrants coming into the port of Dover, and of the accelerated process, which means that the backlog of unheard cases is at a 10-year low? In addition, the success of the dispersal system has meant that since last April hardly a single new asylum seeker has been placed in the port of Dover.

Is my right hon. Friend encouraged by the comments of the Conservative leader of Kent county council, who told Radio 5 just last week:

"I think the dispersal system is working well"?

**Mrs. Beckett:** My hon. Friend is quite correct. I am encouraged to learn that the leader of Kent county council is, at least on this occasion, more in touch with the real world than those who represent his party in this House. My hon. Friend is entirely right to identify that there is merit in paying attention to the accelerated process in dealing with the backlog. I find it hard to keep a straight face when I hear Conservative Members talk about their record on asylum, when people waited years and years, not least in my constituency, without any decision being taken. My hon. Friend is also quite correct to identify this as an area in which Government policy has tackled a problem of enormous consequences that we inherited. I fear, however, that I cannot undertake to find time for a special debate on it next week.

**Mr. Eric Forth** (Bromley and Chislehurst): Is it not time that we had a proper debate in the House about the real role of Alastair Campbell in the Government? Yesterday, the Prime Minister waffled about missile defence. Just after that, we are told, Mr. Campbell gave a clear statement on the Government's policy on missile defence. Today, we have had the unedifying spectacle of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs being not quite unable to deny what Alastair Campbell had said but trying to waltz around it in his gnomic way. Can we please have a debate in which it will be made clear beyond all doubt what the role of this man, Alastair Campbell, is in Government? Is he running the Government, does he speak for the Government, does he decide policy? Why is a Secretary of State unable to deny to the House what Alastair Campbell is reported as having said the previous day?

**Mrs. Beckett:** All I can say is that it is a clear indication of the priorities of Conservative Members that they spend so much time on this kind of nit-picking point

*[Mrs. Beckett]*

and are not the slightest bit interested in debating issues of major importance such as the economy, on which they have nothing at all to say.

**Mr. John Cryer** (Hornchurch): Can the Leader of the House find time for a debate on speech therapy? This is, to some extent, a local problem. I discovered three or four years ago that there was a shortage of speech therapists in my borough, and despite the best efforts of the local community health trust, that shortage has not been addressed. I suspect, from speaking to other right hon. and hon. Members, that it is a national shortage which needs addressing at a national level, which is why we need a debate or a statement on it.

Following on from the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), I should like to emphasise that it is the view of probably the majority of right hon. and hon. Members, if there were a completely free vote, that the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill is an attack on democracy and on representative democracy. It is the first extension of the business vote since 1832. Can we just kick it out after we win the election?

**Mrs. Beckett:** First, my hon. Friend is right to say that although there may be a particular local problem with regard to the availability of speech therapy, there is a general problem and has been for quite some time. That is due not least to the previous Government's record of administration in running the health service, when many of these specialties and valuable contributors to health care were neglected and actively undermined.

With regard to my hon. Friend's remarks about the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill, I have nothing to add to what I said before.

**Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): As these may be the last business questions of this Parliament, and as I am one of the regular attenders, may I say on behalf of several of my right hon. and hon. Friends how much we have appreciated the way the Leader of the House has discharged her duties, typified by the courtesy with which she responded to my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) only a few moments ago?

Now back to business. I have repeatedly raised the point that, a year and a half ago, the President of the European Commission described the Commissioners as the Government of Europe, and this has been repeatedly disregarded by Ministers, including the Prime Minister, whenever it has been raised in the House. Now that the Chancellor of Germany has made the same statement—proposing to formalise the European Commission as the Government of Europe—and has been backed, according to press reports today, by the Belgian Prime Minister, will the right hon. Lady find time for a statement by an appropriate Minister on the serious constitutional question whether this country will continue governing itself, or will indeed become part of a European superstate? The Prime Minister's counterparts in other countries clearly wish that to happen.

**Mrs. Beckett:** My understanding is that the document to which the hon. Gentleman refers is a draft policy paper that is under discussion in Germany and raises issues as to what the respective powers of the EU and member states should be, and notes that there should be clarity about them. That is very much an issue that the Prime Minister has addressed. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that he has on several occasions raised remarks made by the President of the European Commission: one of the reasons that no one talks much about that is that those remarks are not taken all that seriously.

Finally, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his courteous remarks.

**Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): May I tell my right hon. Friend about the case of six of my constituents who were arrested by the Greater Manchester police early last summer? In the autumn, their case was referred to the Crown Prosecution Service, where it remains. By a remarkable coincidence, all six were members of the Bury, North Conservative party—two of them were elected members of the local authority. They stand accused of election fraud, following last year's municipal elections; specifically, they are accused of tampering with postal votes in private residential homes.

In view of the likely—welcome—increase in postal voting in the forthcoming general election, will my right hon. Friend discuss that general issue with her Home Office colleagues to ensure that adequate guidelines are given to local authorities so that the risk of fraud in postal voting is reduced to a minimum? Will it be possible to find time, during next week's business, for a debate on the Floor of the House?

**Mrs. Beckett:** I was not aware of the particular case to which my hon. Friend refers. I am aware, however, that cases of such fraud have occurred in the past—the one that comes to my mind was also in connection with a residential home. That suggests a particular and clear vulnerability in handling postal votes in respect of such places. It is the responsibility of the electoral registration officer to check that someone is a properly registered elector and that electoral fraud of that kind is not being undertaken. Obviously, guidance has gone out to electoral registration officers stating that they should take such matters seriously in view of the sensible and welcome easing of the availability of postal voting. I fear, however, that I cannot undertake to find time during the coming week for a debate of the kind to which my hon. Friend alludes.

**Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): In response to my hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day), the right hon. Lady was unable to give an assurance that important policy statements from the Government would be made in the House. Perhaps we could approach the matter in another way. Would it be possible to find an opportunity for Members of the House to attend the Lobby briefing, so that we could end the constitutional anomaly that arose yesterday whereby members of the Lobby were able to question the organ grinder, whereas Members of the House had to put up with the monkey?

**Mrs. Beckett:** The hon. Gentleman is mistaken. I made it extremely clear to his hon. Friend the Member for Cheadle (Mr. Day) that the Government make very many statements—and all statements of importance—in the House.

On Lobby briefings, first, as someone who attends them, I can tell the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) that he would not find them nearly as illuminating as he thinks. Secondly, if he does have an interest in them, they are of course available on the No. 10 website.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): Is my right hon. Friend at all surprised by the huge amount of support received for my early-day motion 572 on the business affairs of working members of the royal family?

[*That this House applauds the decision of Buckingham Palace to consider issuing guidance on how the business affairs of working members of the Royal Family might be conducted in future; believes a register of royal interests, along the lines of the House of Commons Register of Members' Interests, should be considered; hopes the Palace will invite the views of Right honourable and honourable Members on any draft guidance; and invites the Select Committee on Public Administration to review current practice and offer suggestions for change where it considers appropriate.*]

The motion was signed by 108 Members. Will my right hon. Friend put out feelers to the Palace and use her good offices to set up a meeting between the Lord Chamberlain—Lord Luce—myself and other Members who expressed an interest in the matter by tabling the early-day motion? Is it not the case—indeed, I know that my right hon. Friend will agree with me because I know the kind of person she is—that, if guidelines emerge and are secret, they are no use at all?

**Mrs. Beckett:** I take my hon. Friend's point; it is helpful if guidelines generally are understood. As for his early-day motion, I understand that those matters are under consideration by those who are properly charged with such responsibilities, who will, no doubt, issue any statement that they have to make in due course.

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): May we please have a debate on the proposed national works council directive, which would, in this country hit more than 36,000 companies with more than 50 employees? Given that the European Union Employment and Social Affairs Council's meeting on that matter has been conveniently postponed from 7 May to 11 June this year; that Germany's opposition to the directive is said to be weakening; and that, as the right hon. Lady is well aware from painful experience, the matter is ultimately determined by majority voting under the European social chapter because of this Government's crass stupidity, why does not she just admit that, as we have long suspected, the Government have in mind a craven capitulation on the subject to the advocates of European corporatism in the EU?

**Mrs. Beckett:** I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman attaches any great significance to the postponement of further discussion on that issue. To hear his remarks, anyone would think that the matter had suddenly arisen out of the blue and was for urgent discussion, whereas it has been discussed since at least 1997; it has been discussed and argued about for years. As for the notion that, in some way, it is a consequence of actions taken by this Government, it is in fact a consequence of the discussions that were under way before we came to power. However, I assure him that the Government will continue to fight the case that we believe to be right with the utmost vigour and, if I may say so, with rather more success than the party that he supports when it was in government.

## Foot and Mouth

1.42 pm

**The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown):** With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the foot and mouth outbreak.

This is the 10th time that I have updated the House on the outbreak. Once again, I should like to provide details of the latest position on the disease, to set out the measures the Government are taking and to give right hon. and hon. Members the opportunity to raise points with me.

As of midday today, there had been 1,537 confirmed cases of foot and mouth disease in Great Britain. Since I spoke to the House last week, the average number of cases per day has fallen further, from 16 in the week ending 22 April, to 11 in the week ending 29 April. That continues the decline of the disease from the highest point of 43 cases per day in the week ending 1 April.

More than 2.4 million animals have now been slaughtered for disease control purposes. A further 630,000 animals have been slaughtered under the livestock welfare disposal scheme. May I remind the House that in the 1967 outbreak of foot and mouth disease, which lasted for more than seven months, only 434,000 animals were slaughtered in total? The current outbreak is, as I have said before, unprecedented in scale and in the speed at which it spread.

There is no longer any backlog of animals awaiting disposal, anywhere in Great Britain. The disposal backlog in Devon, to which I referred last week, will have been cleared by the end of today. There are small numbers of animals awaiting slaughter, but the position has improved greatly during the past few weeks. That achievement is the result of a concerted effort in the past few days and weeks, using all the disposal methods—rendering, burning, incinerating, landfill and burial—according to need and as appropriate in the local circumstances.

We have been able to lift restrictions in 10 different areas, where there have been no new cases for 30 days and where thorough veterinary and serological testing has taken place. Some 16,000 farms have now benefited from the lifting of the tighter movement restrictions associated with infected areas. That represents about 13 per cent. of the number of farms that were ever restricted.

We can therefore be optimistic about the future course of the disease, although the epidemiologists warn us that cases will continue to occur for some time yet. What is clear is that our policy was the right one: to bear down on the outbreak swiftly and prevent greater spread of the disease by rapid slaughtering, within 24 hours of the report of a new case, tracing dangerous contacts and tackling the disease on contiguous premises within 48 hours. This has been crucial to the control of the epidemic.

Last week I was able to announce to the House a broadening of the existing areas of discretion for local veterinary judgment in relation to culling on a neighbouring farm. That has provided some relief from automatic slaughter of cattle and has been generally welcomed by farmers, as has the move towards making special arrangements for rare breeds of sheep and hefted flocks.

On vaccination, it remains the position that the necessary support among farmers, consumers and the food industry for a vaccination programme in Cumbria and possibly Devon has not been forthcoming and I cannot see that situation changing now, given the decline in the number of daily confirmed cases. Contingency plans remain in place for the rapid introduction of a vaccination programme should the situation change.

I announced last week a number of ways in which we have re-established routes for healthy livestock to be sold into the food chain. I am pleased to say that we are now issuing instructions to veterinary staff so that they can issue licences which will allow healthy stock from premises within 3 km of an infected place to move after a period of time to slaughter and use in the human food chain. Farmers who wish to take advantage of this should contact their local animal health offices. Access to the livestock welfare disposal scheme remains open to anyone who can demonstrate a real welfare problem that cannot be addressed in any other way. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister of State will be meeting farming organisations tomorrow to review the operation of the scheme and its future.

The Government also want to do something to help with welfare problems on farms in infected areas which cannot move animals because of the local intensity of foot and mouth disease cases. I therefore propose to ask our veterinary staff to examine these problems on a case by case basis and to permit movements on farms provided that the fight against foot and mouth disease is not compromised. The most common problem which this change will address will be where animals are not able to cross public roads to fresh grazing. The change will be introduced by the middle of next week at the latest.

We continue to pay large sums in compensation and other payments to farmers resulting from the foot and mouth outbreak. We have already paid over £100 million pounds in compensation and the latest estimate is that this figure will eventually be over £600 million. The livestock welfare disposal scheme is expected to provide more than £200 million. This is all in addition to the £156 million being paid in agrimonetary compensation to livestock farmers and all the other funding that the Government are providing to support the rural economy and the tourism industry more generally. We are in discussion with the devolved Administrations and the farming unions about the longer term recovery plan.

The Government have also taken steps to safeguard farmers' entitlements to CAP payments. Following consultation with farming unions, the deadline for submitting IACS forms will remain 15 May. However, we have agreed with the European Commission that it will amend its rules on changes that may be made to IACS forms after 15 May. This flexibility will make it easier for farmers to adjust their claims to take account of individual circumstances. My Department has written to all IACS applicants to give them full details of the flexibilities we have secured and the procedures to follow. Farmers whose cattle or sheep have been culled and who are currently unsure of their future prospects should take steps to safeguard their entitlement to future subsidy, if and when they decide to restock their farms. This means that they should submit an IACS form in the normal way by 15 May. Where appropriate, they should also tick the boxes on the form for hill farming allowances and extensification premium.

When I reported to the House on 27 March, I drew attention to the need to enforce the rules on commercial and personal imports of meat and meat products into the

United Kingdom. I should like now to inform the House of the steps that the Government have taken and are taking in this context.

The control of meat and meat product imports into this country involves the inspection of commercial imports at border inspection posts, effective controls on personal imports and action in shops and other food premises against sales of illegally imported food. The Government are taking action in all those contexts to build on our existing controls.

First, we have set up improved arrangements for the pooling of information in government about known or suspected illegal imports. That will help the authorities concerned—MAFF, port health authorities, local authorities and Customs and Excise—to target their activities on the areas of greatest risk.

Secondly, the Food Standards Agency has undertaken a programme of visits to ports and airports to examine the effectiveness of public health controls on imported food.

Thirdly, we shall be taking early steps to ensure that the restrictions on what may be brought into the United Kingdom from outside the European Union and the European Economic Area are made known to travellers by a publicity campaign involving the travel industry, airports, ports and Foreign and Commonwealth Office posts abroad.

Fourthly, the FSA has asked port health authorities and local authorities to ensure that, as part of their routine inspection of food premises and imported food, they check for illegal imports. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State has laid before the House an amendment to the Products of Animal Origin (Import and Export) Regulations 1996 that will clarify local authorities' powers to seize suspected illegal imports. I understand that equivalent action is being taken in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Imports of meat and meat products into the United Kingdom, as into other member states of the European Union, take place within the framework of European law. As I promised the House on 27 March, I have asked the European Commission to give urgent attention to ensuring that the law on personal imports into the EU is clear and robust. Commissioner Byrne indicated at last week's meeting of the Agriculture Council that the Commission attaches great importance to ensuring that there is a high level of protection from disease at the Community's borders. I understand that the Commission's current thinking is that the main scope for tightening the EU's policy on imports lies in ensuring that the current rules are properly policed and in identifying and closing any loopholes.

I referred last week to the banning of pigswill and undertook to make a further announcement. I can inform the House that we are today making an order that will ban the feeding to livestock swill of catering waste that contains or has been in contact with meat. The ban is extended to include poultry and fish waste. The order will come into force on 24 May, after a three week phase-in period that is designed to ensure that animals can safely be weaned off waste food and on to an alternative diet.

The order has been made after consultation with the industry and other interested parties. The possible banning of all catering waste was considered in the consultation, but was subsequently deemed unnecessary, although the feeding of all types of catering waste from premises where meat or meat products are handled or prepared will be banned.

As I said, we can be cautiously optimistic that the worst is over, but we know that there will be sporadic outbreaks for some time and that we cannot afford to let our guard drop for a moment. All the resources that are required to overcome the disease will remain in place where they are needed, for as long as they are needed. We are determined to see this operation through to a successful conclusion. It is in all our interests to ensure that the job is done properly, so that farming and the whole of the countryside can get back to normal as soon as possible.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Speaker:** Order. Before I call the Opposition spokesman, may I say that it is my desire to call every hon. Member who wishes to speak on the statement? However, I need the co-operation of the House and I expect questions to be as brief as possible.

**Mr. Tim Yeo** (South Suffolk): I am grateful to the Minister for his statement, which was supplied to me in advance. I want to begin by repeating the tribute that Conservative Members have paid previously to everyone in the front line of the crisis—the Army, the vets and the many others who have been working extremely hard to get on top of the disease.

I warmly welcome the improved position that the Minister described. It is very good news that the measures that have been taken—it has to be said that some of them were taken belatedly—are now working. Nevertheless, he should know that the crisis is far from over in many parts of Britain. What he describes as a small number of animals awaiting slaughter was, last night, 107,000—more than three times the number that was awaiting slaughter on the day that I first called for the Army to be deployed in an operational role to bring the crisis under control.

In Cumbria, the situation is still so serious that the Army has just been forced to establish a new crisis management centre in the south of the county. In Somerset this week, the disease has struck in a new part of the county for the first time. In Scotland, the disease is still spreading from west to east in the border country. In the Welsh valleys new areas have suffered infection.

On top of that, there is growing criticism from farmers and vets, in places as far apart as Devon and Essex, that the Government may have changed the way in which cases are counted. In Essex, for example, antibodies were found in sheep at Great Wigborough, but the Ministry decided not to include that as an infected case. If foot and mouth was present in those animals, as local farmers and vets believe, why does the Ministry refuse to classify it as a confirmed case?

Will the Minister explain what changes have been made to the basis on which the daily total of new cases is now calculated? Does he agree that, if cases of infection are not recorded as such, there is a danger that an area may wrongly be assumed to be free of the disease and that that may lead to restrictions being lifted prematurely, and the risk of a flare up of the disease at a later date? Was it not one of the lessons of the 1967 outbreak that the foot was taken off the pedal prematurely?

*[Mr. Tim Yeo]*

When the Prime Minister abandoned his plan five weeks ago for an election today, I set out the four tests on which judgment about whether the crisis had been resolved should be based. Good progress has been made towards satisfying two of those tests—the report-to-slaughter time down to 24 hours for infected cases, and the fall in the daily total of new cases. But the other two tests have not been met. The geographical spread of the disease has not yet been reversed, and many farmers with healthy animals are still not allowed to move them, for very good reasons.

How many farmers are subject to movement restrictions on healthy animals and how long does the Minister expect those restrictions to remain? Does he agree that farming cannot return to normal until all those restrictions are lifted, and the crisis cannot therefore be said to be fully resolved until all four of my tests have been met?

In the context of the welfare disposal scheme, I welcome the steps that the Minister has announced this afternoon. How long will it be before farmers with healthy animals within 3 km of an infected place are allowed to move those animals to slaughter for the human food chain? Will the Minister confirm that help will continue to be given to farmers whose premises now require disinfection?

It is now clear that the disease reached its present horrific scale because of the Government's failure to take the prompt action suggested by the Conservative party and recommended by the report to the Northumberland inquiry and the report of western command after the 1967 outbreak. *[Interruption.]* The Parliamentary Secretary says that this crisis is less serious than the one in 1967.

**The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley):** It has been dealt with faster.

**Mr. Yeo:** The Minister has just said that, in 1967, fewer than 500,000 animals were slaughtered. In this crisis already 2.5 million animals have been compulsorily slaughtered and the movement restrictions on healthy animals, which have been imposed directly because of the crisis, have led to farmers asking for another 1.5 million animals to be voluntarily slaughtered. We are talking about a loss of livestock eight times that of 1967. That scale of crisis is the result of Government inaction.

Will the Minister confirm that, when the inquiry into the handling of the crisis is set up, independent experts will be asked to assess by how much the spread of the disease could have been reduced, how many animals might have been saved and how many businesses might have survived if the Army had been given the full operational role that we called for on 11 March, and if the policy of slaughter on suspicion had been introduced more promptly to cut the report-to-slaughter time to less than 24 hours at an earlier date?

On compensation, is the Minister aware of the anxiety about the retrospective cut that he announced last week in payments to farmers whose animals had been accepted for the welfare disposal scheme before 27 April? Will he reverse the decision and eliminate the element of retrospection? Will he speed up compensation payments generally? His statement suggests that approximately £500 million is currently owed to farmers whose animals have been slaughtered. Why has he not acted to help farmers whose cattle have passed the age of 30 months and cannot be sold because of movement restrictions? They have suffered an unrecoverable loss directly because of the epidemic.

I welcome the steps that the Minister announced for dealing with import controls. Is he now ready to introduce long overdue measures to stop meat entering Britain from countries where foot and mouth disease is endemic and to block the importing of other sub-standard meat, which may endanger human or animal health? Will he assure hon. Members that swift action will be taken if the Food Standards Agency decides that controls at ports and airports are too weak? Does he realise that my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) raised the problem of personal imports through Heathrow, and that the Ministry was asked to take action in May last year? Nothing was done. Only last Sunday 444 kg of fish and meat in 43 bags were discovered on one flight from Ghana. I recently visited the port of Dover, where no controls are exercised on food imports.

Livestock farmers are not the only people who have suffered through foot and mouth disease. Thousands of businesses in tourism and other rural activities such as equestrianism have been devastated. Why has nothing further been heard from the Government's taskforce? Why has the Conservative proposal of offering interest-free loans to affected businesses not been accepted? That proposal was suggested in the House more than six weeks ago, and has widespread support even among Labour Members.

If today's statement is the last to Parliament on the subject before Dissolution, will the Minister confirm that full details of the progress of the disease will be available to all candidates on a constituency basis throughout the election campaign?

The 10 weeks of the foot and mouth disease crisis have exposed muddle, incompetence and delay at every level of Government. Farmers, other businesses and taxpayers will pay a high price for ministerial negligence, especially in the early stages of the epidemic. At each stage, the Prime Minister has acted with his eye on the headlines and not on the problems. First, he played down the crisis. He was afraid that admitting that we were facing a national emergency would wreck his precious election timetable. Now he claims that we are on the home straight, but millions of hard-working men and women whose livelihoods have been put at risk by Government dither are nowhere near it. They face an uncertain and, in many cases, bleak future. They will have listened in vain today for any genuine encouragement and assurance that the Labour Government care enough about the rural communities that they have done so much to damage in the past four years to take the necessary action to ensure their survival.

**Mr. Brown:** Let me repeat that it is a mistake to milk a serious disease outbreak for party political purposes. *[Interruption.]*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst):** Order. I encourage those on the Opposition Benches to give the Minister a hearing.

**Mr. Brown:** Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Having asked the questions, it would be as well if the Opposition allowed me to answer them rather than behaving like overgrown public school boys.

I shall answer the questions in reverse order. I shall continue to put all the information that I can into the public domain. That has been my policy throughout the outbreak. We will make public and act on any advice that we receive from the FSA.

There has been no retrospective cut in rates under the welfare disposal scheme. It is essential to all those who care about the livestock industry, however, that our introduction of the welfare scheme does not create a false market. In the long term, that would be ruinous for the industry and suck in imports.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) questioned our prompt action—this, incidentally, from a party that took 11 years to get the proper public protection measures into place to deal with BSE—and referred to when the Army were called in. The advice of the 1967 outbreak report was followed. Ministerial correspondence was exchanged in government, and the Army was called in before the first call for its deployment by the parliamentary Opposition.

The House will know that the Agriculture Select Committee has already begun an inquiry into the outbreak, and I have appeared before it twice, so far. There is also bound to be a Public Accounts Committee inquiry. I pledge that whatever inquiries are held, I will co-operate fully, as will my departmental officials, and we will give evidence willingly.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the comparative scale of the 1967 outbreak. In spite of the much larger scale of this outbreak, we have brought it under control and are moving towards a conclusion more promptly than in 1967.

I answered the question about the 3 km zones in my opening statement. The hon. Gentleman also asked how many farms are still subject to movement restrictions. The answer is some 160,000, as Great Britain is still a control zone.

On the question of the compilation of statistics, where infected premises are confirmed as such, they are reported as such. There are no exemptions. If blood tests turn out negative, however, we cannot report such a case as a positive case.

The hon. Gentleman said that the outbreak was far from over. Yes, there will be cases for a while yet, and it is right that we remain vigilant, do not drop our guard and bear down on those cases.

Finally, I thank the hon. Gentleman for his recognition of the fact that the position has improved and for his support for the public servants—both civilian and military—who are working so hard to bring this terrible disease outbreak to a firm conclusion.

**Mr. David Drew** (Stroud): May I be the first to congratulate my right hon. Friend not only on his steadfastness through this difficult time, but on his good humour, which is often needed in these difficult circumstances? Will he look at how he can begin to shrink the ring around infected premises—those farms that are subject to form D restrictions—as quickly as possible because that is where the biggest problems are arising in the recovery period?

Will my right hon. Friend make sure that payments are made expeditiously? People who have been waiting for a good number of weeks need to know not only how they will restock, but how they will afford to do that and other things on their holding. Will he conduct an investigation into the state veterinary service—which was cut to ribbons by the Conservatives—to see how we can rebuild it?

**Mr. Brown:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right that the size of the state veterinary service is one of the issues that we will want to consider in the aftermath of this terrible disease outbreak. On prompt payment, I have already asked officials what can be done to make sure that we are making prompt payments in these terrible circumstances.

As for shrinking the 3 km infected zones, where that is possible I have asked that it be done, but it has to be consistent with disease control. We are trying to find ways of enabling livestock from premises under form D restrictions to get to the market. As I said in my opening statement, I hope that that is under way by the middle of next week.

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): May I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the prior notice that he gave me of his statement? I welcome it and the general tenor of the improving situation that it described. However, I express caution; any suggestion that the crisis is over will be seen as a joke in the affected areas. If the epidemic is abating in livestock, there will still be many business casualties in the coming months. Given the new case in Wiveliscombe in Somerset, can the right hon. Gentleman scotch any rumours by stating categorically that no feral deer have tested positive for foot and mouth disease?

May I welcome the flexibility now exercised in the contiguous cull? Will the Minister pay particular attention to valuable pedigree herds that may be caught up in an infected area? On the welfare schemes, how is it that in Devon, where there is already a great deal of concern about the changes in compensation rates, the first newsletter issued by MAFF in the county gave the old, incorrect rates to farmers?

Has the Minister given further consideration to re-establishing the over-30-months scheme? We are approaching spring calving and a lot of cows would normally be moved on at that stage. A backlog will build up unless a suitable measure is put in place in the relatively near future. I welcome the relaxation on form D restricted areas. Does he agree that the best course of action for farmers caught in such areas is to enable them to move non-infected animals for sale?

On import controls, is not it extraordinary that the elementary advice in the statement—that the FSA has asked port health authorities and local authorities to check for illegal imports—should have been given at this stage in the crisis? Perhaps that explains why my hon. Friends and I have been refused permission by Customs and Excise to talk to the authorities at ports.

On pigswill orders, can the Minister confirm that what he has said today means that whey will be excluded from the restriction and, therefore, that the cheese-making industry will not be affected? I had expressed concern about that.

Lastly, will the Minister join the Minister for the Environment in saying that there should be an independent public inquiry on the handling of the foot and

*[Mr. David Heath]*

mouth disease outbreak? The Minister should have nothing to fear from some aspects of that inquiry, but clearly there is scope for improvement. We need a clear commitment to allowing someone to consider the evidence of the past few months.

**Mr. Brown:** Of course, we shall consider all the issues arising from the disease outbreak. On whey, my understanding is the same as that of the hon. Gentleman. On enforcement, it is perfectly reasonable for the FSA to highlight those issues with the appropriate regulatory authorities. On the over-30-months scheme, I want to return it to normal working. On the welfare schemes, I understand the point that he makes, but ensuring that we are not setting rates that create a false market is essential for the reasons that I set out earlier.

On the hon. Gentleman's question about pedigree herds, the crucial issue is biosecurity on the farm. If farmers want their animals to be given due consideration when their farm is contiguous to an infected premise, the correct way to achieve that is to pay scrupulous attention to biosecurity. Clearly, the owners of pedigree herds are already well aware of that.

On feral deer, I am still not aware of any case of the disease having been found, although I have discussed what the Government would do in such circumstances, because we would not automatically seek to cull it out. I strongly agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about acting with caution and not saying that the outbreak is over. There is still much to be done, and that includes disease control measures.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): A number of farmers in Pendle have been in touch with me to express concern about the 20-day standstill period. I appreciate that the Government are consulting on that, but can the Minister tell the House anything about the issue? Is he minded to make a policy change?

**Mr. Brown:** The consultation period is not over yet, and a number of matters of detail have emerged already. Although the principle of a 20-day standstill for sheep and cattle has been welcomed, people want the Government further to consider a number of caveats, so I have extended the consultation period. The Government have not reached a firm conclusion.

**Mrs. Ann Winterton** (Congleton): Will the Minister confirm that there will be a full judicial inquiry, on which the Government so enthusiastically insisted for BSE, into the foot and mouth outbreak? If not, surely the Government will be accused of being interested in the problems of previous Governments, but not in their own.

**Mr. Brown:** I have nothing to add to what I have already said to the House.

**Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): I thank my right hon. Friend for the measures that he has announced today and inform him that, unfortunately, the 18th outbreak in Monmouthshire occurred just last week. It has affected seven contiguous farms.

The main concern of the farmers with whom I have been dealing this week are delays in compensation and the reduction in the rates of the welfare disposal scheme. It is particularly unfair on those farmers to experience unreasonable delays in dealing with their applications. Will my right hon. Friend consider the operation of the Intervention Board, which is a rather confusing institution for any of us to deal with? I hope that designated officers can deal with regions or sub-regions of the country at least, so that we can speak to someone in person.

**Mr. Brown:** The purpose of the welfare scheme is to deal with genuine welfare problems whereby animals cannot be managed where they are or cannot be moved under licence, which is the preferred option. My hon. Friend asks about making payments as expeditiously as we can. I have asked officials to see what more can be done.

**Mr. Patrick Nicholls** (Teignbridge): The very measured tones in which the right hon. Gentleman has talked about the problem today represent a marked contrast with the reported comments of the Prime Minister, who is said effectively to have remarked that the crisis is over. The case in Wiveliscombe has been referred to, and MAFF has already identified 15 dangerous contacts.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, if the measured tones that he uses are replaced by those of the Prime Minister, the public will be given the impression that the crisis is over and will drop their guard? There are already reports in the west country of farmers moving their stock around without having received the appropriate licences, and if the Prime Minister's tone is adopted, we may yet reap the whirlwind.

**Mr. Brown:** The Prime Minister has not said that the outbreak is over. It is not. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will join me in saying very firmly to all involved in the livestock industry, but to farmers in particular, that they must not move their livestock without a licence. Unauthorised movement of livestock is the surest way to keep the disease outbreak going.

**Mr. Eric Martlew** (Carlisle): I thank the Minister for all the hard work that he and his staff have put in. He has visited my constituency twice.

There has been a severe problem in Cumbria, but over the 10 weeks a lot of local labour has been employed in the cull. Many of those people lost their jobs because of foot and mouth. Can my right hon. Friend give an assurance that local people will be the last to lose their jobs as the handling of the epidemic winds down? A senior official of the Lake district national park has said that it is unlikely that access to the fells will be possible this year. Did that official get his information from MAFF and does my right hon. Friend believe that that is the case? If it is, the tourism industry in Cumbria will have severe problems.

**Mr. Brown:** That is not my understanding of the situation, but I shall ensure that my hon. Friend gets a written statement on access to the fells. In Carlisle we have tried to employ those who have been displaced from their normal work because of the outbreak on disease control measures. Although I cannot give him the specific assurance for which he asks, I can say that we will do what we can to try to maintain the local employment base where that is possible.

Let me take the opportunity to express my admiration for the community that my hon. Friend represents, and the neighbouring communities, which have been resilient throughout this most terrible outbreak.

**Sir Peter Emery** (East Devon): I wish to put to the Minister a question that was not asked by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), the shadow Minister of Agriculture, who has greatly enhanced his reputation over the past 11 weeks by his sensible handling of the problem for the Opposition.

The Government, understanding that the outbreak was a national emergency, rightly introduced the funding of hardship relief.

That is proceeding, but one understood when it was introduced that the expense was to be met by the national Exchequer. We now find that the areas that have been hit are being called on to meet between 5 and 25 per cent. of the cost of the hardship relief. The local authorities that have had no problems have no extra expense, whereas a quite small district council in East Devon that has had cases of foot and mouth, and where hardship relief is being provided, is faced with an extra bill of £123,000. That is something that it never expected. Surely that cost should be met by the total Exchequer. May I urge the Minister to take this matter to the Treasury and to the Prime Minister—the Minister will not decide this himself—because it stinks of Treasury control, and is not a proper and sensible relief?

**Mr. Brown:** There is no contributory element to the agriculture schemes for which I am responsible. I shall draw the right hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of the Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, who is responsible for the scheme to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

**Mrs. Diana Organ** (Forest of Dean): The policy of culling animals on contiguous premises has been successful in bringing this disease under control, but in the forest of Dean 26 premises have been served with A notices as part of the contiguous cull as a result of dangerous contact with free-roaming sheep from the statutory forest. People have objected to that on the basis that the animals can either be counted in penny numbers or are pets. Will my right hon. Friend respond to the request from me and others for a serological study in relation to the A notices, so that we can move on to the flexibility involving testing before culling that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) mentioned? Secondly, may I press the Minister to put pressure on Forest Enterprise to lift the restrictions on some areas of the statutory forest, when we have resolved the issue of the 26 outstanding A notices, so that we can rebuild the tourism that has been so badly damaged in my area?

**Mr. Brown:** I will be discussing that issue with Forest Enterprise, and I have asked for veterinary advice about the unique circumstances in my hon. Friend's constituency.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien** (Eddisbury): Is the Minister aware not only of the effects of an approach to businesses in the agricultural, tourist and retail sectors that has effectively been a sticking plaster on a haemorrhage, but of the real damage that is taking place for many businesses in rural areas affected by foot and mouth, not least the Clacher pipeline business in my constituency and many others like it? Do the Government have a policy for compensation and assistance, rather than a series of measures put together in a somewhat ad hoc way?

**Mr. Brown:** I have said this before, but let me repeat it. It would be quite wrong to imply that the Government can somehow buy out all the consequential losses resulting from foot and mouth disease. That is true of agriculture and of the other rural businesses that have been so terribly affected by this disease outbreak. By far the best thing that I can do for everyone employed in the rural community is to bear down on the disease and eliminate it, and that is what I am setting out to do.

**Mr. John Maples** (Stratford-on-Avon): May I raise two questions with the Minister that have been raised with me by farmers in the restricted zone on the Warwickshire-Worcestershire border? The last outbreak was nearly six weeks ago and we are now going through the process of inspections that we hope will result in the lifting of the zone restrictions. Part of that process involves the blood testing of sheep in the zone, and those blood tests all have to be analysed at the Pirbright laboratory. Is the Minister confident that there are enough resources available at Pirbright to do those tests without causing unnecessary delay?

Secondly, on the movement of healthy stock in a restricted zone for slaughter for human consumption, I understand that such stock has to be moved to an abattoir in the zone. That restriction makes it almost impossible for many people to get their animals to slaughter. Would it be possible to allow the animals to be moved to abattoirs slightly outside the restricted zone, if adequate safeguards were in place in the form of a veterinary inspection before the animals left the farm?

**Mr. Brown:** It may be possible for us to adopt such a scheme in future, but it is not at the moment. Although it is possible, under strictly controlled conditions, to move animals in an infected zone, we do not want to move animals from an infected zone to one that is currently clear, for obvious disease control reasons. I am not saying that it will not be possible to free up the movement restrictions as we continue to bear down on the disease, and I can see the desirability of the right hon. Gentleman's case from a trade point of view.

On the question of resources for testing at Pirbright, we have enhanced the available resources and I am confident that they are enough to carry out the serology tests that we need.

**Mr. John Burnett** (Torridge and West Devon): The Minister announced that there are proposals to allow healthy stock within 3 km of an infected place to move to slaughter "after a period of time". Will he help the House and my constituents by telling us what he anticipates that period of time to be? Secondly, it was dreadfully unfair to reduce the payments under the welfare cull. That is especially true for farmers under D notices, and I detect grave misgivings in all parts of the House about that.

*[Mr. John Burnett]*

Finally, will the Minister tell us when Dartmoor will be reopened to the public? The tourist trade on Dartmoor remains at a standstill and it is critical that it should be reopened as soon as it is safe to do so.

**Mr. Brown:** I strongly agree with the hon. Gentleman's last point. I want to get Dartmoor opened up as soon as possible. However, that must be consistent with disease control. On the D class restrictions for people in the 3 km zones, the hon. Gentleman is right to say that there are continuing difficulties with movement restrictions, although I hope that what I have announced today will help. My noble Friend Baroness Hayman, the Minister of State, is meeting farmers' representatives tomorrow to discuss the welfare scheme, and I have had some discussions with farmers' leaders on how to help those categories of animals that are compromised for market reasons rather than welfare reasons.

On the hon. Gentleman's question about the period of time, that will be a matter of clinical and veterinary judgment. That judgment will vary from place to place depending on circumstances, but a veterinary judgment will say whether the animal in question is disease-free.

**Mr. David Curry** (Skipton and Ripon): The Minister will know that this crisis will not end on the first day that there are no new cases to announce. That is true for farmers, and also for the hundreds of thousands of other businesses that have no cash or customers and face the prospect of their summer being shot to pieces as well. Will the Minister draw the attention of the Government to the need to persuade more British visitors to come to the countryside, through advertising campaigns? In Yorkshire, £80 out of every £100 spent on tourism comes from British visitors, and the quickest way to get economic life back into the countryside is to get Britons back into visiting their own country.

**Mr. Brown:** I agree with both the right hon. Gentleman's points. Yes, we need to promote domestic tourism, and my right hon. Friend is setting out to do just that. The disease is not over yet, and it requires continued vigilance not only from public servants, Ministers and Members of Parliament representing their constituents, but from the farming industry as well. Any unlicensed movement of animals carried out by people who believe that we are on the home straight could cause a resurgence of the disease outbreak. We must all remain vigilant and committed to bearing down on and eliminating the disease.

**Mr. Tim Collins** (Westmorland and Lonsdale): May I say that nowhere will there be more people praying that the Minister is right to be even cautiously optimistic than in Cumbria? Unfortunately, however, in south Cumbria things are not getting any better; they are still getting worse. In fact, there have been more outbreaks of the disease in my constituency in the past fortnight than in the whole of the period up until then. We have now lost at least half the irreplaceable rare breed sheep on the upland fells that play such a vital role in the ecology and look of the Lake district. Lake district tourist businesses in my constituency report that business is quieter and losses are greater now than they were before Easter.

May I press the Minister to consider taking two steps that need to be taken, as a matter of urgency? First, will he make it Government policy to ensure that rare sheep breeds such as Herdwick and rough fell are not wiped out? Will he declare today that no sheep belonging to those breeds will be wiped out unless there is specific blood-test evidence that they have the disease, and that measures will be introduced to ensure that a major ecological disaster does not take place in the coming weeks, when the last of those animals could be wiped out without MAFF's even knowing that that is what it is doing?

Secondly, will the Minister please convey a clear message to the Treasury and the rural taskforce that Cumbria is bleeding to death? Its Labour-controlled county council estimated this week that losses already amounted to £500 million in that county alone, and were escalating steadily. Businesses in my constituency and beyond need more help, and need it desperately.

**Mr. Brown:** I am considering what I can do, in the context of my ministerial responsibilities, to help the areas with highest infectivity—Cumbria and Devon specifically, but not exclusively. I will draw the hon. Gentleman's other remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State.

What the hon. Gentleman says about special breeds is entirely right: we need to devise a strategy that gives them the best possible chance of survival. I believe that we have done that in discussions with breed societies and representatives of local farmers. I am advised—and I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows this—that a management rather than an automatic-culling strategy has the best prospect of achieving what we both want to achieve.

**Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): I could raise many issues relating to the mishandling of the disease in my constituency, but I would not do so in a spirit of political partisanship, because I was sent here by my constituents to scrutinise the Executive. I shall, in fact, raise just one issue on which the Minister seemed to be prepared to move further. I refer to the form D restrictions.

A farmer in my constituency, Mr. Jeremy Boaz of Willow Bough farm in Grafton Flyford, stands to lose thousands of pounds because he is still under a form D restriction. If he has disposed of his animals under the livestock welfare disposal scheme, he will receive not £50 to £60 per sheep or lamb, but about £28.80. Moreover, he will receive nothing for animals that are slaughtered simply because he cannot afford to feed them. Meanwhile, the farm that caused the outbreak that led to the restriction is, quite rightly, receiving full compensation for its animals. Can such injustice be justified?

**Mr. Brown:** I hope that by the middle of next week the hon. Gentleman's constituent will be able to move his animals commercially, and receive a proper price for them in the marketplace.

**Mr. Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield): The Minister has spent some of his time providing some gentle reassurance that the Government have the issue of illegal food imports in hand. Is he aware of the sheer scale of the problem at

airports such as Heathrow, where dozens of flights end every day? The vast majority will not be checked for such illegal food imports. The episode of last Sunday night, which I witnessed—444 kg of food was seized—resulted from a random check carried out by Customs and Excise. It is unlikely to be repeated frequently, if at all, and nothing of the kind had happened for many weeks before that.

The Minister mentioned port health authorities, but they have no statutory powers to search passenger luggage for imports of commercial scale. Responsibility rests entirely with Customs and Excise, whose priorities at present relate to class A drugs and tobacco. Customs and Excise currently has no recourse to sniffer dogs, or to any of the resources or logistics that are necessary for the carrying out of checks on food imports.

Will the Minister confirm that he has been aware of the current state of affairs at least since 30 May last year, when he was written to directly about this very problem by those involved in the detection of such imports at Heathrow airport?

**Mr. Brown:** Yes, but as the hon. Gentleman says, enforcement of the law is a matter for Customs and Excise. Strategy powers reside with Customs and Excise, and any representations made to me, as a Minister, would be sent to Customs and Excise as well because of its powers to enforce the law.

I think that we should take a robust line on illegal imports. We have upped the checking and testing regime, which involves agencies throughout public service, including local authority trading standards officers. If more needs to be done, more will be done. I consider it unacceptable for the whole country to be put through the pain and turmoil that we have been put through over the past two months because of an illegal import of the disease. We must take firm action to ensure that that cannot happen again.

**Mr. A. J. Beith** (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the Minister visit Northumberland, which seems to have been forgotten, although we are seeing new cases nearly every day? Will he heed the anger of people in the Widdrington area, who have witnessed the burial of more than 100,000 carcases and the burning of 3,500, but are told that—although we are supposedly on the home straight—their burial site is to be kept open for another month? Will the Minister pay particular regard to the need to protect the Chillingham wild cattle, and to the impact of all this on tourism businesses? He could even make his trip enjoyable by fitting in a visit to one of the many attractions in Northumberland that are still open.

**Mr. Brown:** I am aware of the attractions. Given my constituency, Northumberland is high on the list of areas that I am unlikely to overlook. Even were I to do so, it should be borne in mind that my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, who represents Gateshead, is a frequent visitor.

Of course we will make arrangements to deal with special breeds, including Chillingham cattle. What I cannot do is give all hon. Members the special assurances that they would like about particular disposal sites or disposal routes. I know of the concern that these issues occasion locally—although people feel that the policy may be right in principle, no one is enthusiastic about having a disposal site as a neighbour—but I cannot assure the right hon. Gentleman that I will manage to intervene, and change decisions made by those who are responsible for these matters regionally.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): The Minister, with whom I have worked closely, will know that the two suspected cases in my constituency, at Adlington and North Rode, have proved negative. Unfortunately, however, D form notices and movement restrictions are still in place. I am receiving an increasing number of representations from the Macclesfield branch of the National Farmers Union, and from individual farmers: they want movement restrictions to be lifted immediately.

A number of farmers are what I would describe as examples of economic tragedy in the current crisis. For instance, Mr. J. L. Mellor of High Lee farm, Sutton, has store cattle that are long overdue for sale. He can no longer afford to feed them. Mr. P. J. Simcock of Brink farm, Pott Shrigley, has 300 hundred horned sheep that are available for slaughter immediately. Abattoirs are ready to accept them, but they cannot be sent to the abattoirs. They are clean beasts.

Farmers can no longer afford to feed their animals. Will the Minister examine such cases very carefully, and then tell me—and the Macclesfield NFU—that the D forms and movement restrictions will be lifted in my constituency, as a matter of urgency?

**Mr. Brown:** I will do what I can to help the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

For every three suspicious cases reported, only one turns out to be a case of foot and mouth disease. When cases are reported, however, it takes longer to prove that the animals are clear than it takes to confirm the disease. If it is possible to lift the 3 km movement restrictions, consistent with disease control, I will ask the regional veterinary authorities to consider the matter carefully, and to treat the case that the hon. Gentleman has raised as a matter of urgency.

**Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): The Minister was uncharacteristically sharp in his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton). She asked whether there could be a full-scale public inquiry into the matter. Many would want to contribute; many lessons need to be learned. Will the Minister, in the spirit of openness, take this opportunity to explain why the Government do not want a full-scale public inquiry, if that is the case? Many are calling for such an inquiry.

May I re-emphasise the point about the welfare scheme? My constituent Lyn Horrocks received approval for the slaughter of pigs under the scheme, but there was a delay, and she may now receive a lower price for her animals. Does the Minister consider that equitable?

**Mr. Brown:** If we are talking about the same case as the right hon. Gentleman asked me about at the Select Committee hearing, I do not know whether he has been able yet to drop me a note to explain why the animals cannot be moved or managed where they are. If he could drop me such a note, I promise that I will look at the particular constituency case.

*[Mr. Brown]*

I will co-operate with whatever inquiries are set up. Throughout the disease outbreak, I have put all the advice to me into the public domain and tried to explain my decisions as the disease has taken the course that it has. Where circumstances have changed, and therefore public policy has had to be adapted, I have explained that candidly in front of the House, the Select Committee and, where appropriate, at press conferences, too.

**Mr. John Whittingdale** (Maldon and East Chelmsford): Can the Minister explain why the MAFF website states that there have been no confirmed cases of foot and mouth in Essex for over three weeks when, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) said, very recently, 1,600 sheep and 112 pigs were slaughtered after antibodies were found in the blood of animals at a farm near Colchester? Does the Minister understand farmers' fears that they may not be being given all the facts? Can he take this opportunity to state exactly what he believes the position to be in Essex?

**Mr. Brown:** I shall write to the hon. Gentleman to ensure that he has a factual answer to the individual case, but the most likely explanation is that the animals tested negative and were taken out as dangerous contacts. *[Interruption.]* The presence of antibodies does not necessarily mean that the disease is present. If the animals tested negative for the disease, they would not be included as a positive case. That seems to be the most likely explanation, but I shall arrange for a formal reply to be sent to the hon. Gentleman and to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo). However, there is no question of the Government excluding positive cases from the total statistics.

**Sir Patrick Cormack** (South Staffordshire): The right hon. Gentleman has tried to be helpful throughout this terrible outbreak. In view of the fact that those who are suffering may shortly be deprived of parliamentary representation for a few weeks, will he set aside a day next week when he and his officials can see Members of Parliament who have particularly difficult cases, rather like the surgeries that we hold in our constituencies?

**Mr. Brown:** I always try to be as helpful as I can and will continue to be so while I am the Minister.

**Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Recently, I had a discussion with the Minister about the lack of communication between his officials and those in the devolved Administration in Cardiff. A week last Wednesday, I saw the officials in Cardiff, who sanctioned the movement of sheep within enclosed common land in several parts of my constituency on welfare grounds and because it was risk free. All they needed was the rubber stamp of the chief vet of MAFF. I was assured that those animals could be moved on Monday this week. That has still not happened. May I ask the Minister to intervene personally in the matter? It is an animal welfare problem of quite large proportions.

**Mr. Brown:** Veterinary authority in these matters is devolved: not only is there regional discretion, but operations on the ground are the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly, not the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. The veterinary advice comes from the same final source: the chief vet is the chief vet for Great Britain, not just for England. I will ask him to examine the case that the hon. Gentleman has raised, but I say gently that day-to-day operational responsibility lies with the Welsh Assembly and the Secretary for Agriculture and Rural Development in Wales.

**Sir David Madel** (South-West Bedfordshire): The Minister will recall that he answered a question from me last week about vaccine strategy for zoos. I am grateful to the civil servants in his office, who have listened to my representations since he answered that question. He knows how important that is for Whipsnade zoo in my constituency. Is the vaccine strategy document for zoos now in the public domain? If not, when will it be? When it is, please will he ensure that Whipsnade zoo rapidly has a copy of it?

**Mr. Brown:** I shall send a copy of the document to Whipsnade zoo and to the hon. Gentleman and place a copy in the Library.

**Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): The Minister has reiterated his commitment to MAFF being as open as possible about the progress of the disease. My understanding is that MAFF has been publishing the total number of outbreak cases on a constituency-by-constituency basis, but so far it has not been publishing the lists of the locations of those outbreaks, although it could easily do so because, obviously, it has those at its fingertips in order to arrive at the totals. Does he accept that it is important that that information should be published, particularly if there is a general election campaign going on, when hon. Members will not be able to question the Minister directly on the progress of the disease?

**Mr. Brown:** My understanding is that I continue to hold ministerial responsibilities regardless of whether a general election is called. I shall continue to treat all hon. Members who are standing for re-election with courtesy and do what I can to help with individual constituency cases.

I shall continue to publish constituency information. I had some reservations about putting the individual addresses of farmers that might be affected into the public domain. My preference was to give the parish where the outbreak had occurred, rather than the individual holding, but I found in the early days of the outbreak that the identities of the farms were appearing in all the newspapers. They were well known locally. I will examine what it is reasonable and fair to publish. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not give an absolute commitment, because I have reservations which relate solely to protecting the privacy of farmers, who are going through difficult enough circumstances with the disease outbreak without putting their names into the public domain, with all the consequences of that.

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): The Minister will recall that I raised the case of my

constituent, Mr. Tom Fudge of Neighbrook farm, Aston Magna near Moreton-in-Marsh. On that occasion, the Minister replied:

"The hon. Gentleman's point about the rates that the Government pay when we purchase animals for destruction is a fair one . . . I have urged the big retailers and others in the trade to behave responsibly and fairly throughout the supply chain. I have received a sympathetic and supportive response."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 1226.]

That same constituent telephoned me this morning. He said that he was feeding 1,400 sheep out of his savings. He has not been able to sell any owing to restrictions and is being offered £30 a lamb, when a couple of weeks ago the price was £45. He says that the foot and mouth crisis is going from bad to worse and asks what the Minister can do to help farmers such as him throughout the country.

**Mr. Brown:** One thing I cannot do is to organise the welfare disposal scheme in such a way that it acts as a substitute market. Seventy per cent. of the sheep sector is operating, admittedly under licence—under constrained circumstances—in a market-oriented way. If the hon. Gentleman drops me a note setting out the circumstances of his individual constituent, I will see what can be done to help. I am afraid that that is the best offer that I can make.

**Mr. Nick Harvey** (North Devon): Will the Minister put out more information to all farmers—not only those with access to the internet—about the restrictions that will apply over the next few months as they try to rebuild their businesses? I welcome the news letter that has been sent to all livestock farmers, although, as my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said, it contains out-of-date figures for the welfare scheme. Does the Minister understand the frustration of farmers who submitted claims under the welfare scheme some weeks ago, but who are now told by the Intervention Board that the paperwork cannot be found? What exactly is the logic of paying farmers who have kept the animals on their farms for more and more weeks, with all the costs that that incurs, a lower figure than farmers who submitted claims a long time ago and had less costs to cover?

**Mr. Brown:** The answer is that I must not set up an alternative market. We are trying to enable farmers to get their livestock moving through the food chain, rather than being purchased by the state. If the rates that the state is paying compromise the rates that the market would pay, clearly, the market will be supplied by imports and the farmer will be farming a welfare scheme, rather than running a livestock business. That is the answer to the question. It is in the longer term interest of the British livestock industry to get it operating as normally possible as we bear down on the disease outbreak.

**Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): The Minister quite rightly said that livestock should not be moved without a licence. However, is he aware of the bureaucratic delays, hurdles and obstacles placed in the way of farmers applying locally for such a licence? Will he personally take an interest in the matter and intervene to speed up the granting of licences while we remain in the throes of this dreadful disease? Will he also consider the human rights provisions of which the Government are such a fervent supporter and explain to local farmers in the Vale of York why they will receive a lower compensation rate under the welfare disposal scheme than will those who applied before 17 April?

**Mr. Brown:** I have answered the welfare question on a number of occasions. The danger is that we will create a false market and that people will farm the scheme rather than the market. I think that it is right to try to get animals moving through the supply chain, and I am putting considerable effort into trying to reinforce the strict licensing schemes that we already have in place.

Tomorrow, my noble Friend Baroness Hayman will meet representatives of the farming community to discuss farms that are under form D restrictions and consider what more can be done to help them. They will also be discussing what more can be done more generally to get the market working normally and the time scale for the welfare scheme—which is, after all, supposed to be a scheme of last resort, after moving the animals in the marketplace or managing them locally has failed as a strategy. It is not, and it cannot be, an alternative market.

**Mr. Christopher Gill** (Ludlow): I am glad to have the last word on this subject. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that there continue to be muddle, confusion and sheer incompetence in the Administration, as evidenced in the case of my constituent, Mr. Huntbatch of Hope farm, Minsterly? Last week, he was told that it would be a month before he could move his animals. This week, on Monday, he was told that it would be two months before he could move any of his animals. On Tuesday, he moved animals to an abattoir.

**Mr. Brown:** Actually it is I who get the last word, and I do not accept what the hon. Gentleman says. However, if there is anything that I can do to help his constituent, of course I shall.

## International Development White Paper

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Clelland.]*

2.52 pm

**The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short):** I very much welcome this opportunity to debate the Government's second White Paper on international development, "Eliminating World Poverty: Making Globalisation Work for the Poor". As the House knows, I greatly regretted the fact that time was not allocated for a statement when the White Paper was published. However, as they say, everything comes to those who wait. I am sure that we all agree that a debate is better than a statement and are pleased to have this debate.

As the House will know, in the past, little time was devoted to discussion of international development, which has for many years been regarded as a residual political issue. We had neither a Department nor a Select Committee to address it. I tell the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) that I hope that we do not have too many more international development events in this Parliament because I have already paid so many tributes to him that any more from me might embarrass him. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] Perhaps later.

Previously, very little time—10 minutes, I think—was allowed for a Question Time on international development. Now, we have a separate Department for International Development and the Select Committee on International Development, which has done a superb job under the able leadership of the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford. I have already made clear, and I really mean it, my respect for his commitment to international development and for the work that he has done on international development policy throughout his life, both when he worked at the Commonwealth Development Corporation and ever since he became an hon. Member.

Nevertheless, although we have had two White Papers, legislation on the CDC and an International Development Bill—which I hope will soon be enacted—there is further to go. There is no doubt that, as those who have reflected seriously on such matters probably agree, the biggest moral issue facing humanity is the fact that one in five of those who share this little planet of ours live in abject poverty. The consequences of that inequality for the world, both morally and in terms of world safety and stability, are one of the most important political, strategic and economic issues that the world will have to tackle.

We have a way to go in persuading the political system and all political commentators, both in the United Kingdom and around the world, to face up to the seriousness of the issue and to stop treating it as charity or a residual issue outside mainstream politics. We have to make it clear that, if we are to have a safe and decent future, our priority must be to manage the world more sustainably and justly.

**Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): I should simply like to reiterate the Secretary of State's point. On Tuesday, hon. Members debated HIV-AIDS in the developing world. Horrendous numbers of people are dying from HIV-AIDS, which she and I entirely agree may be the biggest catastrophe facing the world. Sadly, despite that 90-minute debate, the matter was not picked up at all by political commentators. I hope that she will reiterate, as I think many hon. Members will, that the disease is a disaster, particularly in the developing world.

**Clare Short:** I agree with the hon. Gentlemen. I also know that he has taken great interest in the subject and frequently tried to draw it to the attention of the House and anyone who would listen. I agree also that the failure of most media political commentators to take seriously that and other international development issues is both worrying and perplexing.

Some time ago, I read an article about the industrial revolution in the United Kingdom, which was a time of profound historical change. The article, however, said that not only contemporary debates in the House, but contemporary media reports, novels and cultural activity were all about landowners. Opinion formers of the time took no notice of the transformation that was caused by industrialisation. I think that we have a comparable situation now. The fact is that the world is becoming increasingly interdependent, and it will be increasingly at risk if we do not act to make it safe.

As I said, both political systems and political commentators treat international development as a residual issue of charity. That is a serious problem for the future safety of the world. However, those of us who do attend to these issues realise that fact and are trying to convince people of the issue's seriousness and the need to address it by making the necessary changes.

Our first White Paper on international development was published in November 1997. It committed the Government to focusing all our development efforts, both our bilateral programme and our influence in the international system, on the systematic reduction of poverty and on meeting the international development targets. Since then, we have worked hard, with considerable success, to try to build that type of commitment right across the international system. We have probably been more successful than I could have hoped for when we started out on the task.

My Department has also published a series of targeted strategy papers—which are not, as the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) once suggested, the reason for my Department's increased publication costs. The papers are in no way vanity publications, but serious documents on the international effort necessary if the targets are to be met. They are also being used worldwide to try to mobilise international collaboration and energy to meet the targets. The targets are not an accidental collection of good things; they track all types of policy necessary in poorer countries to lift people up and create sustainable improvement in their lives. They deal with subjects such as higher income levels, better health care, more education, clean water and better governance.

I became committed to moving on to the second White Paper, on globalisation, after the Seattle meeting. As hon. Members will remember, there was chaos, with large and destructive demonstrations, at that badly run meeting. More worrying was the muddle of some of the commentary on the meeting from around the world. We should seek urgently to clarify in world public opinion the definition, the promises and the threats of globalisation. We also have to clarify how we can manage it to ensure that the poor of the world benefit and that future of the world is stable and safe.

After Seattle, we had Prague, Washington and the May day demonstrations in our own country. There has been a strange mixture of forces, including some very nasty elements determined to use violence. It is extraordinary that people travel across the world at great expense to smash up McDonald's, even though there are plenty of McDonald's in their home countries. Such people are destructive and unhelpful.

There are some forces that are simply protectionist. The trade union movement in the United States is very small—only about 8 per cent. of American labour—but mobilised large numbers in Seattle to march for protectionism. It was strange, at a time of unprecedented growth in the US, before there had been any glimmer of a downturn, that they wanted to put up trade barriers, because they blamed any job losses—it was a time of major changes in technology, so some jobs went—on international competition and the fact that labour is cheaper in China. Such thinking is dangerous and muddled.

There are some environmental fundamentalists who, in a completely self-contradictory way, organise on the internet meetings at which they discuss how to prevent any investment in modern technology in the poorest parts of the world. They show deep double standards. In a muddled way, they think that the poverty and closeness to nature of a lot of people in Africa and southern Asia gives them a better standard of life. They enjoy all the fruits of the technology brought to us by multinational capital, but do not want the poorest continents and people to share in that.

All those groups advocate very undesirable policies and can be taken on one by one, but when I came back from Seattle, I found that many caring, decent people were deeply confused about the World Trade Organisation and how best to manage international trade. That is dangerous. The last time countries drew back into themselves in a knee-jerk reaction, as many in the United States want to do, was in the 1930s. Because trade and investment flows are becoming so rapid and bringing so much change, there is a danger of isolationism and recession returning.

Against that backdrop, I thought it important to amplify the analysis in our first White Paper, analysing the effect of globalisation on the poorest countries and setting out an agenda to be read more broadly, we hope, and influence public opinion at home and internationally. We need a commitment from Government to seek to manage this era in a way that benefits the poor and gives us a more stable and safer future.

That is the purpose of the second White Paper. I am pleased to say that it has attracted wide international attention. We published 4,000 copies of the first White Paper, which was considered influential and a success. Already, 14,000 copies of the full text of the second White Paper have been distributed in English, with 1,000 in French, Spanish, Portuguese and German. There has already been a reprint of the short introductory version, and 60,000 copies have been printed. The website has had half a million hits, with 11,000 serious visits in which the whole White Paper has been downloaded.

That is good. We need an international debate, and I know that some of the leading figures in the international system have read the White Paper, because they have talked to me about it. I hope that some of the MobGlob—I understand that some of these people who turn up to destroy international meetings call themselves that—might read it, and that some of the more intelligent among them might be encouraged to think more seriously and in a more forward-looking way about what is to be done.

From meetings in this country, I have detected a change of view about the WTO, and an understanding that it is membership-based, with countries joining by choice. People used to think that it was run by multinational companies. Three quarters of its membership are developing countries, and that gives us the possibility of having a multilateral, rules-based international trading body that makes decisions by consensus, holding the world together and bringing more justice to the poor of the world. To lose such institutions would throw the world into far more division, with the rich and powerful bullying and further marginalising the rest.

Apart from its attempt to influence public opinion on how to manage this era in a forward-looking way, the White Paper—I say this largely in honour of the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge)—contains a strong series of commitments across Government to trying to manage change in a way that benefits the poor, securing greater world stability.

There is a superb historical role for Britain. I think that it was Dean Rusk who said that we had lost an empire and never found a role. We all understand that comment. We are an open, trading, multicultural country with links with all parts of the world. We have a lot of influential positions on the international stage, because of both the bad and the good in our history. We are involved in the United Nations Security Council, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Commonwealth and the European Union, which is the largest single market in the world and the biggest destination for the exports of developing countries. To use our international influence to work for a more inclusive and just world that takes better account of the needs of poor people and countries is a fine role for the UK.

I hope that, across parties, we can hone a deeper and more informed commitment to that objective. In that way, Britain could make an important contribution to the world in the coming era.

**Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Does the Secretary of State agree that one of the most useful things that the Commonwealth could do is to identify the big global issues—electoral practices could be one example—on which it could make a major contribution, rather than, as it sometimes seems to do, trying to produce valuable programmes that are very like those produced by other organisations?

**Clare Short:** Yes. There is such a clear role for the Commonwealth. It has tantalised many people, because it involves relationships of genuine affection that people want to sustain, despite historical forces pulling in the other direction. There are many countries outside it that could join: one thinks of Afghanistan, the US and the Palestinian Authority. Rwanda would love to join, and is trying to convince us that there is a small part of Rwanda that was once colonised by Britain. We are all worried about its not having a role, yet people have such affection for it and there are still countries wanting to join.

In this era, in which we need to strengthen multinational institutions and reach agreements about how to manage the world economy by consensus—that is a

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fantastic task—the Commonwealth has a distinctive potential role, as it encompasses so much of the world. The consensus that it can generate could be taken into the appropriate multilateral institution to facilitate agreement on how to create a fairer world.

**Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): I am enjoying the Secretary of State's exposition of her vision, which I share, of Britain's future role in the world. Does she agree that, by pursuing policies of globalisation and development, we will help to solve the problem that the media are interested in and go on about day in, day out: asylum seekers and economic migrants?

**Clare Short:** I strongly agree. There are more refugees and asylum seekers in the world than there have ever been, and more of them are being housed in some of the poorest countries. There are more displaced people in Africa than ever before—from memory, about 10.5 million. Tanzania, one of the world's poorest countries, is host to 300,000 refugees. That is misery for the people concerned and for their continent and its future. Clearly, many people are also seeking to come to Europe, where there are better economic prospects. It is cruel to turn refugees away without examining the forces that are pushing them out of their own countries, because everyone prefers to stay in their own countries, given the chance. The creation of a world of equal development, where people have the chance of education and a decent life at home and the opportunity to travel out of interest and to share ideas with each other, is achievable in a 50-year time span. That should be our objective, instead of the erection of barriers around our own country. That cannot be the solution.

No matter how privileged a country is, it cannot control the future of world trade rules, the international environment or the level of conflict. Africa, the continent in the greatest trouble with disease and other problems, is on Europe's doorstep, so we cannot make even the richest and most privileged children or countries safe. We either manage the world more effectively or the catastrophes will bite back at all of us, wherever we live.

I am proud of the fact that, increasingly, it is the UK's view that we should have a coherent attitude to the international economy. For example, we should examine international trade negotiations not only from the perspective of what we can achieve for the UK—although of course we must look after our own interests—but from that of whether they will lead to a more sustainable and fairer international system. We are getting a reputation for taking that approach, and our influence on making the international system more collaborative, coherent and focused on the systematic reduction of poverty is increasing. I hope that that work will continue for many years, whichever party forms the Government. It is a profound, historical and moral approach, but we cannot be complacent whatever we do because so many people are so poor and suffer so greatly.

Some people talk themselves into depression on those issues, as if everything is getting worse. That is not so. More human beings are being educated—including more girls—living longer and having access to clean water than ever before. Partly because of that, more human beings are surviving and the world population is growing. More people have done better; but there are more people, so we have to ensure that the solutions we have found reach those people. The world population will stabilise as girls go to school and more people have a chance of a decent life, but if we do not increase our efforts there will be more and more catastrophes. We have made a contribution, but there is more to do and no one who cares about the issues can be complacent and think that enough has been done.

The White Paper starts by clarifying the term globalisation, because it is the source of muddle in the international debate. Some people think that it means what neo-liberalism meant some years ago: letting the market and inequality rip and rolling back the state. In the era when those ideas were dominant, public services were run down and poor people were excluded from health care and education, as happened in Africa, Latin America and other areas. Those people opposed those ideas, see globalisation as a continuation, and therefore oppose it. I understand those emotions, but that is a muddled view of what globalisation means.

Globalisation started, perhaps, with the ancient Egyptians. It has existed since humanity started to trade, share ideas and technologies and move around the world. It accelerated at the time of the industrial revolution, with more production, manufacturing and trade across the world, and it has accelerated massively recently for two reasons. The first is the end of the cold war. We now have one global economy, instead of two blocs, and that integration has speeded up the movement of capital, investment and ideas across the world. The second is the new technologies. Information technology moves ideas around the world very fast, so capital is more mobile. That has led to a reduction in barriers to trade and a fall in the cost of international transactions. The global economy is therefore much more integrated now than it was even 10 years ago.

The good side of globalisation, which is rarely mentioned, is the diffusion of global norms and values, including the spread of democracy. More people—around 62 per cent., although some would argue about some countries on the margins—live in a democracy. The proliferation of global agreements on the environment, such as those on ozone-depleting substances, biodiversity and development targets, are the beginning of a global ethic of morality and the inclusion of all. That expectation of the same norms and values is an attractive part of globalisation.

Globalisation also brings with it rapid change and new challenges. The scale and rapidity of the change has generated uncertainty, anxiety and alarm across the world, including in our own country. Rapid change is difficult for us all to deal with, but that distrust and worry creates the danger that regressive political movements could start to appeal to people. There are also worries about the impact of globalisation on people's culture. For example, some deplore Hollywoodisation, with everybody eating hamburgers and watching the same films. The White Paper acknowledges those fears, but it argues that we are more likely to end up with such a world if the poorest countries are all marginalised and their cultures disrespected. In a world of equal development, in which different languages, cultures and music are respected, that danger will recede.

People rightly also worry about the environment and the inequality within and between countries. Many people believe that such inequality is growing, but international equality has narrowed recently; it depends on the speed of development and economic growth in the poorest countries. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development member countries tend to trog along at 3 per cent. growth a year, and inequality will grow or shrink depending on whether poor countries do worse or better than that. The White Paper analyses the performance of individual countries, and some of the poor and middle-income countries that have opened up and liberalised have become more equal. Others have become less equal, but that is a matter of political choice, not a result of an invincible force that responds to globalisation.

The White Paper proposes ways in which the world can manage the forces of globalisation so that they are beneficial to humanity. The lesson of history is clear: open societies that learn from and trade with others are enriched materially and culturally. Societies that encourage education and services for all, that use modern technology and that distribute the resources of economic growth broadly are more civilised, just, decent, comfortable, happy and stable. That is how we should manage in this era, and those who turn their back on that approach will not bring its benefits to their countries.

In recent decades, those countries that have seized the opportunities offered by more open world markets to increase exports, and attract inward investment and modern technology, have made the greatest strides in reducing poverty. More people have been lifted out of poverty in the past 30 years than in the previous 500. The east Asian countries have performed spectacularly. China's performance in the past 15 years in the systematic reduction of the numbers of people living in abject poverty has been welcome, even though China may have other aspects—such as its treatment of Hong Kong—that we do not find attractive. Countries that liberalise sensibly, educate their people and have decent standards and access to modern technology can achieve the sort of economic growth that reduces poverty rapidly. We want to bring those lessons to parts of the world that have not benefited, especially Africa.

We are on track to reach the target of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, but that is because of the performance of China, India and Bangladesh, although there is much to do still in those countries. Some countries in Africa have reached that level, including Uganda, Mozambique and Botswana, but many have not. We could reach the target, yet large parts of Africa could continue to experience the misery of high levels of conflict and human suffering. We have to do better to bring progress to all countries.

Globalisation is creating an unprecedented opportunity to lift millions of the world's poorest people out of poverty. That can be done if we organise ourselves and share the ideas that make it possible, but it is not inevitable.

We are at a crossroads. Many countries could be marginalised and left to suffer in squalor and poverty while the rest of the world gets more wealthy. That would be morally repugnant and dangerous. As information is globalised, people will be able to see their own poverty and others' prosperity, and they will not accept it. The anger thus created could cause all sorts of disaster for everyone.

The White Paper argues that if the poorest countries can be drawn into the global economy and are thereby able to export goods and increase their access to modern knowledge and technology, the world could make massive progress towards the removal of abject poverty from the human condition. If we define poverty in relative terms, it may be true that the poor will always be with us, but abject poverty can be eradicated. It disappeared from Europe and north America at the time of the industrial revolution in the 1840s and 1850s. That shows that eradicating abject poverty from the world is an achievable objective.

**Ms Oona King** (Bethnal Green and Bow): I apologise to the House for being in and out of the debate because of my duties in Standing Committee, but my right hon. Friend spoke about drawing poorer countries into global trade. Is she going to speak about the definitions of pro-poor growth, on which I know that the Department has been working? Does she consider that some areas of growth are more likely to draw more people out of poverty more quickly than others? If so, will the Department do more work on that possibility?

**Clare Short:** I am coming to that, but it is not a complicated proposition. More research can always be done into how progress can be made more efficiently, but pro-poor growth is inclusive. Non-governmental organisations and people working in the development sector used to argue about whether growth was necessary or desirable when it came to reducing poverty, but that was ridiculous. Population growth without economic growth means that poverty will grow invincibly. That has been evident in some countries, especially in Africa.

However, growth that is not sustainable—such as that depending on the extraction of mineral resources that are not replaced—does not lift up a country. Growth whose proceeds go exclusively to one group does not reduce poverty, but rather maximises the risk of conflict. The research clearly shows that if all a country's people do not benefit from growth, the excluded group is more likely to resort to conflict in the absence of democratic opportunity.

Economic growth has to be sustainable. That means that a country's environment and resources must be taken into account but also, in the modern world, that good education and health care are available.

Education and health care are not just desirable: the technologies of modernity require people to be educated so that they can contribute to their countries and participate in the global economy. The fair distribution of the proceeds of growth means that education and health care are available to all. Economic change often disbenefits one group of people, and Governments have a duty to help them to adjust and find new avenues by which to go forward. If that happens, the sort of growth that brings benefits to everyone, and especially to the poor, can be sustained.

I want to mention inequality. Some of the Latin American countries are the most unequal in the world. For example, enormous wealth and desperate poverty exist side by side in Brazil. It takes longer for growth to reduce poverty in such countries. Unless a country's economic development is strange, the proceeds of growth tend to be distributed fairly evenly, but in very unequal countries the

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proceeds that go to the poor are very limited. Questions about the degree of inequality are questions of justice, but removing inequality depends on stability and the speed with which poverty is reduced. That lesson is clear, and measures must be taken to ensure that action is put in hand to reduce poverty.

As I said, extending education and health care to everyone is a fundamental requirement. Ill health is undesirable and causes suffering, but the research shows that poor people work endlessly. They are creative people but they work harder than anyone else in the world as they try to lift their families out of poverty. However, ill health constantly throws people back into poverty. If a family's breadwinner cannot work because of ill health, that family has no income. If a child or a dependant is unwell, the family borrows money—or begs, or sells belongings—to get drugs and health care that is often of very poor quality. Better health is desirable not only for its own sake, but because it helps people improve their lives and the lives of the next generation.

Education and health care are crucial for development. They are to be paid for out of the proceeds of development, but investment in those sectors is one of the ways to secure the conditions necessary for development.

**Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): The Secretary of State mentioned the terrible disparity between the very wealthy and the very poor in South America. Will she comment on the drug barons and the regimes in that part of the world, where there seems to be a vested interest in feeding drug habits and keeping as many people as possible oppressed in poverty? Should not the western world take even more interest in that than it does at present?

**Clare Short:** The problem of drugs extends world wide. Drugs involve criminality, illegality and instability. Their use by people who are marginalised and often damaged is evident even in countries such as our own. Drug use is a crisis of the era.

Colombia is an example of a country with poor governance, widespread violence and an absence of justice or law. In such countries, very poor people who do not use drugs grow them, as they are the only crops that will secure an income. It is no good persecuting those people: they must be offered the chance of a legitimate life. They need to have the economic well-being that comes with taking legitimate produce to market, and which gives them the chance to send their children to school and to enjoy decent health care.

Too often in the past the focus has been on bombing campaigns. Unless a decent future is promised, people return to growing drugs because that is all that they can do. The drug barons are the only people who will buy such crops, and we must work hard to find more constructive solutions that offer people the chance of decent lives.

For example, the UN spent a lot of money in Afghanistan on paying people not to grow drugs. They stopped, but they started again because they were not offered the chance of decent lives that did not depend on drug production.

**Mrs. Gillan:** The Secretary of State may know that I have been trying to champion the cause of growing pyrethrum as an alternative to poppies. It is possible that pyrethrum could be a crop substitute for drug production. Will she look again at my letters to the Department on crop substitution, which offers a way forward for families that depend on growing drugs to feed and clothe their children?

**Clare Short:** I should be delighted to do so, although I do not think that the hon. Lady has sent me any letters, as I would have read them. I am ashamed to say that I do not know what pyrethrum is.

**Mrs. Gillan:** It is a variety of chrysanthemum.

**Clare Short:** Oh, I know what chrysanthemums are. I should be delighted to look at her letters if she sends me copies, but there is more to the problem than finding just one crop substitute. People must also be able to get crops to market and their children to school. If the package on offer is not sufficient to allow people to have legitimate lives, the men with guns will remain in control and people will be unable to move forward.

Pro-poor growth and establishing educated and healthy populations are key requirements in achieving progress. Development assistance is also vital, and we need more of it, but it must be deployed differently. In the past, it has been associated with the charitable mindset. I do not deny the value of charity—we should all care for those in need—but charity consists of handouts to the poor, and it is not development. The task is to use overseas development assistance to create the conditions that enable people to lift up their lives.

To achieve that, we must stop having lots of different, fragmented projects and instead help countries establish the effective institutions of a modern state. Those institutions provide services to a country's people and run the economy in a way that ensures that savings stay at home, that inward investment is secured and that people have access to modern technology. In that way, a country's economy can grow in a way that benefits all.

The White Paper commits us to increase United Kingdom development assistance as a proportion of gross domestic product to 0.33 per cent. by 2003–04—a 45 per cent. increase. We are also allocating progressively more to low-income countries and untying our development assistance, for which we have had all-party support. However, we could do better and that I hope we will have all-party support to help us continue making progress so that we reach the UN target of 0.7 per cent. I am delighted to tell the House that after 32 years of trying, we have agreement with the OECD Development Assistance Committee that aid to the least developed countries will be untied. That is very important, because when aid is tied, supplies have to come from the giving country. It is motivated by trade connections, leads to growth inefficiency and does not enable countries to put in place the institutions that they need to go forward.

We must build an international system focused on the systematic reduction of poverty. We have been working on that with some success, but there is more to be done. The UN is precious—nothing can replace it—but it could be more efficient. I am haunted by Sierra Leone. We will succeed there, but UN peacekeeping could be more efficient and effective, and we must all work together to achieve that.

We must have fair international rules and strong international institutions to harness private capital and trading opportunities to improve the life of the poor. We must challenge the MobGlob, the mobilisation against globalisation. What they preach is a disaster for the world and for the poor. The systematic reduction of poverty requires greater, not less, international co-operation. Without rules, the strong and the rich will bully the rest. Sovereignty now stays with nation states—it does not go to any other institution, but must be pooled to be exercised. There are some things that countries cannot do on their own. Countries must collaborate with others to produce rules that will benefit everyone. If we cannot do that, we will be in trouble.

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough): I agree with everything that the Secretary of State has said, something that I cannot always say, and I congratulate her on her speech. Will she say something about the need to encourage greater charitable giving in the west? I know that progress has been made with the gift aid scheme and other measures. There is a limit to what the taxpayer in the developed world will pay, yet we would all like to spend much more on international development.

**Clare Short:** People in this country are very generous. That is also true of the USA, which is not always as governmentally committed to development and often thinks, perhaps because it is such a big country, that it can secure all that it needs unilaterally. In the United Kingdom, people provide £400 million a year to development NGOs and the taxpayer tops that up with another £195 million or so a year. Dues paid into the international system have come to just over £3 billion this year, and at 0.7 per cent. of GDP, that figure would be roughly £7 billion.

People are generous when it comes to charitable giving, but we also want to make a contribution to countries, and there are some things that charities cannot do. Some countries have rotten financial systems and need better management of their public finances. A charity cannot put that right. We are working to educate public opinion in this country; there is no question that people, especially the young, who will inherit the future, care about the poor of the world. However, when asked what can be done, they say "Give to charity." That is honourable and I admire it, but we need to call for fairer trade rules and international environment agreements along with stronger UN peacekeeping capacity so that citizens can use their democratic power to achieve the conditions necessary to make the progress that we want to see.

I have three final points. First, it is increasingly clear that no matter what one's economic, political or geographic perspective, in a globalising world, eliminating poverty is more important than ever. We live in a world in which great wealth and great squalor exist side by side. The immorality of that is clear, but in a globalising world we also need to focus more actively on poverty elimination to secure future stability and prosperity for all. The dangers for the future are environmental degradation, conflict and diseases for which we have no cure, such as HIV/AIDS and multi-drug-resistant TB. Some 20 per cent. of the population in our neighbouring continent, Africa, live under conditions of conflict. That causes enormous suffering. Refugee movement is a barrier to development, and the issue of asylum seekers will affect Europe.

This is about our safety and more justice in the world. It is a priority; we know what to do. We live in a time of unprecedented knowledge, technology and capital. We know the conditions that produce development; we must be intelligent in applying them more broadly and collaborating internationally. In that way, we can make massive progress.

Secondly, we are living in a time of profound change. There is intellectual and political mind-lag in the world. Some institutions are attending to the agenda of 50 years ago. We must move our political institutions and thinking forward so that these issues are regarded as a priority for the safety of the future. We must do everything that we can to get more people to involve more people. The White Paper is designed to help in that way.

Finally, I believe that there is more cynicism and negativism in the media and in much political commentary than there has been in my lifetime. Everyone is supposed to have an ulterior motive. There is no room for decent and honest disagreement—we must all carp and sneer. I do not like that—it is not a pleasant way of proceeding politically, and it is also dangerous. We could achieve massive historical change, but for that, people need to work together and believe that it is possible to collaborate. If cynicism takes over, we will not achieve that.

This is a wonderful role for Britain; we can make an important contribution to the world. However, people must raise their sights to see where the need is and what is possible. If they work together to achieve that, we could have a world in which the extremes of poverty that existed in this country in the 1850s have gone from the world. Every child would be educated, and the world would be safer and more decent. All of us who have been able to contribute to that in any way can be proud of our part in political life.

3.37 pm

**Mr. Gary Streeter** (South-West Devon): I am very glad to follow the Secretary of State. I hope to make a speech in a similar vein. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), I agree with everything that the right hon. Lady said—to my concern and, probably, her distress. The silent one on our Front Bench is now scribbling furiously in a little blue book.

I share the Secretary of State's vision about the contribution that this country can make to international development, peacekeeping, diplomacy and bringing people together. We are uniquely qualified to do those things. We are not a superpower; we have lost our empire and have, for some years, been in search of a role, and I think this is it. We can punch above our weight, bring people together and seek to make real inroads into abject poverty. I agree with the right hon. Lady that we are at a crossroads in terms of globalisation. The international community and Governments throughout the world need to make the right choice. We must ensure that we encourage them to do so.

As has been said, the British people have repeatedly shown their concern for the world's poorest through their generous response to recent crises in Kosovo, central America, Mozambique and Gujarat, the inspirational Jubilee 2000 campaign and their consistent support, year in, year out, for excellent British aid agencies. Many of our constituents have already sent us a clear signal: they

*[Mr. Gary Streeter]*

want our country to be at the forefront in the attack on global poverty. I certainly agree that, at present, the House does not do justice to the seriousness of that subject.

At this point in my speech, I had intended to make some sneaky and sneering party political points about the absence of debate, but I have decided not to make them—[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on, go on!"] No, I am overwhelmed by the spirit of consensus and am reluctant to break out of its orbit.

The Conservatives broadly welcome the thrust of the Government's White Paper. We certainly pay tribute to the Department for International Development for all its excellent work on behalf of the whole House and of the country. I want briefly to explore the working title of the White Paper. I do not want to consider its chapters in detail, because we have all grown familiar with the contents over the past few months; I want to look more closely at its excellent title—"Making Globalisation Work for the Poor". That is much more than a title; it is the very essence of what we have to achieve as we go forward in the next 20 or 30 years.

One of the key points about development is that there must be a long-term view. As politicians, our focus is usually on the next general election, which is probably in about four weeks—not much time to achieve anything significant—while international institutions and multinational corporations are worried about their next shareholders' meeting and so on. However, if we are really to make progress, we have to act on a much longer-term basis than that.

There is no question but that the abject poverty we see in the world is wholly unacceptable. As the Secretary of State said, we know that throughout history a significant proportion of the world's population has always been extremely poor. Perhaps the difference nowadays is that we are much more aware of that fact and that if we have the will and if we get our act together, we have the wherewithal to do much, much more about it.

In the developed world, we do not have to look back far to find a time when in this country, other western European countries and the United States of America, there was rampant poverty, with disease, child labour, sweatshops and urban squalor. In this country, not long ago, the poor were completely disfranchised, but through trial and error, and by pursuing sound social and economic policies during several generations, we and other countries have established the rule of law. Usually, benign governance, free markets and private enterprise produce material comforts and security for all.

As the Secretary of State said, our challenge is to ensure that the same progress is made throughout the entire world. The good news is that it can be much quicker for developing countries which choose the right way than it was for us. They can learn from our mistakes and our experience. Despite some of the mindless chanting and banners of the protesters in London on May day, the truth is that globalisation, if correctly harnessed, is not the enemy of the poor but the very vehicle whereby the world's poorest can be lifted out of poverty.

It is worth reminding ourselves why our goal should be to seek the eradication of abject global poverty. I am sure that everyone in the House at present—although perhaps not everyone in the country—agrees that it is morally unacceptable to witness the horrors of grinding poverty, especially when we have so much wealth. As I said, not everyone feels like that—we should not condemn those who say that charity begins at home and that global poverty has nothing to do with us. Such things are said, but we should gently remind those people of two facts.

First, global poverty leads to global instability, conflict and disease. One way of minimising the risk that future wars will affect our own country is to help to improve living standards and to establish proper democratic frameworks in developing countries. This is a passion of mine: even in greater Europe, the one way to ensure that our children do not have to engage in a 21st century European war is to make sure that the former Soviet countries in central and eastern Europe are welcomed into the European Union as soon as is reasonably practicable. Momentum towards the EU will underpin the rule of law, market economies and fragile democracies in the states that suffered so much under communism. There is a price for us in taking on board those new members, who will need much support for many years. However, the cost of the alternative is immeasurably higher.

Secondly, as living standards improve and market-based economies begin to flourish in more and more places, so the trading and investment opportunities for our businesses will increase, underpinning our own economic prosperity in the north. Thus, for the person who is not minded to go down the route of moral acceptability, there are two reasons why compassion and self-interest combine to motivate our attack on global poverty.

I am convinced that globalisation is the key to unlocking global poverty, and it need not take the many generations that it took us to figure it all out. A stable political framework, the rule of law, open economies, free trade, competition and a strong private sector are all part of the conditions necessary to produce economic growth, jobs and prosperity. A real consensus is growing among politicians, economists, financiers, commentators and some leading NGOs about the true benefits of globalisation, and about the key political and economic policies that will bring benefits to the countries that pursue them. The evidence is clear: countries with more open economies, and which have implemented policies to support and attract inward investment and trade, have recorded the best growth performance.

Not many years ago, Asia was poorer than Africa. However, because many Asian countries embraced strategies and policies that transformed many of them, they have made significant advances, while Africa, in most cases, sadly has not. Those Asian countries encouraged savings, investment, education and the rule of law and many of them have reaped the benefits.

The great irony, however, is that while that consensus has been growing among politicians, commentators, experts and economists, another consensus has been building to the contrary—as the Secretary of State mentioned. More and more people see globalisation and global capitalism not as the vehicles to defeat abject poverty, but as problems in themselves. That opposition has been growing for several years among people who profess to care for the world's poorest—and I am sure they do care. So we have had the Seattle riots and our own May day protests—egged on by such books as the best-selling "No Logo", by Naomi Klein, which takes a pot shot at globalisation.

That situation should concern us and I want to make several points about it—I did not know that those protesters were called the MobGlob, but the expression is apt. As we know from our own surgeries and postbags and from the public meetings we sometimes attend, there seems to be a growing belief that there would be no global poverty if multinational corporations did not exist, if the World Bank and the IMF stopped imposing conditions on their financial support, and if debt everywhere was cancelled. That simplistic approach is mobilising more and more support against the very policies and organisations which most of us believe contain the long-term solutions.

Many decent, caring, well-intentioned people are beginning to hold those views. I am sure that I cannot be the only Member to be receiving more letters and more visits to my surgery from people who express those views and who want us to take that simplistic approach. Does that matter? I think it does, because if those views spread in people's minds, they become a distraction from solutions that might work. It does matter if a lot of well-intentioned people put their energies into ideas and solutions that are likely to make things worse for the world's poorest. Those protesters need to be told that they are fighting to keep people poor. Rather than breaking windows in McDonald's, would not it be a better idea to set up businesses that employ people in the developing world and so create prosperity?

I agree with the Secretary of State that if such opinions grow and take root, they could easily pull us back into a protectionist world that would be very serious and dangerous for us all. It is interesting that commentators acknowledge that just before the first world war, the world was extremely integrated—possibly even more so than today, given the lack of technology. It took shifts in public opinion, increased protectionism and global conflict to drive a wedge into that growing integration.

The onus is on us consistently to make the case for the free trade economic growth model and not to allow ourselves to be distracted. I congratulate the Secretary of State as I believe that she has done that; she has been brave in some of her speeches. I encourage her to continue doing that for the next three or four weeks while she remains in her position—*[Interruption.]* I did not say where she would be after that.

We must pose the question: what is the alternative? Now that centrally planned economies have failed the world over and modern technologies have rendered untenable an exclusively local and protectionist approach, what is the alternative to globalisation harnessed in the right way?

**Clare Short:** I do not think that we should be embarrassed by such agreement; we are talking about enormously profound and important issues for everyone's future. Indonesia grew with horrible corruption and repression, but the beauty of the lessons of the Asian financial crisis—provided that we can help people and that the suffering is not too great—is that we have reached the point where that model is not sustainable. In fact, democracy, inclusion, dealing with corruption and bringing education and health care to all represent the stable model, so we have refined the model that is most successful economically in a way that advances the condition of humanity.

**Mr. Streeter:** I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that intervention. It is absolutely right to look for sustainable models, not flashes in the pan. We are looking for things that will last, and the Indonesian model and perhaps those of one or two other Asian tigers have shown themselves to be unsustainable, because they did not put in place the necessary political stability, transparency and perhaps the freedom from rank corruption, so I certainly agree with the Secretary of State.

We must make the case for globalisation, harnessed as best we can, although I am sure that many mistakes will be made. If we do not make that case, we will be in danger of letting the arguments go by default and increasing the sense of alienation and disenchantment with the political process as a whole that is felt by a growing number of people.

I would be the first to accept that globalisation is not producing equality. Richer nations have thus far benefited more than poorer ones. Indeed, some of the world's poorest nations have so far been almost entirely excluded from the real economic benefits, but that does not mean that globalisation is not the solution, just that we have not yet driven the process far enough forward. However, that does not need to be the case if those nations can be helped to choose a different path by which they, too, can prosper.

Decisions made in Uganda in recent years have been better, on average, than those made by the Government in Zimbabwe, and the people of Uganda have benefited. Policies pursued in Taiwan have helped its people march into prosperity, while the decisions made in North Korea have had the reverse effect. Countries can choose prosperity in a globalising world.

Our goal is not equality—although some people think that it should be—and perhaps it is not even relativity; it is surely to see absolute living standards rise, so that everyone has access to shelter, food, water, reasonable education and health care. That should certainly be our goal. Some people point the finger at the multinational corporations and blame them for not doing enough to improve living standards for the poor. Of course, their primary goal is to make a profit. That will always be the case, which is as it should be, but by investing in developing countries they will, over time, bring economic growth with them. That is happening all over the world.

The best of our multinational corporations are increasingly aware that they have some responsibility for the communities in which they invest, on wage levels, child labour, environmental stewardship and other issues. I shall cite some famous names that are bound to fill the MobGlob world with fury, but BP, Nestlé, Gap and Nike all employ people in developing countries. They are not the anti-Christ. No doubt they can do things differently and no doubt they can improve their commitment to local communities; and they should be held to account—through whatever stakeholder power is available and through our consumer choices—for the commitments that they make to corporate and social responsibility, which are now a common feature of their annual reports. They say such things, and we are entitled to hold them to account for them, but they do not deserve the vilification that the anti-capitalists have heaped on them.

*[Mr. Streeter]*

Globalisation is happening. It has been going on for generations. Modern technology has speeded up the process and, short of unforeseen disasters, the momentum of globalisation seems set fair to continue. We in the Conservative party recognise that and broadly welcome it, and we have designed development policies that are intended to help to shape globalisation in a way that benefits the world's poorest. In the second part of my speech, I shall therefore briefly set out the four key development policies that we shall pursue in government to help to maximise the forces of globalisation for good, not ill.

First, we shall focus on good governance, as we have made clear in our policy papers. I have talked about that endlessly; I am even getting bored with hearing myself speak about it—a serious state of affairs. I accept that the DFID is currently focused on good governance, but we shall make it an even higher priority. My observations and experience, drawn from the past two years, show that the state and quality of governance in a developing country is absolutely critical and fundamental to its success in choosing to enter into prosperity.

Decisions by national Governments remain at the heart of a nation's fortunes. Although globalisation is all about what happens in the entire world, we all recognise that nation states still remain extremely important. Without good governance, the rule of law and a willingness to embrace market economies, the framework for prosperity is simply not in place. I am not talking about a "one size fits all" approach, but I accept that we can advocate nothing but democracy. Some countries have embraced market economies when they are not fully democracies—we are all a little concerned about Uganda and the succession strategy there; but, from our experience, we can only advocate democracy and, certainly, benign government—one of the key fundamentals that must be in place.

I should like to read a brief extract from the World Bank report "Poverty in an age of Globalisation", just to make the point. Page 9 states:

"Good governance has emerged as one of the most important prerequisites for development. This is both because of the role of government as a builder and provider of institutions, and because the failure of governance can lead to an overall political breakdown. Weak governance has been an overriding characteristic of the poorest performing economies"—

no surprises there.

The next Conservative Government will do more to help to build good governance. That is our unique governmental contribution to global poverty. I know that the policy is long term, intangible and difficult to measure, but it is vital. As part of our policy, we want the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the British Council to increase their work in democracy building and governance. We want to see more support for political parties overseas. Strange as it may seem to some of us, political parties are actually rather important organisations, and their establishment in many of the countries that we are talking about is very important, especially if they are rooted in the community and open to all. We will seek to support strong civil society, and we will draw upon the experience of the know-how fund and make British expertise available, especially in the civil service, judicial and security sectors.

There is one thing that we know how to do well in this country—collect tax. That represents the sort of expertise that many countries would be very keen to draw on, and we will make that the primary focus. That will be the best way to meet international development targets, which we support. The best contribution that we can make to poverty reduction and to producing a poverty focus throughout the world is to help to strengthen the framework of countries with which we are working, so that the private sector and foreign direct investment can do their jobs in increasing living standards in such countries.

Our second and related focus will be to bear down on corruption. We all know of the reality in many countries. I was interested to read some recent research by Mr. de Soto, a Peruvian economist, who found that corruption and poor bureaucracy represented a real block to enterprise in many countries. He wrote:

"In the Philippines, to formalise a squatter's house built on state-owned land can require 168 steps involving 53 public and private agencies and taking between 13 and 25 years.

In Malawi, the bureaucracy that administers property law is, in the words of an official report, riddled with jurisdictional overlaps and internal conflicts, and is often the cause of delays, errors of judgment, lack of coordination, rampant corruption and dereliction of duty."

We want to bear down on such corruption, wherever we possibly can. We shall be rigorous in withdrawing development assistance where there is evidence of misuse, and we shall encourage other donors to do the same. We will review the increasing use of sector-wide funding plans, which are clearly more open to misuse than more strictly monitored financial support.

**Clare Short:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. An effective modern state goes beyond democracy and human rights, proper tax collection, the proper management of public finances, the rule of law and people having the right to property so that they can build houses, which is important for many slum dwellers, and so on. All that is absolutely key and we are increasingly moving towards it, but sector-wide approaches involve building an effective state, and they replace an old approach that went outside the state because there was corruption. We must take the risk and become engaged in helping countries develop their financial management systems and those by which they deliver services to their people. That is what sector-wide approaches involve. I therefore agree 100 per cent. with the hon. Gentleman about wanting to work more on corruption and effective government. I agree with the diagnosis completely and that is what we are doing, but he has a contradictory objective in wanting to move away from sector-wide approaches—they go together.

**Mr. Streeter:** The jury is still out on this. Even the Overseas Development Institute said in its recent report of 1 May that the sector-wide plans

"have lacked good evidence on how poverty is being addressed and with what effect."

The Secretary of State may well be right, but I was simply saying that the jury is still out and that I would review sector-wide funding, not abolish it, on 8 June.

We do part company, however, on my third point for putting in place the best possible development policy to harness the forces of globalisation for good, not ill.

I profoundly disagree with the Secretary of State about the charitable sector. We Conservatives want to build a new partnership with the charitable sector. We want to do much more to encourage and harness the energy and compassion of the British people and our aid charities. I accept that there are many developments that only Governments and multilateral organisations can undertake, but there is a massive role for the charitable sector. Most important, it can build long-term, committed relationships, people to people, which Governments can never do.

The Secretary of State said that charities are really about handouts and that she was talking about sustainable development. Of course we want sustainable development, but I visited a project in south-west Rwanda—I could list several dozen and I am sure the Secretary of State could, too—where a few years ago people were hungry. World Vision was sponsoring a project there whereby an agricultural expert from Ghana was teaching farmers how to increase massively the yield on their hilltop farms, partly by terracing and partly by better husbandry. After the three-year project, the yields were significantly increased and the people were no longer hungry. Indeed, they had surplus to sell, with which they bought cows. I was introduced to the cows, of which they were so very proud.

**Clare Short:** Did they have foot and mouth?

**Mr. Streeter:** No, they did not have foot and mouth.

**Clare Short:** They have it in Rwanda.

**Mr. Streeter:** I hope that those dear cows to which I was introduced do not have foot and mouth. They were of the "Phoenix the calf" variety: extremely desirable—I do not mean to eat. As I was saying, the farmers were no longer hungry and they could sell their surplus crops. Most significantly, they were passing on their new skills to other farmers in the region. I think that that is sustainable development and I know that the Secretary of State does too. That was achieved through a long-term relationship established by a charity that was doing the right thing. I could cite many other examples. That is absolutely at the heart of international development.

**Mr. Leigh:** Does my hon. Friend think that we have anything to learn from US tax regimes in making sure that we are a generous society in terms of donations to charities?

**Mr. Streeter:** That is the direction in which we want to go. Government cannot do it all. The British people are very compassionate and give generously and often in response to humanitarian crises, but they do not have much confidence in our public development schemes—or at least that is what the recent survey indicated.

We must do more to encourage the charitable sector. We want to encourage people to give more and we want the charitable sector to do the right thing in terms of a strategy that we agree with it. We Conservatives have thus pledged ourselves to double the amount that the DFID spends through NGOs and charities over the lifetime of a Government. We want to make sure that money is available to large and small NGOs and that we work more closely with the charitable sector in making a real long-term difference.

We will set up a web-based, one-stop-shop information and advice service. As I have said before, I really believe in this; I ought to as it is my idea. I offered this idea, called aid direct, to the Secretary of State and I hope that she has looked at it. The idea is to provide up-to-the-minute information about the situation in each developing country, with inputs from embassies, NGOs and major corporations working there. It is so often the case that people who want to make a contribution and a difference do not know how to start or what to do for the best in a particular country. As a result, we get overlap and duplication and people get frustrated and turn away. More information and up-to-the-minute advice, matching needs and resources, is what we have in mind. It could be a very effective facility for encouraging an even better performance from the charitable sector.

**Clare Short:** I know that the hon. Gentleman is keen on this. In the course of my life, I have found that most good ideas have already been thought of by someone. The Royal Bank is in the process of trying to do that for the whole international development system, so that in any given country everybody knows what everybody else is doing and they all have access to the information. The idea is a good one, but it is in hand.

**Mr. Streeter:** The Secretary of State said that the idea is in hand, but it is not yet in existence. We have checked carefully but there is nothing in the whole world or on the world wide web along the lines that I am suggesting. It would be great if it were put in place. We do not mind our best ideas being pinched. Indeed, in this party we are used to that—it has been happening for at least 10 years and we were getting pretty cheesed off with it. However, we want this to happen because it will provide a real service to people who want to make a difference.

Finally, in government we propose to make sure that globalisation is harnessed for good, and not for ill, by reviewing the performance of all multilateral organisations. We recognise that although the nation state remains dominant, there is a need for multilateral agencies and combined resources. We accept that, but we want them to perform well and to offer value for money. We have often spoken about the European Union aid programme. Our policy on that is well known: unless the recent reforms produce vast improvements, we will work for a treaty change to allow member states to opt out of much of the EU aid contribution, and so spend the same money much more effectively.

We are unhappy about the lack of true accountability of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, and about the performance of the UN. The UN should do less, better. We want to champion the cause for reform of the important organisations which, sadly, have too often been under-achievers. We want the World Trade Organisation to concentrate on smoothing the path of global free trade.

**Mr. Robathan:** I hate to disagree with the profound consensus that has built up in the Chamber this afternoon, but does my hon. Friend share my unease from the White Paper that Britain will be channelling more money through multilaterals and the UN family than we have

*[Mr. Robathan]*

done up to now while working for reform? Does he agree that it would be best for reform to take place before we channel more money into such agencies?

**Mr. Streeter:** My hon. Friend is right. When I launched our well-received policy documents, I said that on the day we came to power—on my first day as Secretary of State for International Development—I would seek an urgent review of all our contributions to all multilateral agencies, particularly UN agencies, to make sure that we were getting value for money and doing the right thing in spending British taxpayers' money in that way. We can use the threat of withdrawal of that money to push for more reform.

**Clare Short:** The House might like to know the figures. As a Government, of our £3 billion we give £195 million through British NGOs, £172 million through the World Bank and £152 million through UN development agencies, some of which is compulsory as a member of the UN. People think that the UN is massive, but the British NGOs take more of British taxpayers' money than the UN development system or, indeed, the World Bank.

**Mr. Streeter:** Is the Secretary of State right on that point? My recollection is that £1.4 billion is spent through multilateral agencies—half through the EU and half largely through the UN and various organisations which are part of it—but we can take this offline. We need to make sure that whatever is spent through the UN represents value for money and that British taxpayers are getting the best possible bang for their buck.

In conclusion, I pay tribute to two colleagues who are retiring at the general election. First, my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) has been a champion of many causes throughout the developing world. Of course, I pay tribute also to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells). I think that this is the fifth such tribute that has been paid to him. He has retired several times already. *[Interruption.]* Yes, he is doing an impersonation of Frank Sinatra. He has been an outstanding Chairman of the Select Committee on International Development and is respected on both sides of the House. We will miss him very much and hope that he will find new life in the development sector after 7 June, if that is when we leave this place.

In conclusion, globalisation is happening and is part of the world in which we live. As all of us have said, we are at a point where there is a historic opportunity to make a genuine difference for the world's poorest people. The choices that we make will determine whether we seize that moment. The next Conservative Government will seek to harness the forces of globalisation by helping countries to strengthen their Governments, bearing down on corruption, entering into a new partnership with British charities and championing reform of global financial architecture. All that we need now is an early opportunity to put our ideas into practice.

4.11 pm

**Mr. Tom Clarke** (Coatbridge and Chryston): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter). I did not say that last time that I did so, because he did not deserve such comments, but I think that he is getting a little better. I was impressed with his optimism, as I think that the whole House was. Perhaps he went a bit over the top about what he would do in his first day in office, but I think that we can forgive him for that. As always, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State rose to the occasion and was massively impressive in leading the debate.

Having mentioned those two speeches, I hope that I can be forgiven for opening my remarks by referring to another speech that was made a long time ago. I am inspired to do so because one of the documents provided by the Department for International Development refers to the commanding heights of the global economy. I suddenly realised on reading those words that it had rightly become fashionable again to quote Aneurin Bevan. I hope that I might also be allowed to introduce a bit of empiricism, as I want to refer to the first Labour party conference that I ever attended. Indeed, I made my first speech at the conference. The Leader of the Opposition made his first such speech at 16, but I was an elder statesman, as I made mine at the age of 18.

However, the conference was remembered not so much for my speech as for what was, sadly, the last speech of Aneurin Bevan. I think that he died seven or eight months later. I want to draw to the attention of the House to the following point: Aneurin Bevan said that, in his experience, the burdens of public office were far too heavy to be borne for trivial ends. I genuinely believe that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has taken that message on board. Her Department is not about red boxes and chauffeur-driven cars. The work that is going on in the Department at Victoria—and, if I may say so, at East Kilbride—and elsewhere is constructive and is based on responding to the modern world and the challenges that are presented by the universe of today.

The White Paper reflects those views. It is practical and relevant, but it is also thematic in terms of tackling poverty and of grasping the possibility of promoting global social justice. My right hon. Friend will agree that those two aims often go together. The White Paper raises issues such as humanitarian relief, education, health and the great problem of world debt, but it also does something else to which this debate has added: it challenges us to remember that there is still a poverty of ideas.

That is why I believe that the media have not quite caught up with the need to respond to the problems, although in the very nature of things, they have made a substantial contribution in bringing those problems into people's living rooms. Among other things, that explains why international development has taken off in the current Parliament. Day after day, people are seeing on their television sets starvation in Ethiopia and the tragedies in India, El Salvador, Mozambique, Kosovo and East Timor. They rightly expect the sort of response that the Government have provided. Tragically, they are seeing fratricidal warfare in Rwanda, Burundi and elsewhere, and they know that we must deal with the consequences of those terrible situations. They have also seen the obscenity of landmines in Angola and Afghanistan. I think that they genuinely welcome the progress that the Government are making in that regard.

The media are to be commended for bringing those issues to people's homes and into the public domain, but they are failing by not examining as they should the

question of how we can deal constructively with those problems. Their failure to give full coverage to the White Paper shows that they must catch up on that.

Nevertheless, the White Paper, the Government's thinking and the progress that has been made in the past four years have given me great hope. People want the sort of matters that have been raised, including those that are relevant to the environment, to be addressed. When President Bush made his announcement about his Administration's attitude to the Kyoto protocol, there was an instinctive and genuine feeling of revulsion throughout this country. That feeling was rightly reflected in the House. Apart from the fact that we expect better of a great nation—I am not anti-American in any sense—we also know that more than 77 per cent. of people, if the opinion polls are to be believed, disagree profoundly with the President on this matter. I do not believe that the production of 20 per cent. of carbon dioxide emissions in a country where 4 per cent. of the world population live is acceptable.

The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) made important points about the environment during the recent proceedings of the Standing Committee on the draft Asian Development Bank (Seventh Replenishment of the Asian Development Fund) Order 2001. I think that Cambodia was very much in his mind and I am delighted that these matters are now being addressed.

I am also delighted about the genuine inclusiveness in the Department for International Development. That inclusiveness is seen in its work with NGOs and charitable organisations, which is to the advantage of both. The organisations include Oxfam, the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, Christian Aid, War on Want and many more. We have gained from such pluralism as we approach international affairs in the way that the White Paper sets out.

For example, I am grateful to CAFOD for the information that it has given us on Peru. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will bring us up to date on that later. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State replied to a written question that I tabled a week or so ago. Less than a year ago, there was no democracy in Peru and the election was rigged, so it is encouraging to hear from CAFOD that the Minister for Women's Affairs in Peru, Susana Villaran, has set up a truth commission and that her Ministry is assessing the plight of about 600,000 people who were displaced by political violence.

We want to address such matters and we want the international community to be involved in seeking a solution. That dialogue will continue.

I welcome the fact that the Government—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State rightly referred to this today—are committed to an aid budget that will increase by 45 per cent. in real terms between 1997 and 2003–04, and have refocused all the UK's development effort on the reduction of extreme poverty. I am glad that my right hon. Friend constantly underlines that challenge to extreme poverty wherever we find it in whatever part of the world.

We have led the world in dealing with the dreadful problem of debt repayment and its implications for the poorest people in the poorest countries. I do not talk with any sense of complacency, because I know that that view would not be shared by those on the Front Bench. However well we happen to be doing, organisations such as Oxfam continue to remind us of the challenges that lie ahead.

For example, Oxfam, in a parliamentary briefing, states:

> "Of the twenty-two countries receiving debt relief under the HIPC initiative, three-quarters will be spending over ten per cent of government revenue on debt this year, leaching vital resources away from poverty reduction efforts. Sixteen countries will still be spending more on debt than on health care. Ten countries will be spending more on debt than on primary education and health combined. Zambia is a case in point—this year the Zambian government will spend a quarter of its national budget on debt, more than its entire spending on health. This in a country where one out of five children will not live to see their 5th birthday, and where the impact of the HIV/AIDS crisis has reduced life expectancy to 40 years."

Oxfam makes a relevant point.

**Clare Short:** Of the 22 countries receiving debt relief under the HIPC initiative, which is designed to remove the overhang of debt so that they can borrow and trade sensibly and use aid and their own revenues for other purposes, all, on average, spend less than 11 per cent. of their revenue on debt relief—that is lower than the rest of the developing countries. If we focus only on the heavily indebted poor countries and on debt, we start distorting need. In the case of Zambia, President Chiluba is talking about breaching or changing the constitution, going for a third term and ripping up the agreed economic reform programme that brought debt relief to Zambia. That is the threat to Zambia—bad governance. We must go on with the debt relief programme, but the obsession with having more and more debt relief for a small number of countries is getting a bit out of proportion.

**Mr. Clarke:** I am delighted by my right hon. Friend's response, and the House and Oxfam will take on board the important points that she has made. However, I hope that she will forgive me for quoting from another parliamentary briefing from Oxfam on the related but equally important subject of global education. It states:

> "Today 125 million children are not enrolled in school; two thirds of these children are girls . . . We are witnessing a global crisis—children throughout the world are being denied their fundamental right to education . . . In developing countries, one in four adults—some 900 million people—are illiterate, 64 per cent. of them are women."

My right hon. Friend has seen that as a huge challenge, particularly remembering the role of women; women seeking emancipation, and rightly so—the poorest people in the poorest countries. The Government's response is progressive.

The hon. Member for South-West Devon referred to institutions such as the EU, the World Bank, the IMF and the United Nations and its agencies. It may be that I and many others share some of his criticisms, but the main thrust of such international organisations, including the EU, cannot be changed by giving the impression that we are half in and half out. In such a situation, nobody takes us seriously. We made a grave mistake in leaving UNESCO, for all its faults. I am glad that we are back. We should be in there fighting—in the EU, in the UN, and playing our part in seeking the transparency and improvement in the World Bank, the IMF and elsewhere, as the White Paper tells us. That is the way to achieve our objectives, not self-imposed isolationism, for which the hon. Gentleman seemed to argue.

*[Mr. Clarke]*

International development is a wonderful subject, but there are difficulties, some of which I have seen for myself, as have other hon. Members. It was no great pleasure to stand by Lake Victoria and see bodies floating down from the terrible carnage in Rwanda, and to see how the locals had to deal with mass graves and the pollution of their rivers and their fish, upon which they were almost exclusively dependent for their food supply. That is the negative side of our work. That was sad and something that we wanted to erase, and it is right that we should continue to seek to do so.

I want to end on a more positive note by remembering two countries where tremendous progress has been made. The first is northern Iraq. The right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) has not been given the credit that he deserves for setting up the safe havens. Having visited Iraq in the early stages and then again about 18 months ago, I could see the transformation in that country, much of it due to the UN, which is extremely commendable. It is a remarkable and welcome change.

But for me, in this Parliament, and perhaps in the previous one, my greatest memory was of visiting South Africa in the week when we saw almost a miracle—the democratic election of Nelson Mandela and the end of apartheid and oppression, the progress for which we are all now striving. With that came the message that, if Mandela can spend 27 years in prison, as he did, and yet come out with such huge optimism, as we in Britain saw this week, what we see in the White Paper is inspiring to us all and I warmly and genuinely congratulate my right hon. Friend.

4.28 pm

**Mr. Bowen Wells** (Hertford and Stortford): I should warn the House about the mutual admiration society that we seem to be creating this afternoon. Despite that, I still want to say how grateful I am for the kind remarks made about me by the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter).

However, I am not alone on the International Development Committee. We have a superb Committee, whose members are dedicated and work extremely hard. We have produced more reports than most Select Committees, all of which have provoked enormous interest. I should like to extend the kind remarks that have been made to the members of the Committee, including the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), who played a remarkable part in the first two years of that Committee. The Committee has supported and helped DFID's effort to build consensus and to make this the important subject that it is.

The Secretary of State's energy and conviction have undoubtedly driven, led and inspired the Department for International Development and others. Discussions on pro-poor policies and achieving international targets have taken root in all international organisations, although some are not as good as others. We recently discussed regional development banks. The Asian Development bank will focus on and operate a pro-poor programme, which will totally change the way in which it has operated since its foundation. The Secretary of State has encouraged that sort of achievement and vision, and we should congratulate her on the globalisation White Paper, which is the second such document that the Department has produced since she took up her post.

The globalisation White Paper encompasses almost all the subjects that the Select Committee on International Development has confronted. One of our early papers was on conflict. We all agree that conflict drives back development, and it is important to find ways in which to reduce it, especially in places where it is rampant, such as sub-Saharan Africa.

Another important report covered women and development. We cannot begin to tackle the problems of the poorest of the poor until we empower women to take charge of their lives, their children and families. Currently, 70 per cent. of those in abject poverty cannot do that. That is only the tip of the iceberg. Many others who are very poor are not in a position to take control of their lives or begin to contribute to their escape or that of their countries from abject poverty.

I want to complain to the business managers about the lack of opportunity for debate on the Floor of the House. The first White Paper that the Department produced was never debated or the subject of a statement.

**Clare Short:** It was the subject of a statement.

**Mr. Wells:** Yes, but not of a debate. That was disgraceful. As the Select Committee report on globalisation requests, business managers should provide for a debate on international development at least once every Parliament. I believe that we should debate it more often. After all, the Department's budget is set to increase every year and it will soon spend more than £3 billion. If the Secretary of State continues her success in getting money from the Treasury, the Department will have an even bigger budget. The Chancellor of the Exchequer has attended our Committee proceedings more than once to discuss debt, which the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) mentioned, and I know that he is also dedicated to tackling the problems of abject poverty not only through debt relief but in other ways.

The expansion of the budget should be seriously debated. We do not have to worry about the press. I am sure that all hon. Members will have noticed that no members of the press are here because we do not intend to have an argument, slag each other off and make their news. I am grateful for that, but it does not make the debate less important. Indeed, it probably makes it more important.

**Mrs. Gillan:** Opposition Front-Bench Members have strongly supported the Secretary of State's efforts to secure an annual debate. Today, the International Criminal Court Bill is being considered in Committee. I was supposed to attend the proceedings and several hon. Members, who take a specific interest in international matters, are serving on the Committee and cannot be in the Chamber. That applies not least to the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), who interviewed earlier. Surely it is not outwith the wit of man or the usual channels to timetable our business so that those who take a special interest in international development can be in the Chamber.

**Mr. Wells:** I agree with my hon. Friend. Select Committee members often serve on Standing Committees.

Those hon. Members should be spared their duties on Standing Committees, including the Committee that is considering the International Criminal Court Bill, and given time to attend the debate.

The approach of *The Economist* to globalisation has infuriated the Secretary of State. It claims that she has abandoned her convictions and ideals by wholeheartedly adopting the liberal free trade ideas of the past. Such commentators miss the point. The Secretary of State constantly says that we need growth and extra money to tackle poverty. I agree with her. Contrary to the old liberal theories on free trade, she and I believe that the process must be managed. As she constantly says, there is nothing automatic about growth leading to the diminution of abject poverty in any country. It has to be managed and the goal of diminishing poverty must be wholeheartedly pursued if we are not to find that the rich get richer, the poor get poorer and we make no progress on expanding the wealth of countries, and introducing good governance, democracy, the rule of law, a sound civil service, an independent judiciary and a free press.

That is the difference between the globalisation White Paper and old-style liberal economics. *The Economist* is almost always profoundly wrong about everything. If *The Economist* claims that something will happen, almost invariably it will not. If hon. Members want to know what will not happen, they should read *The Economist*. The Secretary of State was right to take it to task for accusing her of being a Whig, an old liberal in the 19th century sense. The Secretary of State is trying to create the right conditions for growth. My hon. Friend the Member for South–West Devon also wants to do that.

In 1996, sub-Saharan Africa earned six times more from exports than from overseas development assistance. Exports, trade, the expansion of agriculture, surpluses and markets to which surpluses from rural areas can be transported over good roads will lead to growth, education, health for women and children and thus bring under control the serious problems that population increases will cause. In 25 years, there will be 8 billion people in the world. At the beginning of the 20th century, there was a world population of 1 billion; we are now contemplating a population of 8 billion. The idea of doing nothing, sitting still and not searching for methods to create economic growth is not sustainable. The population in developing countries will increase by 97 per cent. in the next 25 years. If we are not careful, abject poverty will increase, not decrease.

As a result of HIV-AIDS—on which the Committee produced a report—life expectancy is being driven back in some countries. Life expectancy had grown from 46 years, on average, to 64 in 20 years. It is now being driven back. As we discussed with the Under-Secretary of State in Westminster Hall, we will be driving back 30 years of development in Africa if we do not help the African countries to manage HIV-AIDS. We cannot ignore that important issue.

However, let us not get too depressed. In a publication, the World Bank—commenting on international development targets—says:

"The Republic of Korea, Malaysia and Morocco belong to a select group of countries that halved the proportion of their people living in poverty in less than a generation. So did the Indian states of Haryana, Kerala and Punjab. Another dozen countries—including Botswana and Mauritius—reduced the proportion by a quarter in a generation. Other countries can learn much from the well-documented lessons of this experience, for if it has been done, it can be done again.

Empowering poor people is the starting point—providing opportunities for women, opening political space for poor people to organise. Democratisation has to go beyond simple rule by the majority to include minorities."

The task to which the globalisation White Paper is putting our shoulders can be achieved. We are not pursuing a lost cause. We must strengthen our determination that we are going to achieve our targets.

We are not doing as well as we should at the moment. The publication to which I referred mentions the target of reducing abject poverty by half by 2015, and suggests that we are running below the target level that we should be achieving at the moment.

**Clare Short:** We are on track for the target of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015, but we are below the target on maternal mortality and some of the others. The trouble with the target is that it is an average across the world and Asia is doing a lot better than Africa. I agree that people who see the sad images care but feel very depressed. They should know that we have had a lot of success and that if we could universalise that success, we could make progress. We are on track for the target of halving the proportion of people in poverty; it is achievable, but we have to do better in the countries that are missing out.

**Mr. Wells:** That is a perfectly good correction. We are below the target in Africa but we are beyond it in some Asian and Latin American countries; although, as has been pointed out, the inequality of the distribution of the increased growth in Latin America is causing difficulty.

In the original White Paper and the globalisation White Paper, it has been acknowledged that the private sector will have to drive the programme. We must encourage that but, in 1996, £11.3 billion was invested in developing countries by the private sector in this country. In 1999, that fell to £3.8 billion. There is a serious problem, although I accept that that is related to the Asian crisis. We must resume that level of investment by the private sector; not just to the seven or so fastest-developing countries, but to the least-attractive countries. That is important if we are to achieve anything like the targets that we have set ourselves. Those figures need to be investigated.

I attended a conference at the Foreign Office yesterday for British Trade Partners for Africa. I was alarmed that DFID was not mentioned at all by British Trade Partners, in spite of the fact that more than £1 billion of the DFID budget is planned to be spent on Africa in the next year. DFID's work in Africa is vital to exports from Africa to this country and from us to Africa. When will the Foreign Office stop being jealous of DFID and start co-operating? When will the DTI recognise that trade is a part of DFID's responsibility—as is recognised by the Secretary of State for International Development—and must be integrated in the effort to increase trade and investment into the poorer countries? We could do that.

In many African countries, the infrastructure is not as it would be in more developed countries. Often, there is no clean or reliable water supply, and no adequate telephone system. Roads may be very bad and everything that can be expected in a developed country in which we

*[Mr. Wells]*

invest is not there in a developing country. If through grants and assistance from DFID, infrastructure problems were addressed—including health, education and housing needs—and that was followed by private sector investment, we would make a greater contribution than by simply giving ODA.

I ask the Foreign Office and the DTI to work properly with DFID. We would then all gain hugely, because we would be creating wealth in developing countries and we would have a competitive British industry. I am so glad that untying has taken place, but we have to get that to take place in other competitive countries. None the less, the British should be able to get the lion's share of the DFID expenditure, simply because they are the best people to do the work at the lowest possible price, with the best possible quality.

The agreement to introduce a longer period of tariff-free access to the European Community will enable the management of change to take place. Change has to take place, but in introducing tariff reductions and championing free trade we must not be seen to be threatening.

In the example of the Caribbean, some trading arrangements have existed for more than 400 years. These people are our friends and they are part of the fabric of the British nation. A demand that they must change their entire economy in a brief period—forget producing bananas, rice and sugar—would have represented a problem and they would have needed time to tackle it, but wisdom has prevailed and what has been agreed is probably fair.

I do not agree about bananas, however, because, under the arrangements being negotiated by the United States and the EU, there is no way that the east Caribbean banana trade will be able to continue. Why? Because producing the same quantity of bananas costs twice as much in the east Caribbean as it does in central America. There is no way in which we can overcome that, except through diversification.

**Clare Short:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not want the record to suggest that I have no concern for the future of the Caribbean. I agree that the Caribbean must be helped to adjust on sugar, rice and bananas, although I do not think that the longer adjustment period that has been agreed is necessary. However, I agree that an adjustment period is necessary.

For the eastern Caribbean, there is a niche in organic bananas, about which some of our supermarkets have made proposals, but encouraging the Caribbean to stay in products that it produces expensively, but which are available cheaply elsewhere in the world, will not help. In the end, it would get producers into trouble. They are good on education, however, and Barbados has figures as good as any in the rest of the world. It is a beautiful island that could achieve even more from tourism and value-added activities.

I share the hon. Gentleman's concern for the Caribbean and I agree that its countries are vulnerable because they are small. They need additional help and they need to phase in the adjustment. I do not believe that a longer period is necessary, but we have one and we are absolutely dedicated to supporting the Caribbean in the transition. I am sure that there is a prosperous and comfortable future available for the Caribbean if the change that needs to be made is embraced and carried through.

**Mr. Wells:** I believe that that is the intention and I very much hope that change will take place. However, I note that Stabex payments are being made because of lack of banana production in the eastern Caribbean following price falls in the British market. They have helped, but the trouble is that they are paid to Governments. The Governments of the eastern Caribbean are using them not to modernise the banana industry, but for other purposes. It would be all right if they used the payments for diversification in the economy, but I am afraid that they are not, nor are they putting them into education, where standards have been falling. Health standards, too, have been falling.

Banana farmers are not rich and the payments are being absorbed by other Government expenditure. A lot more work and management has to be done in the Caribbean if we are to enable them to maintain their current standards of living, which are not luxurious. I cannot afford the prices of the hotels on the west coast of Barbados and the Barbadian community as a whole, unless supported by Government money, could not afford to buy even a gin and tonic in the new Sandy Lane. That is not the issue, however, and we are concerned with the general standard of living in those islands. It is important that we bear that in mind.

**Dr. Tonge:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that those problems still exist in the Caribbean and that, with the Americans determined to pursue Plan Colombia, there is a great danger that Caribbean farmers will turn to coca as an alternative crop?

**Mr. Wells:** Yes, but that is not merely a possibility. I could take the hon. Lady to areas around the volcano called Soufriere in St. Vincent where coca is being grown.

**Dr. Tonge:** Is that a promise?

**Mr. Wells:** Perhaps we can make an arrangement.

I could take the hon. Lady to that area or to Dominica, where I know coca is growing very well. It is a wonderful crop with few enemies, it has no diseases and there are no insects that eat it. Indeed, it grows so well that three crops a year can be produced, so it is a major temptation—the Secretary of State referred to that matter when discussing Colombia. There is a serious problem and our help, sympathy and support are necessary while people are making those adjustments, which, I agree, have to be made.

I want to discuss human migration, as $70 billion is generated by those who have left the countries in which they were born for countries such as the United Kingdom. From those countries, they send money back to their own countries to help to maintain the families from which they came. That is a huge sum and, in some countries, such money represents the largest single source of income. I welcome that, but the question of human migration will dominate such discussions for the next 100 years.

The trouble is that we attract some of the most skilled people from those countries. There is a bar on the national health service recruiting doctors from those countries to

help us through the NHS crisis. However, although the Government are debarred from such activities, the private sector agencies are recruiting nurses from South Africa, a country that can ill afford to lose them, having trained them and spent money on them. Yet those nurses are now coming to work here, which I think is immoral and quite wrong. If anything, we should be lending our skilled people to deal with HIV-AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases prevalent among the poverty-stricken people of South Africa.

Economic migrants come to this country, and we are having difficulty processing them once they claim political asylum. They are fleeing terrible regimes and countries that hold out no economic hope for them or their children. They should not be described as inferior people or as criminals who are breaking the law. They should be treated with great courtesy, as is the tradition in this country in welcoming people from overseas. If they are breaking the laws on immigration, their cases should be treated seriously; they should quickly be examined and then asked to go back to the country from which they came. We cannot take the numbers that are coming here, and they are breaking the immigration laws that have been agreed.

However, we cannot send those people back to those countries unless we make an effort to develop those countries in the way in which the globalisation White Paper suggests and demands. When we explain why they have to go back, we should also explain what opportunities the British and the international community will offer them for a better life in their own country. That is the human and sensible way to deal with the people who come here—who are among the most skilled, energetic and innovative people—to the discomfiture of our immigration service and our Customs and Excise service.

That discomfiture is irrelevant, however. Those people are human beings just as we are, and they are seeking to achieve a better life. We would do the same if we were in their position, and they should be treated with dignity and courtesy. None the less, they should not be admitted unless there are genuine political asylum reasons. It is a disgrace that we have let our immigration system get into such an appallingly incompetent state.

On corruption, the International Development Committee has produced a report worthy of serious study not only by the Government—who will undoubtedly have to introduce a Bill to enable us to comply with the OECD legislation to make it a criminal offence to seek to bribe foreign public officials—but by the civil service. The civil service will have to be organised in several Departments, including the Home Office, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Foreign Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department. There are 14 such organisations dealing with this problem spread across government, including the Serious Fraud Office and the Financial Services Authority.

The Government must put that matter in order, but we must also address the fact that London is one of the major money-laundering centres of the world. We must get our banks, lawyers and accountants to stop laundering money from overseas. They must also stop harbouring money stolen from third-world countries and enabling it to come here to be cleansed so that it can be used by families and relatives elsewhere in the world.

That is what we have to do, but the countries in which we are investing must also clean up their act. We can make a major contribution by not giving them a means of disposing of the money. This must be an international effort. If we close our doors, it is possible that the money will go to Switzerland, Frankfurt, New York or elsewhere. We must ensure that there are international agreements, which will stop some of the corruption in the countries with which we are dealing. If they continue to be corrupt, private development and private investment will not take place.

When the International Development Committee held a seminar for business men, we asked them what inhibited them from investing in some of the world's poorest countries. The main problem turned out to be corruption. Corruption is an important issue, which we must address as soon as possible in the next Parliament. We must drive out corruption, or at least drive down the level of corruption to which we contribute, and which inhibits the private-sector investment that is so badly needed.

The White Paper—14,000 copies have been sold, and the Secretary of State gave figures relating to translations and the website—has aroused debate and interest throughout the world. That is a tribute to the Secretary of State's work, and that of the Select Committee, in leading discussions in the international-development world in Europe and elsewhere. I am thinking of the World Trade Organisation, the United Nations development programme, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, all which bodies the Committee has visited during the current Parliament.

The White Paper is a major contribution to discussion on this issue. I trust that it will produce a consensus that will drive the current programme towards maximum success.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Madam Deputy Speaker:** Order. Several hon. Members clearly wish to speak. If speeches are brief, more may succeed in catching my eye.

5.2 pm

**Mr. Mohammad Sarwar** (Glasgow, Govan): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this important debate.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on publishing her Department's second White Paper. It is not simply a wish list of noble aims; it constitutes a practical approach to lifting millions out of poverty. I am proud that our Government are setting realistic targets, and leading the push for positive change. If the ambition is to be realised, it will take many years but decisions made now and in the coming months will help to shape a better future for people in developing countries.

It was encouraging to note the consensus among Opposition Members, and their support for the White Paper. I confess, however, that the vast majority of my constituents are hostile to the idea of accepting anything that is said by the Conservative party.

I have a special interest in the debate. Having been born and brought up in Pakistan, I understand the importance of investment in health and education for developing countries. Moreover, I represent the Scottish constituency

*[Mr. Mohammad Sarwar]*

with the highest ethnic minority population. The vast majority are from Pakistan and Kashmir, but many come from India and Bangladesh.

Interest is heightened when decisions made now will affect constituents with families on the other side of the world. Let us bear in mind the stark figures. A fifth of the global population live in abject poverty: that means that more than 1 billion people exist on the equivalent of less than $1 a day. We live in a world of growing material wealth, yet the outrage of abject poverty persists. Now we have a real chance to end poverty. It is our moral obligation, but it is also in our interest.

The biggest problems facing Scotland and the United Kingdom are fuelled by poverty. I am thinking particularly of the drugs trade, which breaks up families and communities and kills young people in Govan and other parts of Scotland and Britain.

The heroin trail starts in some of the poorest and most underdeveloped parts of Asia. It is very much in our national interest to make globalisation work for the world's poor. When Martin Luther King said around 40 years ago,

"Before you finish your breakfast this morning, you will have depended on half the world".

we may have seen his point most clearly in our cereals, coffee, tea and fruit, but it has now taken on greater significance.

Greater movements of people, goods, services, capital and information are bringing every part of the world closer. With every passing day, we are increasingly dependent on people thousands of miles away in our modern world. Globalisation is powered by advances in technology, particularly e-mail and the internet. It is as fast and simple now for someone in Indonesia or Peru to contact me by e-mail as it is for my constituents in Ibrox and Pollokshaws. The costs of international transactions have been reduced and capital is much easier to move. The poorest developing countries must be part of that. We must not allow them to be left on the fringes of progress. Decisions by political leaders throughout the world now and in the immediate future can end poverty.

We must not underestimate the importance of good government. Globalisation will work for people in poverty only where their Governments are effective and responsive to their needs. Where there is conflict and corruption, the people who have the least will always suffer the most. I am pleased that the White Paper makes it clear that reducing world poverty is a goal for all in our Government—for all Departments.

At present, there are great disparities through globalisation. The far east has clearly benefited, while millions in Africa have yet to see any change. Thirty years ago, Korea was poorer than Ghana. Now it is richer than Portugal. Governments of poorer countries must create conditions that help the poorest in their communities to find work or a marketplace for goods that will keep their families. Developing countries must attract foreign investors who can conduct their business safely and with a reasonable return. If not, investment will quickly go elsewhere. That demands a stable legal system that punishes theft and bans bribery and corruption. By the same token, people's human rights and working conditions must be protected.

If a developing country has good government, it will have a better chance of growing economically. We must do everything that we can to encourage decent education and health care, fair law enforcement and proper financial management. It is noticeable that healthy democracies with a free media and open debate about government have the best chance of making globalisation work for the poor in their countries.

Those investing in basic infrastructure such as water and sanitation, electricity, transport and telecommunications have a key role in giving poor communities access to global markets. One of the biggest barriers to development is armed conflict and the threat of conflict. India and Pakistan invested vast sums of money developing nuclear capabilities while large sections of their populations lived in abject poverty. Conflict threatens investment, stability and security and hinders any chance of growth. I warmly welcome the White Paper's commitment to increasing international efforts to resolve conflict and regulate the arms trade.

The greatest disparities in wealth are caused by disparities in the availability of education to rich and poor. More than 110 million children of primary school age have never attended school. Moreover, 150 million other children have dropped out of school before attaining basic literacy and numeracy. Education is the quickest way out of poverty. Countries that invest in primary education develop much more quickly, and girls especially benefit from it. Women constitute two thirds of those living in extreme poverty, and I commend my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for giving such priority to providing education and health care for women and girls in poverty.

Better-educated countries attract business investment because of their skilled and flexible work forces. Education makes globalisation work. Nevertheless, there is a danger of what the White Paper describes as a "digital divide". Only one in five people in the world have access to reliable telecommunications, fewer than half of people in Africa have ever used a telephone, and there are more computers in New York city than in the whole of Africa. Ever more international business is conducted by the fast global transfer of information. Such technologies must benefit traditional industries, as is beginning to happen with the development of internet marketing.

Investment in education must be coupled with affordable access to telecommunications. The introductory version of the White Paper provided a good example of how such arrangements can work. People in remote villages in Bangladesh can obtain a loan to purchase a mobile telephone, enabling them to establish a tiny call centre for community use.

Good health care also is needed to lift people out of poverty. More women will die in India during pregnancy this week than will die in Europe this year. Illness can ruin a whole family's livelihood. When one family member becomes sick, another family member often has to care for him or her. At such times, the family may need more money for medicine.

I welcome the decision to hold this debate during save the children week. Children are most at risk from sickness and disease, but they have to be healthy to get the most from any available education. We must act now to provide decent health care for the 600 million children around the world who live in poverty.

Globalisation should enable us to share medical knowledge and make a real difference to the health of the poor. At the most basic level, people must have clean water and sanitation. Every year, diarrhoea ends hundreds of thousands of lives although it could be treated with simple rehydration. However, globalisation also entails increased travel and the spread of more killer diseases such as tuberculosis and AIDS; 16,000 new HIV infections every day decimate communities. Zambia lost 1,300 teachers to AIDS in less than one year.

International institutions are badly in need of reform. I congratulate our Ministers on leading the debate on poverty reduction and reaching agreement with bodies such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. However, those bodies do not provide a strong, clear voice for developing countries. We must make bodies such as the World Trade Organisation fully involve the world's poorest countries and include them as part of an open and fair global economy. International trade rules must change and not simply serve the most powerful interests. The greatest growth in developing countries has consistently been achieved where exports have received the greatest promotion. Such promotion has been most clearly evident in the far east, where poverty has decreased most rapidly.

We must also ensure that the trade rules work for all countries. Britain's largest merchant shipbuilder is in my constituency but it has suffered at the hands of heavily subsidised overseas yards. Recently, Korea has taken the lion's share of world shipbuilding but its yards have undercut competition by building ships at a loss. We need the WTO to work fairly for all countries, including the United Kingdom.

The tide is not always against developing countries. ActionAid is among the many British groups campaigning to stop patents on food crops. This week, the United States patent office threw out 13 of 16 claims by the American company Ricetec seeking patents on basmati rice plants and grain. Farmers in India and Pakistan were appalled by the patents, and there was considerable lobbying and campaigning worldwide to have them struck off. International pressure may have paid off in this case, but crop patents are still a reality under WTO rules.

The world's poor must be heard on this issue through the WTO. I am not advocating flagrant disregard for intellectual property rights. In my constituency, there is an established firm of highly trained intellectual property attorneys, Murgitroyd and Company. I have seen the importance of its work, protecting and enforcing property rights over ideas and inventions. It could operate from anywhere in the world, but chooses to base itself in Glasgow. What I advocate is proper respect for intellectual property. The idea that an American company could claim a patent for basmati rice would be treated as a bad joke in the Punjab if it were not so serious. There is much to do before the WTO shakes off its image as a rich man's club.

There is also much to do to meet our global responsibilities towards the environment. The goal of reducing carbon dioxide emissions by a fifth by 2010 received a major blow when President Bush decided against implementing the Kyoto agreement. I do not envy my right hon. and hon. Friends the job of trying to persuade the Governments of developing countries that we must all act to protect the environment while the United States disregards the agreement with impunity. We must lend support to those in America who continue to press their President to take action to protect the world's environment and future.

The best chance of progress comes when people are organised in their demand for change. In Britain, that has been seen in the successful Jubilee 2000 campaign to end crippling debt, leading to substantial commitments to cut the burden on heavily indebted countries. Most recently, in my constituency, Queen's Park and Pollokshields church members have written to me expressing fears over ethnic conflict in Indonesia between Muslims and Christians driving more people into abject poverty.

There has also been a successful postcard campaign by the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund calling for global trade to work in the interests of the poor. Hundreds of constituents have expressed their personal commitment to the issue, focusing the minds of Scottish Members on the White Paper. There is a broad alliance of Church and faith groups, charities and campaigning organisations, amounting to a huge 3 million people throughout Britain, demanding policies that will meet the target of halving extreme poverty by 2015.

There is also pressure to provide more funding for development, rising to 0.7 per cent. of gross domestic product, and to allocate more of our aid to the lowest-income countries. I welcome the Labour Government's strong commitment to the issues outlined in the White Paper. While such a movement can influence Government policy in Britain, we see a need for similar action by civil society in developing countries. Their Governments are more likely to address the needs of the poor if their own people demand that they do so.

I welcome the assertion in the White Paper that globalisation can work for the world's poorest people. It is a great challenge for developing countries, and for our country, but we now have the framework for success and can look forward to ending abject poverty for millions.

5.19 pm

**Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): I warmly welcome this debate and thank the Department for International Development for its two very fine White Papers. In one sense, this debate is poorly timed, coming, as it does, at the end of the Parliament—we are all rather frustrated that it did not come earlier—but in another it is well timed, because the May day demonstration on Tuesday should have highlighted to the rest of the country and of the world what we in this Chamber are about. Unfortunately, the media seemed to be searching for a riot. Every time I turned on the television, the media were waiting for a riot to develop, but it never came.

I have a suggestion for the demonstrators and the police. We could save all the money and spend it on development causes if the demonstrators and the police would each nominate a small group. The two groups could then execute a modern morris dance in Trafalgar square, with wooden planks, instead of staves, and riot helmets. That would be a token demonstration of the protesters' point, because we all know that they have a valid one. It has not been said often enough this afternoon that globalisation is exploiting poor people and the environment, and trying to make us all the same the world over—all eating burgers, wielding mobile phones and drinking coke.

In an editorial, *The Times* mentioned a banner waved by the demonstrators that said, "Replace capitalism with something nice". I asked myself whether communism was

*[Dr. Jenny Tonge]*

nice. It was tried, and it did not last because the people who lived under it did not think that it was nice. Is the primitive life style nice? The Victorians spoke of noble savages, living in their wonderful villages and engaging in subsistence farming to try to stay alive. My right hon. Friend the Member for Yeovil (Paddy Ashdown) mentioned Gladstone's hill villages of Afghanistan in a debate last week. If anyone is interested in globalisation and needs inspiration, I refer them to my right hon. Friend's speech. I am only sorry that the official Opposition missed it, because it was an extraordinarily good speech—

**Mrs. Gillan:** I was there.

**Dr. Tonge:** Apart from two Front Benchers, the Conservatives missed it totally.

**Mr. Leigh:** The hon. Lady's colleagues are missing her speech.

**Dr. Tonge:** It has been handed round to them. I have visited villages in India and Bangladesh and across sub-Saharan Africa. In southern Sudan, people want peace more than anything, but they do not see their previous life style of crop growing and cattle grazing as especially nice. It was grinding slavery just to keep alive. In all the places I have mentioned, globalisation of communication has occurred; people know now what our capitalist life style is like, and they think it is much nicer than theirs. The villagers of India and Bangladesh want their fridges and cars. The people of southern Sudan would accept decent housing and a few roads for a start. To them, capitalism looks nice, and they do not want it replaced by anything else until they have sampled it.

I have tried to point out to people terrible working conditions, including the use of child and slave labour, filth and disease in the workplace, and the destruction of the environment by mineral extraction and the cutting down of forests, but they ask me, "Who are you to criticise us? Sorry, British people, but your country became rich in the 19th century on the backs of the poor at home and abroad."

I originally hale from the black country and if I had enough time I would read out passages from J. B. Priestley's "English Journey", which describes that area, just before our lifetimes, as a hell hole.

**Mr. Dennis Turner** (Wolverhampton, South-East): Read it!

**Dr. Tonge:** With that encouragement, I will. Priestley said:

"There was the Black Country unrolled before you like a smouldering carpet. You looked into a hollow of smoke and blurred buildings and factory chimneys. There seemed to be no end to it."

He added:

"I could easily believe that there were no people down there."

He spoke of the area's

"iron face lit with hell fire."

I remember from my childhood the hell fire of the blast furnaces when they opened at night. Priestley wrote of yards

"filled with rusted metal and great patches of waste ground, shocking as raw sores and open wounds."

That is very familiar to me. We did that here, so who are we to criticise people abroad who want to get rich?

The hon. Member for South–West Devon (Mr. Streeter) accused Tuesday's demonstrators of mindless chanting, but they are right to be worried about globalisation and the activities of the multinationals. Those activities often benefit people in this country, and a few people in the developing countries who are already rich, but no benefit accrues to the poor in those countries.

The multinationals, of course, disagree. They produce wonderful, glossy brochures extolling their own virtues. They say that they would not dream of disobeying OECD guidelines on the environment and labour standards. However, NGOs and representatives from countries all over the developing world frequently tell me stories of exploitation and destruction allegedly carried out by British companies.

Sometimes it is worth naming names, and this debate is one such occasion. I shall use the word "allegedly", even though I am in the House of Commons. Weir Pumps and Rolls-Royce are accused of contributing indirectly to the terrible civil war in southern Sudan, where people were killed, abducted, enslaved and murdered. BP is claimed to have been involved with paramilitary organisations to protect its oil interests in Colombia. Shell's involvement in Nigeria is legendary, as is Nestlé's promotion of baby formula in Africa and India.

Chocolate manufacturers everywhere—Cadbury, Nestlé, and Thornton—are alleged to have used child slave labour. Rio Tinto's exploits in south-east Asia offer numerous examples of bad practice. Other stories circulate about Balfour Beatty's involvement in the Ilisu dam project. Supermarkets such as Tesco and Sainsbury's are alleged to use third-world countries to grow foods and flowers for the western market.

The list goes on, but I stress that these are allegations. The multinationals tell a different story. I have mentioned their brochures, which describe their aims and their missions to educate and treat the sick as part of their projects. Members of the Select Committee on International Development have seen those projects. I recall the model clothes factory in Bangladesh making clothes for Gap. In that factory, the Department for International Development was providing health care for the women. We were troubled about that at the time, but good practice does exist.

I am sure that the Select Committee was shown the best examples, but hon. Members are not easily fooled and we know that that was not the whole truth, unfortunately. Local managers in developing countries cut costs to attract more multinational investment, and they will do so by exploiting people and the environment. Because OECD guidelines and WTO regulations are not legally binding, the multinationals will continue to turn a blind eye for the sake of profits for their shareholders.

**Clare Short:** I am not saying that there are not some multinationals that exploit, especially in the mining and extraction sector, but the standard of jobs offered by multinationals in agricultural sourcing and textile

production, for instance, in developing countries across the world is greater than what is otherwise available in those countries. We want improvement, but those people need investment. A million young women in Dhaka work in the textile industry who previously lived in rural areas and had no income. It must not be suggested that such investments do not bring benefits, because they do.

**Dr. Tonge:** The Secretary of State must not think that I am condemning all multinational companies, but NGOs and others constantly report examples of multinationals not following good practice, and of people being exploited.

I remember a wonderful film on television called "Mangetout"—everyone must have seen it. People in Zimbabwe—or perhaps it was Tanzania—went up and down the mangetout plantations singing something like, "Up the hillsides, down the valleys, Tesco is our greatest friend." They sang that little song as they picked the mangetouts. They were happy and well cared for; it was a good project. I am not suggesting that all is bad.

What can we do about the deficiencies that used to exist in our country and now exist in other parts of the world in the name of economic growth? How effective are we in our own policies? As the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) asked, how joined-up is our policy? We have no criticism of the Department for International Development. It has made tremendous strides and produced two White Papers. There have been other positive steps such as the cross-departmental initiative to combat conflict in Africa. That is excellent stuff. The export credit guarantee review is being carried out, and efforts on debt relief are being made with the co-operation of the Chancellor. Again, that is all wonderful stuff. A draft export controls Bill will be introduced in the next Parliament. I welcome greatly the pre-Budget support for the vaccines for TB, malaria and AIDS. However, the co-operation of other Departments, which is so essential, seems to be lacking.

The Department for International Development did not sign the annual report on human rights this year, having done so for the past two years. It is not a permanent member of the Cabinet Committee on Defence and Overseas Policy. I think that it should be—after all, as DFID cleans up all the mess, the Secretary of State should be a member of that Cabinet Committee.

**Clare Short:** I think that the hon. Lady was a member of the Select Committee when that recommendation was made. Since the conflict in Africa cross-departmental review was set up, which I chair, I am now a full member of that Committee. That is not so important for me, because I used to attend; it is more important that the Department is recognised.

**Dr. Tonge:** That is excellent news. However, I note that the Secretary of State still does not sign the annual report on strategic arms exports, which is a significant factor in poverty in the developing world.

The Department for International Development supports ethical trading and ethical foreign policy, but I sometimes wonder whether the Department of Trade and Industry does. We certainly worry about whether the Foreign Office does any longer. There was confusion a few weeks ago about arms to Morocco. The Foreign Office said in a written answer that it had not supported the arms going to Morocco, but that the DTI decided such matters. So the buck was passed to the DTI. We need more joined-up Government, even though progress has been made. We certainly need more progress on the aid budget and on alleviating debt.

Incidentally, I think that development will be set back hugely if the Government support the United States on national missile defence. The world could not sustain another arms race; it would be anti-development.

The WTO is, in theory, one of the most democratic global institutions, and it must be made to work. However, it is in need of reform. A significant co-ordinated effort is needed to ensure that developing countries establish the administrative capacity to be able to participate in WTO proceedings. I understand that 38 of the world's poorest countries are unable to send representatives to the 50 or so meetings held in Geneva. If we are to encourage good governance and good world trade, it is important that they should be encouraged to attend those meetings and given the expertise that they require. WTO dispute settlement proceedings must be made more transparent and must be resolved more quickly. I think that the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford would agree with that.

That surely means that the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF must somehow be brought under the umbrella of the United Nations. There must be world regulation of those things. It can work; it has already happened—for instance, global certification for conflict diamonds is under discussion and is being agreed by 159 countries. That is surely proof that such worldwide systems are possible. We must work towards them.

I shall not say much about HIV/AIDS—as hon. Members know, in my view, that is probably the biggest problem facing the world at present. If we do not do more about HIV/AIDS, it will stop development—it will engulf the world. It is not a problem only for developing countries, but for all of us.

As I said in a debate on HIV/AIDS held at the beginning of this week, among the earliest examples of globalisation were the Christian and Catholic Churches. If only the Vatican would promote the use of condoms in developing countries—really go for it, make it public and produce a big statement on the subject—that would help so much in what is really the only defence of the developing world against HIV/AIDS at present. I hasten to add that that would be a pro-life measure, not anti-life. I hope that the Special Assembly of the United Nations in June will command the attention of the world's media. It must do so, because as I said, this is a global emergency.

In conclusion, we need global monitoring and global legislation to tackle globalisation so that it will be a force for good for all the people in the world. Without concerted international and domestic cross-departmental action, without moving from declaration to implementation and tackling those problems, the 2015 development targets and the noble aims of DFID will be irrelevant.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, I point out to the House that several right hon. and hon. Members are trying to

*[Mr. Michael Lord]*

catch my eye and that, unless contributions are considerably shorter, a number of them will be disappointed.

5.37 pm

**Mr. Tony Worthington** (Clydebank and Milngavie): Out of respect for my colleagues on both sides of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall attempt to follow your advice and cut my remarks short.

The globalisation White Paper just about gets it right: as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development says—rather than in the words attributed to her—she is not pro-globalisation, but pro managed globalisation that serves the needs of the poorest people in the world. We have resources that must be used for the poor.

My right hon. Friend and I agree, above all, that that means getting our ideas right. We have to conceptualise the problems in the right way. I have four brief examples of that. The first relates to the way in which we think about HIV/AIDS. A recent judgment in the Pretoria high court was greeted with triumph; it was seen as a wonderful achievement—as indeed it was. However, in a sense, that triumph was one for the drug companies, because it means that we think about HIV/AIDS almost exclusively in terms of finding drugs for it. That is wrong.

No matter how cheap those drugs are in South Africa, only a tiny number of people will benefit from them. What matters is that we stop AIDS and prevent people from catching it—not that we manage death better, but that we keep people alive by stopping them catching that appalling disease.

When I looked into the subject, my immediate thought was that the drugs companies would make more money from managing death than from saving life through anti-retrovirals. There would be less money to be made from a vaccine and even less from microbicides. The World Bank estimates that $2 billion is being spent annually, world wide, on treatment research, for example, on anti-retrovirals—primarily by the private sector. It is estimated that the total research on a vaccine was not $2 billion, but $300 million, and private research accounted for less than half that sum. Public money is being spent on a vaccine, but only a little bit of private money. In 1999, the sum spent on microbicides to protect women was about $35 million, of which $3 million came from the private sector.

We have a very clear picture and if those figures are correct, the private sector spends $7 or $8 on managing the disease for every $1 it invests in research on finding a cure or preventing it. Virtually nothing is spent on microbicides to protect women who are reliant on men. That is not a sensible policy. The challenge for us is to find out how to structure the fight against AIDS—where to spend the money and on which basic services—but we must somehow get the research right.

Another way to structure ideas is in terms of manpower and the mobility of labour. As the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) has suggested, we tend to think of ourselves as a given in such matters. We use the language of aid, but I think that we should ban the word "aid"; it is damaging because it implies that we are the good guys. I suspect that an audit of whether we gain from the developing world or give to it in terms of labour would show that we are the gainers—certainly the United States is. It is unbelievable that a country such as India, which has to struggle to find resources to train its doctors, IT workers and scientists, finds that it has used its own scarce resources to help the United States, and we must audit those exchanges.

We must consider another inhibitor of development. When we studied corruption, I started by thinking that it was about good governance in the developing world and that the developing countries were exploiting the poor with their appalling practices. They are, but by the end of that piece of work, I became convinced that the problem lies here.

Let me cite some unfair figures. According to last year's annual report, we put about £14.9 million of bilateral aid into Nigeria. However, the Nigerian Government are trying to trace £4 billion that the Abacha regime took out of Nigeria and invested in the western world. So for every £1 that we put into Nigeria, one Nigerian family took out £200 and invested it in the west, and it is not the only family in Nigeria and that happens not just in Nigeria.

Let us consider what has happened in Russia. We used to have know-how funds for Russia—perhaps we still have them—but I think that those funds should come this way because enormous rackets have been involved in placing Russian money in this and other countries. If we are to promote development, we must be a bit sharper than the Home Office, the Financial Services Authority and the Treasury in closing down money laundering in this country and elsewhere. That would be in our own good and in everyone else's.

Next, I turn to the way in which we consider trade. I am amazed when people demonstrate against the World Trade Organisation. It is amazing that one of the few agencies for bringing trade under control should become a bogey figure. We have to consider multinationals such as Cargill. People in this Chamber have never heard of it, yet it is the world's largest agricultural company and private firm. It has huge control over every stage of food production: from the supply of seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides right through the food chain to shipping and transportation. Its interest is not in ending poverty. When it offers miracle seeds to the developing world, it is interested in making profits and dominating the market. If, as a consequence of that, it reduces poverty, that is a useful by-product. However, its by-product is more likely to be depleted land, which is likely to be dependent on Cargill fertilisers and pesticides, the elimination of small, self-sufficient farmers and the destruction of the biodiversity of the area. That must be stopped on behalf of the poorer people of the world. We should work with the poorer countries in the WTO to bring democratic control to the world's marketplaces, not campaign on the streets against one of the only mechanisms that we have for controlling multinationals.

I have tried in my speech to say how futile it is to protest against globalisation. People are right to say that this is an area of major concern. I have tried briefly to look at four areas: AIDS, the mobility of labour, money laundering and trade. It is important for the Secretary of State and all of us who remain here to get our questions right about how we manage globalisation. If we accept the questions as they are presented to us, we are in danger of intensifying rather than curing poverty.

The Secretary of State is right to point out the impact that her globalisation White Paper is having throughout the world. DFID has been useful in getting a focus in this place for crucial ideas on subjects such as AIDS, corruption and trade. We have not had such a focus here before. The existence of DFID has enabled us to do that.

5.47 pm

**Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): I start from the Christian position, which is that every human being is of equal value in God's eyes. We do not always live as if we believe that, but it is the Christian position and it drives us to have a responsibility for those less fortunate than ourselves. That responsibility carries a cost. In my view, the developed nations of the world have been playing at helping the poor of the world. Their bottom line is: how cheaply can we do this job? Can we invest a small enough percentage of our wealth so that our electors will not notice?

Let me give the House some figures. If someone in the United Kingdom earns the minimum wage, which from next October is to be set at £4.10 an hour, and works a 35-hour week for 48 weeks, he or she will earn £6,888. That is little enough. Goodness knows, I could not live on it. The present percentage spent on development is 0.3 per cent., which is just under £21. More important, 0.3 per cent. of a Member of Parliament's pay of almost £51,000 per annum is £150. I have no idea how my colleagues spend their money, but when I look at the price of a restaurant meal or an opera ticket, it makes me realise how small a proportion of the UK's national income we are prepared to devote to the poor of the world. We can and should do more. We should engage our population in the debate and stop pretending that we can look generous without cost to ourselves.

Secondly, we need to practise what we preach about empowering the poor. In Government agencies and NGOs there remains a culture of patronising the less well educated and the poor, and it is time that that stopped. Part of the problem stems from the understandable desire among aid agencies to protect their own way of life, their career prospects and sense of self-esteem, but few attitudes do more to perpetuate a culture of dependency or to fuel a sense of helpless envy and resentment.

Let me tell the House a true story. I know a black African who has considerable experience of development work in a number of different settings. He tells me that he was once asked to go to Ethiopia as a consultant. At meetings with white-led NGOs, he was treated with patronising condescension. As he said, that treatment would have been inexcusable if he had been, as they assumed, one of the Ethiopians whom the project was designed to help, but as he was a professional consultant, it was even less tolerable.

The Secretary of State has on many occasions made welcome and trenchant remarks about the contrast in overseas projects between the glossy new Land Rovers that are deemed to be indispensable to the aid workers and the inability to provide the local health workers with the bicycles that would allow them to be more effective. I sometimes think that too much development assistance is like that. A much greater proportion of our assistance budget should be ploughed into enabling local people to find the resources to enable them to take the skills that they have learned to other parts of their own country, and successful projects in one country should share their experience with other countries. Too little use is still made of the information revolution, and too much of the travelling to spread good practice in, for example, sub-Saharan Africa, is undertaken by white professionals.

One of the advantages of globalisation should be that it makes it much easier for development to be taken forward on the basis of south-to-south information exchange. I also look forward to much greater use being made in this country, where community development is mostly at a very primitive stage of evolution, of consultants from Africa, South America or other parts of the globe where community development has been carried to a much more sophisticated level. That implies, of course, that in coming years the huge development industry that has grown up since the end of the second world war will become increasingly controlled by organisations in the developing countries themselves and that the expatriate industry will shrink. That change will not be welcome to the international NGOs, which will resist it, however much their rhetoric claims the reverse.

That brings me to the issue that I raised in Westminster Hall earlier this year: the accountability of NGOs. I am glad that some of the bigger international NGOs are addressing that matter in a joint working group and I look forward to seeing the results of their endeavours. However, the fact remains that international development is an arena in which public compassion can be manipulated to secure funding for organisations whose agendas may be idiosyncratic and whose standards of work may be below what should be acceptable. If NGOs are to continue to play such a key role in the global development strategy, they need to subscribe to a code of conduct and to inspection.

In passing, it is worth noting that one possible benefit of globalisation could be that it makes the pooling of expertise and resources across some of the great international organisations such as the Christian Church easier to achieve. I understand that the budget of the worldwide Christian Church is three times as great as that of the United Nations Children's Fund, but, in terms both of standards and global reach, its contribution does not match that huge potential. Globalisation could help to change that.

**Mr. Streeter:** Before my hon. Friend moves on from that point, will he confirm that although rationalisation, mergers, acquisitions and pooling of resources have occurred in almost every other sector, they rarely—if ever—happen in the NGO community? Will he say a word about that?

**Mr. Rowe:** I could not agree more, but I think that the establishment of competitive organisations that must risk public compassion fatigue in order to obtain funds is a mistake.

I turn now to other aspects of globalisation. I should like to deal first with its impact on national sovereignties. When the United Nations was established, it was taken for granted that it could proceed only on the basis of the nation state. That remains the position and is likely to do so for the foreseeable future, but we should not ignore the considerable change that globalisation is bringing to the world in that regard.

The most obvious sign is the emergence of the great trading blocks. Few nations believe that they can continue to stand aside from membership of a trading area,

*[Mr. Rowe]*

although I realise that some of my hon. Friends believe that we should do so. As we all know, such membership carries rules that circumscribe the freedom of action of national Governments. This process will continue and accelerate, and there will come a time when the nation state is no longer seen as the best guarantor of liberty and prosperity.

The emergence of international criminal courts and many other institutional innovations are heralds of that change. It will be important to ensure that whatever takes the place of the nation state protects the interests of the poor. For example, that is why it is of cardinal importance that poor nations should be resourced to play a full and well-informed part in negotiations that involve international bodies such as the World Trade Organisation. It is no use the rich countries claiming that they are keen to help the poor and then skewing the international instruments of world trade in their own favour, either by accident or design.

As an element of the interaction between sovereignty and globalisation, the future of cultural diversity will be a key area of debate. For example, it is already clear that, in many countries and in many religious communities, practices have evolved over the centuries which are regarded by their practitioners as inalienable elements of their cultural identity. Yet in the modern globalised world, many of those practices are no longer regarded as acceptable. An extreme example of that is the fact that the Taliban's insistence that girls should not receive a modern education is almost universally condemned.

One of the defining moments of the new globalisation was the Beijing conference, at which almost every country on earth signed up to treating women in a way that flies in the face of many of the practices glorified with the name of culture and carried out in many places on earth.

In the United Kingdom, the practice of some immigrant families of coercing their daughters into marrying a man from their former home so as to preserve their traditional culture is repudiated both by the girls and by the vast majority of British citizens. Of course, those who cling to such practices are quick to cry "Racism" when they are rebuked, but it is vital for the world's health that we have a grown-up debate about such issues and are not paralysed by the fear of being automatically and wrongly branded as racist.

The mother tongue is another such global issue. The advantages to the world of having a lingua franca in which to transact business and international relations are clear, but there is are powerful arguments in the other direction about the advantages of diversity and the damage done to a people's diversity if their language is ignored.

Britain has enjoyed a huge advantage in speaking English, not least because it is the language of the most powerful and richest nation on earth, but that advantage is eroding fast. Already, English no longer commands more than half the internet transactions in the world. When China and India achieve internet access on the scale already enjoyed here, the position will change again.

In the USA, Spanish is growing faster than any other language. Unless we are to trust to technology to provide cheap, instantaneous translation, we shall need to have an international debate on this issue also. It matters to the poor because there is no doubt that many poor people will not be able to enjoy anything like equal opportunities if they are not taught in a language that commands international understanding, yet it is precisely the poor who need to have their cultural identity protected.

I am astonished at how little use is made of parliamentarians in international discourse. We can and must do better. For example, in the EU the scandal of the incompetent aid budget needs parliamentary attention at every level. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) instituted a meeting of the Chairs of International Development Committees. That is a start, but we should also be having regular dialogue with our opposite numbers in our fellow European Parliaments.

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Inter-Parliamentary Union should be taking a lead. There is no reason why international development should not feature much more prominently on their agendas. For example, there is no reason why parliamentary pressure should not be being applied in every country on a co-ordinated basis to encourage companies to assist their work forces to resist the ravages of AIDS or to deal with corruption, yet we do not do it.

In passing, I must confess to utter astonishment that when I asked the DFID if there were any opportunities for me to help with development education—on a part-time, voluntary, or even paid basis—once I had retired, it could think of only one, and that in two years' time. I do not suggest that I would be very good at it, but after four years on the International Development Committee, there might be an audience somewhere sufficiently ignorant to learn something even from me.

The global challenge of poverty is, above all, the challenge of children. Not all countries are like Cambodia, with 46 per cent. of their people under 15, but in Brazil, the Philippines, India and many other countries, the population is disproportionately young. If those children have no worthwhile education, no job and nowhere to live, they will steal, fight and emigrate, and we shall rue the day.

If we cannot hope to make globalisation work for the poor at nil or almost nil initial cost to ourselves, it will eventually cost us serious money. If we do not commit the resources, we shall fail the biggest moral test of the century. Moreover, we shall find ourselves paying out far more a little down the track as we try to contain global instability, global disease, global movements of population and, no doubt, a growing disenchantment with global capitalism and global democracy.

6 pm

**Jane Griffiths** (Reading, East): It is good to have an opportunity to debate the White Paper, especially as the previous international development White Paper was not discussed on the Floor of the House. I am especially pleased to take part in the debate because international development is one of the most important issues in my constituency. In Reading, East, only banning hunting has generated more letters. I do not know whether that is unusual. That interest was highlighted when the previous Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), visited Reading last autumn. We had one of the best—and best attended—public meetings for some time.

Each July, music, arts and food from around the world can be experienced in Reading at the famous world of music, arts and dance—WOMAD—festival. There is a

standing invitation to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to join me and the world on the banks of Thames this July.

Reading's interest in the world is reflected in its many active voluntary groups, which campaign and work on international issues. I am pleased to have visited many of them in the four years that I have been a Member of Parliament. My views are informed by visits to such groups, including those of Reading Oxfam, Amnesty International and the World Development Movement. Two constituents in particular, John and Jackie Oversby, keep me informed about international development issues almost weekly. The people whom I have contacted have been delighted with the Government's and the Department's achievements so far, especially the leadership that we have shown on debt relief. However, they have anxieties about some other matters, which I shall outline shortly.

We should consider the White Paper against a background of positive progress on international development issues. Development assistance is 0.31 per cent. of gross domestic product and is moving back up to the target of 0.7 per cent. The previous Labour Government achieved 0.5 per cent., but the previous Conservative Government almost halved that figure, which dipped to 0.26 per cent. in 1997. We all welcome ending the practice of tying aid to trade.

The impact of economic growth on poverty is shown in the change in the number of poor people who live on a dollar a day. In east Asia and the Pacific, it fell from 452 million in 1990 to 257 million in 1998. It is expected to fall much further and that decline is most welcome. However, I am worried that the pattern has not been repeated elsewhere. Other hon. Members have also drawn attention to that. The average per capita income in African countries has fallen by more than half in relative terms since 1965. Not so many decades ago, many African countries were among the richer countries; that is no longer the case.

Reports from the World Bank show that the world is dividing into those who benefit from globalisation and those who do not. I should like to know the Department's plans for assessments to identify the impact of growth, trade and investment on poverty. I know that the Department has given some consideration to the problem of the increasing inequality in and between regions. Globalisation seems to have exacerbated those problems, and I am especially keen to know what thought has been given to them.

Growth offers a great chance to lift people out of poverty, and we need to ensure that everyone benefits from it. However, conflict is a great generator of poverty and inhibitor of growth. For example, Sudan has been in conflict for decades. The presence of oil reserves literally fuels the conflict.

Two years ago, I had the privilege of visiting Bangladesh with Population Concern, and I witnessed the difference in affluence that can occur in regions. In Bangladesh, a woman in the wealthiest fifth of the population is 16 times as likely to have trained assistance in child birth as a woman in the poorest fifth.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to assure me that the question of institutional reform will be addressed when we look at development assistance. European Union institutions have been far too slow in disbursing their funds. The Committee referred recently to the slow release of funds which meant that, for example, a director of an NGO working in Pakistan had to take out a personal loan to prevent a project from foundering because of the slow release of funds. That is unacceptable; we must have a payment code for the EU.

We must find ways to encourage the use of unspent funds—funds that are unspent because, for example, the conditions for disbursement are not there, as in Sudan. We must encourage the use of those funds, which may be just sitting in accounts, to benefit highly indebted poor countries.

Does my right hon. Friend support the World Wide Fund for Nature's call for land tenure reform to minimise poverty? There are suggestions about that subject in the White Paper. The WWF has also highlighted the devastating reduction in species diversity in many countries, which has been exacerbated by conflict and by unsustainable over-consumption by impoverished populations who have little choice in the matter. Does she agree that reduction in species diversity is a time bomb that could destroy the future of stable food supplies for the world's poor?

In my constituency, we have the BBC monitoring service at Caversham Park, where we listen to and, I hope, help to inform the entire world. I thank the House for listening to me and I thoroughly welcome the White Paper. I invite my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to visit my constituency, where she will be assured of a warm welcome and a listening ear.

6.6 pm

**Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough): This is a very important debate on a vital issue, and it is a wake-up call. If we in the west do not take more interest at the highest political level, we will reap the whirlwind in the next century.

I have been reading a lot about the Spanish civil war and I have been struck by the divisions in European society in the early part of the previous century and by the huge cruelty engendered by civil wars within Europe as a result of grotesque inequalities of opportunity and wealth. In Europe, we have created a real consensus—there has also been a consensus in the debate—based on the belief that we should allow free enterprise to flourish and have effective social security, health and education systems for everybody. As we have been so successful, we have created far calmer societies where the enormous hatreds that spawned fascism, communism and civil wars have declined.

It is often said that the public are disillusioned with politics, but part of that disillusionment is because we are so successful. But while we have been successful within our own societies, the general political system has overlooked the massive divide between the developed and the developing world. If we do not take action soon, we could face enormous conflict throughout the next century.

Everybody here takes a great interest in the subject, and I do not need to remind the House of the enormous well of misery and despair; 1 billion people live on a dollar a day and 5,000 Africans have died from AIDS over the past few days. These facts are familiar to us.

Despite the tremendous consensus among those on the Front Benches, how much interest in the issue is there outside? We have had a splendid speech from the

*[Mr. Edward Leigh]*

Secretary of State, but a lot of her natural supporters are falling away from her and support many of the sentiments expressed by the anti-globalisation activists. I am not referring to the rioters, whom only a tiny minority would support. There is no point in Members on both sides of the Chamber agreeing if support is being lost outside, so I am speaking to alert people of a conservative disposition—a right-wing disposition, even—to the fact that we have to handle the issue correctly.

Many people who share my prejudices and political instincts are worried about asylum seekers. We can have all the controls in the world—indeed, we can do whatever we like—but nature abhors a vacuum. If there are huge inequalities of wealth, the strength of a system does not matter, because no matter how many times people are thrown out of a country, they will come back again, and can we blame them? Many people of my disposition care passionately about defence, but we shall have to spend a lot more on it in the next century if we do not take the issue of inequality seriously.

I want to alert conservative-minded people so that they wake up to their responsibilities. It is easy for us to lecture people about paying more tax and my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) showed just how derisory is our contribution to development—0.3 per cent. of gross national product. However, will any of us tell our electorate in the next three weeks, "We're spending too much on the national health service and the pupil:teacher ratio"? No, we will not. Will we tell people that we will increase taxation? No, we will not. That is the reality of the situation.

We face an appalling dilemma, which has a moral aspect. From a Christian or any other perspective, how can we allow such a large proportion of the world to live in such abject poverty? Those who are not interested in morals should be interested in the threat to freedom, the defence threat or any other threat posed by allowing people to live in such dire poverty. However, none of us has the moral courage to ask our electorate to pay more tax.

I do not know what the solution is, but I must deal with three points, the first of which I made during interventions: there is a lot of scope for encouraging charitable giving. My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) began the process with gift aid and I pay tribute to the Chancellor, who has widened its scope considerably, but we must ask ourselves why American society is so much more generous.

Charitable donations come off the tax bill of American citizens, which is a tremendous incentive, so they can say, "I do not believe in a lot of what the Government do, but if I give to charities I can decide which good causes my money goes to."

**Clare Short:** That is important. Americans are generous individually, but America is very mean in its contributions to international development. The richest country in the world is also the meanest, as it contributes only 0.1 per cent. of gross national product, so we do not want to imitate that. Charitable giving by individuals is good, but Governments must fulfil certain obligations, because some things only Governments can do.

**Mr. Leigh:** Of course, I accept that and I am not suggesting for a moment that Governments are not important. I want contributions to increase towards the level recommended by the United Nations, but I am trying to be realistic about how quickly we can convince our electorate that we can deal with the problem through taxation. We can learn from the United States model; it encourages charitable giving and we should consider it. Furthermore, the Government have made progress on payroll giving.

My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) put the second point again and again, and it is an important one. This country leapt forward when it introduced good governance, whereby it began to pay judges and civil servants properly and started to root out corruption. That is achievable today elsewhere, and if we divert more resources in that direction, we will do much.

The third point is set out in the White Paper in the excellent chapter 4, which is entitled "Harnessing Private Finance". I refer hon. Members to paragraph 159 on page 51, which states:

> "Domestic tax policy is crucial. In recent years, many developing countries have offered investment subsidies, including tax incentives, to attract transnational firms. Such subsidies are intended to generate new employment. But in practice they often fail to alter the investment decisions of firms . . . The experience of Uganda and other countries suggests that simplification of a country's tax regime may be a more effective way to encourage companies to invest."

Those three measures—harnessing private finance, encouraging charitable giving and promoting good governance—are the means by which we can take forward this debate. If we do not do so, we could be in serious trouble. This is the most important issue facing this Parliament. It could unite right and left, and I hope that this debate will help that process.

6.15 pm

**Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): There has been a lot of talk about consensus from the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) and others. I suspect that part of the consensus in the Chamber is due to the fact that there is a great deal of admiration felt between the Select Committee and the Department for International Development, and that they often see eye to eye. Indeed, the Select Committee agreed on 32 items out of 42 in one departmental report. The consensus goes beyond that in many respects, but I suspect that there is no overriding consensus. This could be a bit like those Venn diagrams that interlink: the area in the middle represents the part where everyone agrees. To a great extent, that is the area that we have been discussing. However, the contents of the other areas of that diagram might enliven our understanding.

I am not going to cause discontent by discussing the issues on which I have a difference of opinion. I want to use this opportunity to concentrate on one item, although I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and the House will not think that I am just a single-issue campaigner with no other ideas, or that I do not want to link my remarks to a wider analysis of the subject.

Paragraph 36 of the report that the International Development Committee recently produced on the globalisation White Paper referred to the Tobin tax. It pointed out that a number of submissions had been made

about a tax relating to international currency speculation, and that the Secretary of State had been attracted to the idea but was

"not optimistic about it being implemented in the near future."

The report also stated that the Secretary of State had promised to forward to the Select Committee a note on the Government's policy on the Tobin tax. I do not know whether that has been made available yet, as the report came out only recently. The note has certainly not yet been produced by the Select Committee, so perhaps it is still on its way. I would be interested to see it. I am not arguing that investigating the case for the Tobin tax—or even producing such a measure, in the end—would be a panacea for all the problems that we have discussed today. However, it would be a significant advance.

International currency speculation involves exchanges of money worth up to $1.5 trillion a day, mainly unrelated to trade in real goods and services. Instead, it involves the advantage to be gained from trading in other people's currencies. Many of the problems of disruption in the third world have often been associated with earlier occurrences of currency speculation. In fact, the economic causes of the break-up of Yugoslavia should also be examined in terms of its then currency problems. Such problems can create social disruption and allow people with extremist ideas to find a ready market for their particular approach.

Those speculative currency flows undermine the powers of national Governments and regional blocs, and create massive instability. Tobin suggested that a small levy of 0.25 per cent. on those speculative transactions would dampen down the scale and scope of speculation, and raise a substantial revenue of $250 billion a year. Those revenues could be used for the very purposes that we have discussed today: they could be devoted to health care, environmental protection and other forms of development. I suppose that this is a bit like the tax on smoking: the tax does not end smoking, but it raises revenue. As long as globalisation produces the gains that it is currently producing—for that is the reality—there will clearly be a huge opportunity for the raising of funds.

The levy would have to be universal, or nearly universal, and safeguards would be required to minimise diversion. At present the proposal is backed by the Canadian Parliament, the Belgian Parliament, the Finnish Government, the Indian Prime Minister and the Swedish deputy Prime Minister, as well as George Soros. The campaign in this country is led by War on Want, and 144 Members of Parliament—on a cross-party basis—have signed an early-day motion supporting the measure.

I should like the Government to take the lead on the Tobin tax in the way they took the lead on debt relief. That strategy is not operating fully yet, but we played a large role in connection with it. We have led the argument internationally, and have made some distinct achievements.

The Secretary of State's responses to the Select Committee suggest that the Department for International Development is rather more sympathetic to the issue that we are discussing than the Treasury. Perhaps it is just as well that I am now pushing at a half-open door. One of the Treasury's many objections is that speculation would go offshore, and that evasion would result from the refusal of certain areas to agree to provisions that might operate in some major dealing countries.

About 12 countries could be linked with the proposal, which might tie down a great deal of world development. It would limit scope for evasion, and onshore organisations could be registered so that guarantee payments were legally protected. Electronic processes relating to trade would make the taxing of currency transactions relatively easy to administer, and would reduce the possibilities of tax evasion. Stock exchanges themselves could refuse to trade or quote with those dealers or rogue areas.

The Treasury has produced another set of objections, which were presented to me following a meeting during which, along with the director of War on Want and others, I visited the Economic Secretary to the Treasury. It was suggested that four of our proposals were already being dealt with, which, in my view, did not rule out the principles involved in the Tobin tax.

Alternatives were offered. The Government emphasised the existence of codes and standards which could deliver transparency and accountability, and which covered fiscal policy, financial and monetary policy, corporate governance, best practice for financial institutions and the surveillance machinery that should be associated with that, on an international scale. If the Government can advocate such policies, there is surely no reason why they should not accept our argument about the Tobin tax.

The Government propose bringing together the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and key regulatory authorities in a financial stability forum, which would tackle many problems relating to instability in world markets. They have stressed two points that are very third way and new Labour: partnership needs to exist between the public and private sectors on an international scale and there needs to be agreement with the G7. I might not be into the mixed economy or an advocate of it, but I am realistic enough to realise that we must operate in the world as we find it, rather than as we would like to find it, although sometimes, as well as making concessions to reality, we should mention what we are after.

The Government have also said that new social principles should come to the fore of the work of the World Bank and the United Nations. That is equivalent to the principles on freedom of the market and social justice which are also advocated by the third way. They are now projected on an international scale.

Those principles are relevant to the argument about the Tobin tax. We are approaching a general election. I believe that those parties that agreed to advocate that measure would win enthusiastic support. I note that what we consider to be our sister party in Northern Ireland, the Social Democratic and Labour party, has adopted the Tobin tax provisions.

I ask the Secretary of State to explain the situation in the UN. Kofi Annan helped to set up a panel to investigate the Tobin tax, but it is beginning to look as if it has been pushed to one side. Some of us believe that the decision that the panel will make on that tax is not that which we feel that it should adopt.

I appeal to the Government to take the matter on board. They cannot produce a tax on international currency speculation by themselves; it must be a matter of massive international agreement. The Secretary of State said that it might be something for our grandchildren to consider. I realise that it will not be introduced tomorrow, but I hope that we may make progress on it in my lifetime.

*[Mr. Harry Barnes]*

The Government are in an ideal position to get it up and running because of their achievements in international development, so I hope that the matter will be taken on board and seriously considered.

6.28 pm

**Mr. Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): It is a privilege to contribute to this interesting debate. I have been an hon. Member for four years and I think that it has been one of the best debates that I have heard on an important issue. The quality of the speeches has been superb. The issue on which we all seem to agree is that self-interest and the common good are two sides of the same coin, and that to survive as a sustainable planet we must not only create wealth, develop skill and talent, but ensure that no one is left behind.

I should say that I am a member of the board of CAFOD—the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development—the development agency of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. I am delighted that, this week, my hon. Friend the Member for Heywood and Middleton (Mr. Dobbin) has sponsored a display of CAFOD's work in the Upper Waiting Hall. I am also delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is to visit CAFOD next Tuesday to sign the programme partnership agreement between her Department and the organisation.

The display upstairs carries a short extract from a speech by a woman from Zambia, Mulima Kufekisa Akapelway, in St. Chad's cathedral, Birmingham during the G8 summit in May 1998. My right hon. Friend may remember that—not only is the cathedral in her constituency, but she was in it when the speech was made. It is worth recalling Mulima's words:

"Calling from Africa, standing by ourselves, we have to beg for debt relief. But standing alongside you . . . we are in a position to demand justice."

I think that that statement encapsulates not only the work of non-governmental organisations such as CAFOD, but what we as politicians, and everyone else who is concerned about the issue, are trying to do—forge a new solidarity between rich and poor and powerful and powerless people, to work together for a more just world order.

I think that the Secretary of State is right to say that, of itself, globalisation is neither good nor bad, but that it is how we shape it and what we make of it that really matters. What is clearly undeniable is the fact that globalisation is here, changing our world profoundly and rapidly. Every day there are 3 million international travellers and $1.5 trillion travels round world markets. I was astounded to learn that, in 2000, there were more than 100 billion minutes of international telephone calls. That is a staggering statistic.

Whether we like it or not, we are all caught up in globalisation. Food and clothes, telecommunications and manufacturing industries are all part of the global market. For me, one of the great ironies of Tuesday's demonstrations was the fact that, in Wednesday morning's newspapers, every photograph of the events showed people who wanted an end to global capitalism wearing Levi jeans, Adidas track suits and Nike trainers—

**Mr. Wells:** And using mobile telephones.

**Mr. Goggins:** Yes.

One of the problems that we face in trying to gain a better understanding of globalisation is the fact that globalisation is very hard to measure. I was interested recently to read about the work of A. T. Kearney and *Foreign Policy* magazine, who tried to draw up a globalisation index in which they analysed 50 developing countries and some key emerging markets around the world. Although I would not say that their findings are the gospel, they are certainly worth some consideration.

One of the findings was that globalisation is not uniform and that some of its aspects work faster than others. In the late 1990s, for example, when there were some trade difficulties in other sectors, the telecommunications industry grew apace. Moreover, some of the global gaps are not only between rich and poor. The digital divide, for example, distinguishes the United States, Canada and Scandinavian countries, where almost half the people have access to the internet. There is therefore a gap not only between those countries and developing countries, but between them and other developed countries.

Perhaps the most interesting claim made in the study was that there is a link between globalisation and income equality, which is quite the reverse of the usual arguments with which we are familiar. The study said that the link was particularly distinct in some of the emerging-market countries. Using the index, the study highlighted Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary as countries that are both more globalised and more equal than other countries, such as Russia, China and Argentina, which tended to be less globalised and more unequal. As I said, although I am sure that the study is far from perfect, it gives us at least a start or handle to measure the impacts of globalisation.

The international development targets are clearly crucial in attempting to ensure that globalisation makes the world a fairer place. They include halving world poverty, providing universal primary education and reducing mortality rates for under fives by two thirds, all by 2015. In trying to achieve those goals, it has been absolutely essential to get the support of the IMF and the World Bank. I certainly applaud the Secretary of State's efforts in striving also to obtain the commitment of the World Trade Organisation to those international development targets. Targets are often dull and meaningless things, but I think that those targets can inspire and energise us. As many hon. Members have said today, it is also possible to achieve them.

Many hon. Members have also already made the point that growth alone is not sufficient. The World Bank has estimated that, if we keep growth at current levels and remain as unequal as we are now, the proportion of the world's population living in poverty would decrease from 24 per cent. to 22 per cent. by 2015. Clearly, therefore, growth is essential—but so is redistribution. I am talking not about old-fashioned redistribution in which money is taken from one group and given to another, but about a much more dynamic process in which we have real investment, real opportunity and skills and real development that really connect those who live in the poorest parts of the world with the rest of us.

I should conclude my remarks now. However, as I said, this has been a tremendous debate on a very important topic.

6.35 pm

**Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): I echo the closing words of the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale, East (Mr. Goggins). I, too, think that this has been an extremely valuable debate. I am very pleased and privileged to be here to wind it up. This is a rare opportunity for a decent debate on international development. I do not want to labour the point, because the Secretary of State and the Minister know that, however often we clash across the Chamber, we have a commonality of purpose. Conservative Members have been genuinely distressed that she has not had as many opportunities as we would wish to come to the Dispatch Box to discuss what is an extremely important topic.

In the spirit of the debate, I, too, congratulate the Secretary of State, as we approach what may be a general election—this may be one of the last occasions on which I stand at the Dispatch Box on this side of the Chamber—on her tenure in the Department. The final White Paper that she has produced covers a large number of topics under the umbrella of globalisation and represents a significant contribution to the debate both at home and abroad, which is much to be praised. To have carved out the new Department, and to have had the complementary Select Committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), has been another noteworthy achievement.

The Secretary of State has made great personal efforts, and I hope that, by paying her this handsome tribute, I make up for the witchy comments that I sometimes make from this side of the Chamber, which needs must be made, because we cannot always agree and it is only right that we should challenge the Government, as she did so ably when she was in this position.

The Secretary of State made an excellent speech in which she condemned the violence of the demonstrators at Seattle and elsewhere. She and many other speakers showed up the double standards often displayed by such people. She did not even mention what she was up to in Seattle, but I happen to know, because I took part in a Standing Committee debate on a statutory instrument earlier this week, connected with the fact that she signed up, in the margins of Seattle, to the WTO advisory centre on law, which will give the poorest countries access to legal advice in trade disputes. As I said in that Committee, I thoroughly commend that. I supported the approval of the statutory instrument and asked some questions that the Minister answered satisfactorily.

I was very interested to hear what the Secretary of State said about the downloading of the White Paper. I wonder whether the systems can identify the people who access the information, because it is all very well knowing the number of people who clock in to receive the words of wisdom but we would also like to know the qualitative element, and whether technology will be developed quickly enough to enable us to identify those people with whom we are communicating.

The Secretary of State outlined a vision that is not dissimilar to our own and made some valid points on the international situation. We all agree that we are at a crossroads in relation to international organisations and we all hope to see the reform of the relevant institutions, not least the United Nations and the European Union. For once, the EU did not come in for much criticism in this debate. I suppose we take it as read now. We certainly hope that the path to reform will be trodden at a much quicker pace than heretofore. That is common ground between us. It should not be impossible in this new millennium to ensure that people throughout the world achieve basic standards. With correctly targeted programmes and the identification of the key elements for each area—because they all have different requirements—it should not be outwith the wit of man to make progress.

**Clare Short:** Or woman.

**Mrs. Gillan:** I shall come to the role of women shortly.

The Secretary of State kindly took an intervention on the pyrethrum issue, and I have had my file copied for her. A marvellous company in Penn in my constituency, Agropharm Ltd, produces that alternative to organophosphate and organochlorine-based insecticides, made out of chrysanthemums. I wrote to the Secretary of State on the issue on 5 March, but I understand that she has had other things to do. She has undertaken to consider the issue, and we would be grateful for her comments on it.

The Secretary of State mentioned some relevant institutions. I hope that the absence of mention of the British Council and scant reference to the Commonwealth does not mean that we have forgotten those institutions. I wish to take this opportunity to praise the work that is done by the British Council and to point out that the Commonwealth should be a great force for good in the future.

The right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) was the first Member I met when I came into the House, and I think that he was the Opposition spokesman on the subject at the time. He has an impressive track record and made a wide-ranging contribution. He touched on Kyoto and the environment, praised Oxfam for its advocacy and briefings, and discussed debt relief under the HIPC initiative and the role of education in the third world. He was also generous enough to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major) for his creation of the safe havens in Iraq, and he also referred to Nelson Mandela's inspiration, which is an inspiration to us all. I was pleased to see Nelson Mandela at the concert on Sunday celebrating South Africa, and I am also grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his contribution to this debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) was elected Chairman of the Select Committee on 16 July 1997. He is truly the Frank Sinatra of politics, but he is really going away this time and we will miss him. In fact, I do not know what we will do without him. He spoke passionately about the empowerment of women, and I agree that if we can reach the women of a society and ensure that they are enabled and empowered, we can improve that society's hopes and aspirations.

I also share my right hon. Friend's complaint about timetabling. He echoed a theme that has become common in this debate, which is the need for better co-operation between the Departments, including the Foreign Office and the Department of Trade and Industry. We all know that cross-departmental issues are the most difficult to solve for Ministers and Secretaries of State, and many hon. Members explored that theme during the debate. I am sure that the Secretary of State will take those points on board.

*[Mrs. Gillan]*

The hon. Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) welcomed the White Paper and spoke about his constituency. When he said that India and Pakistan had wasted money on nuclear proliferation at the expense of their people, a murmur of assent ran around the House. He also championed women and children, and their education, and that was another common theme of the contributions from hon. Members today. The hon. Gentleman spoke about shipbuilding in his constituency—rightly so—and about GM crops. We all know that GM crops will not solve all the food shortages in the developing world. GM technology may be of benefit in the future but, before large-scale planting begins, we need to ensure that proper trials are undertaken and that crops are safe. We should not threaten the poorest nations with crops that could reduce fertile land to desert.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) allowed her frustration to show a little at the beginning of her contribution. She gave a poetic glimpse into the history of the black country, and managed to talk about a song from the film "Mange Tout" that mentioned Tesco. However, she named some companies—Rolls Royce, BP, Shell, Nestlé, Cadbury, Thornton, Rio Tinto, Balfour Beatty, Tesco and Sainsbury's—and I should be keen to see the examples of alleged wrongdoing to which she referred. I should like the hon. Lady to write to each of those companies so that they can provide an explanation.

**Dr. Tonge:** I have done that.

**Mrs. Gillan:** I am glad that she has done that already. I should be interested to look at her correspondence, to see exactly what the complaints were and how the companies responded. We should not always rail against multinationals and tell them to keep away from development, as their foreign direct investment is often most important to the countries that receive it.

The hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) as usual made an excellent contribution. He made four points—on AIDS, mobility of labour, money laundering and trade—and they were well expressed.

What can I say about my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe)? Once again, his outstanding contribution made us all think. I hope that the Secretary of State will find something for him when he retires—although he should not be allowed to retire, as he has a wealth of experience and education to offer.

The hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) spoke briefly. I believe that people in Reading, East are more interested in foxes than in international development, but the hon. Lady spoke with fervour about the slow release of funds.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) spoke in his usual thoughtful and thought-provoking way. He issued a wake-up call.

The hon. Members for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) and for Wythenshawe and Sale, East also made excellent contributions—especially the latter, who is a member of the CAFOD board.

I reserve my final praise for my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), who has led me in this brief for some three years. He has led the shadow team on international development from the front. He gave a reflective speech, in which he spoke of our three aims—good governance, working with the NGOs, and reforming the multilateral organisations. My hon. Friend has moved the discussion on and has given a blueprint for the future in the work that he has put into "First Things First".

Finally, I thank the Under-Secretary of State for International Development, who will answer the debate. I, too, have enjoyed this debate and I feel that, at least in the past four years and thanks to the Secretary of State, the debate on international development has been moved forward.

6.48 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Chris Mullin):** As all hon. Members I think agree, we have had a very good debate. I am only sorry that more hon. Members could not take part, but some have been tied up in Committee duties upstairs. I hope that debates on international development will become a regular feature of the parliamentary calendar, and it may be a better test of demand if they are not always surrounded by one-line Whips.

I want to add my tribute to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells), who has made yet another final appearance—although I think that this one was positively his last. He and the Select Committee on International Development, which he chairs, have played an important part in the sea change that has taken place in our attitude to overseas development over the past few years. We are grateful for the constructive, positive and rigorous oversight of the work of the Department that the Select Committee has offered under his wise stewardship.

We shall miss the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford, and the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe), not least because they belong to that dwindling band of one-nation Tories that is so fast becoming an extinct species in the modern Conservative party. Whatever their next incarnations, I wish them well.

The hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) made a constructive and thoughtful speech which rose to the spirit of the occasion. In his final point, he talked about withdrawing from some of the multilateral institutions with which he was not happy. I hope that that will be a last resort. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) said, it is generally better to stay and fight one's corner than to take the ball and play elsewhere.

The hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford gave us a long list of the countries in which the number of people living in poverty has been halved during the last generation or two. That was a worthwhile point, because we need to remind ourselves from time to time that we are not up against impossible odds. It can be done and it has been done, and we must get used to publicising successes. He also asked about the Proceeds of Crime Bill, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington). The Bill was published last March and will be introduced in the next Session. I agree that it is an important and necessary piece of legislation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) mentioned the outrageous attempt by a number of multinationals to claim patents on things such

as basmati rice. I was delighted to hear that they have been seen off this time around. I understand that patent offices around the world have cancellation procedures, so it is worth bearing it in mind that once a patent has been granted, it can be retracted if sufficient evidence exists to suggest that it should not have been granted in the first place. Perhaps we should look at a few more of the patents that have wrongly been granted, as my hon. Friend outlined.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) rightly reminded us of the misbehaviour of some multinationals. I think that she would agree that there are good ones and bad ones. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out, many of them operate higher standards than local employers, so we should not lump them all together. One of the most effective ways of mitigating misbehaviour by multinational companies is to empower the consumer. Many of those companies want to be loved, and they can be embarrassed into changing their behaviour—witness the outcome of the recent court case in South Africa over the HIV/AIDS drugs. There have been other examples in which the power of the consumer has faced down mighty corporations when sometimes not even Governments have been successful in doing so.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie said, quite rightly, that prevention of AIDS is more important than a cure. We had a very good debate on this in Westminster Hall the other day, which I think that most right hon. and hon. Members who are here today attended. The point was repeatedly made that even if the drugs were available at a relatively low price, most of those who are most affected are beyond the reach of effective health systems. Therefore, the most useful things that we can do are to encourage prevention and help establish effective health systems.

The hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) made an interesting speech, and a good one. He said that we ignore at our peril the scale of the crisis that is growing, and that if we continue to ignore it we will reap the whirlwind. He was right to make that point, and we shall bear it in mind when we talk about what prompts asylum seekers to come to this country and the desperation that exists. One has only to look at some of the perilous ways in which they make their way here. Would we put ourselves and our children in a truck or send them to a destination, without adults, unaccompanied, as some people do? They know that they will never see their children again, but hope that they will at least lead a better life. Such desperation lies behind any rational discussion of asylum seeking.

The hon. Gentleman expressed the hope that he would alert Conservative-minded people to that problem. I share his hope and trust that his voice will be heard in those parts of middle England that my right hon. Friend and I cannot reach. I look forward to the day when the main political parties compete for votes through an appeal to the best instincts of middle England rather than the worst.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) asked about the Tobin tax and the response to the Select Committee report. The response will be issued tomorrow and a note on the Tobin tax will be attached. I am sorry that it was not possible to provide the House with the response in time for today's debate. As hon. Members may know, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has been attending the spring meeting of the World Bank in Washington. She returned only yesterday and has thus only recently been able to approve the text; that is the reason for the delay.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire is well aware that the great difficulty with the Tobin tax is that to make it effective we have to persuade everyone to sign up to it. It is rather like the proposal to tax aviation fuel. It is another desirable objective but unless we can persuade everyone to sign up, some countries could drive a coach and horses through the plan.

**Mr. Rowe:** It is clear that the hon. Gentleman does not intend to respond to any of my points. I hoped that he might mention the fact that we are still in danger—both in DFID and in the NGOs—of acting de haut en bas towards the people we most want to help.

**Mr. Mullin:** That may be so. I am sorry that I do not have time to reply to all the points made in the debate. During the few minutes that remain, I should like to make one or two points of my own. I am happy to repeat to the House what a good fellow the hon. Gentleman is and how useful his contributions have been over the years—*[Interruption.]* I cannot promise him a job.

We have a good story to tell. Thanks in no small measure to the robust leadership provided by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, there has been a sea change in the way that we manage overseas development. DFID is an independent Department with its own seat at the Cabinet table. Overseas aid is no longer a tool of foreign policy, still less a tool of trade policy. As a share of gross national product, it is rising year by year, although it is still far too low. Furthermore, our aid is now firmly targeted on the poorest people in the poorest countries.

We are setting an example that other countries and, more important, international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, are beginning to follow. What is most heartening is that both sides of the House have signed up to our approach. Indeed, I hope that it is about to be enshrined in law.

As many hon. Members have remarked, however, there are no grounds for complacency. As many of the speeches have shown, no one is under any illusions as to the scale of the task that we face. However, at least we can move forward in the knowledge that there is a fair measure of agreement about where we need to arrive and how to get there. We can take heart, too, from the fact that the international community is increasingly pulling in the same direction. What matters is the political will to achieve what we all know must be done, and I assure the House that there is no lack of political will on the part of the Government.

*It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.*

## Child Abduction

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

7 pm

**Sir John Stanley** (Tonbridge and Malling): The Parliamentary Secretary will remember that we last met on 24 October last year, when I secured an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall before the special commission meeting in The Hague to review the operation of the 1980 Hague convention on the civil aspects of international child abduction. I am very glad to return to that extremely important subject now that the special commission meeting has taken place.

As the Parliamentary Secretary knows, I am a vice-chairman of the all-party group on child abduction, but I am speaking entirely in my individual capacity and in no way on behalf of the parliamentary group. I am sorry that I feel impelled to say that the responses that the all-party group has had from the Lord Chancellor have been singularly less than helpful in the run-up to the special commission meeting.

I wish to refer to two specific issues, the first of which relates to the letter that the members and officers of the all-party group sent to the Lord Chancellor on 20 December, in which an entirely reasonable request was made. We said:

"we also consider it would be desirable to have some parliamentary representation at the Special Commission meeting. Previously, Parliamentarians have been almost totally absent—indeed in the entire list of delegates to the 1997 Special Commission meeting there is only one Parliamentarian. We should like to propose therefore that two members of the British Parliament are included in the UK delegation, one from the Government and the other from the Opposition."

As we live in a parliamentary democracy and as—not entirely surprisingly—there are a relatively small number of hon. Members who have in-depth expertise on the 1980 child abduction convention, we believed that the Lord Chancellor would support our request, but we were disappointed. In his letter of 21 January, the Lord Chancellor replied:

"I do not propose to increase the delegation to include parliamentary representation this time. I think that this would cause difficulty with other States".

So it was somewhat galling, to put it mildly, to find that a Member of the European Parliament was present at The Hague, as were two American Congressmen, who were, of course, part of the official United States Government delegation. I must make it clear that the presence of those three parliamentarians caused absolutely no difficulty whatever to the member states present at the special commission meeting, and the grounds on which the Lord Chancellor rejected our proposal were shown to be wholly spurious.

The Lord Chancellor's correspondence with the all-party group was less than helpful in the provision of information. We wrote again to the Lord Chancellor on 14 February, making this request:

"The Group would wish to comment on the specific contents of the communique that the British Government would like to see agreed at the forthcoming Special Commission. We should be grateful therefore if you could provide the Group at the earliest possible date with the text of the current UK draft of the proposed final communique or a summary of its terms as wanted by the British Government."

The all-party group clearly wished to have the opportunity to comment on the objectives that the United Kingdom Government were trying to achieve at the special commission meeting. But the Lord Chancellor replied to the Chairman of our group, the hon. Member for Nuneaton (Mr. Olner), on 6 March, offering no information whatever, although by this time we were less than three weeks away from the start of the special commission meeting. He said:

"Ahead of the Special Commission the Central Authority for England and Wales together with the Central Authority in Scotland and Northern Ireland is currently drafting a working paper for submission to the Permanent Bureau about topics which we feel ought to be on the agenda. I would be happy to send you a copy of this document upon completion."

Although on 6 March the Lord Chancellor was offering no information to the parliamentary group about what the British Government were trying to achieve at the forthcoming meeting, on 20 March I received a helpful and fully informative letter from the Foreign Secretary. He attached the full record and papers of a meeting which took place in the Foreign Office on 13 February, chaired by Baroness Scotland, at which officials of the Parliamentary Secretary's Department were represented, as well as those from outside, including Reunite. So the meeting was effectively in the public domain. One of those papers is headed "UK Aims For The Special Commission" and details the nine objectives of the British Government. In other words it provided precisely the information which the all-party group had sought and which the Lord Chancellor had declined to give us in his letter of 6 March.

I earnestly hope that lessons will be learned. I do not make that criticism of any other part of the British Government. Indeed, in my extensive dealings with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Foreign Secretary, ambassadors overseas in their posts, including in Sweden where I went in January, and officials in the consular department of the Foreign Office and in the child abduction unit have been singularly helpful and informative. I hope that in future the same will be true of the Lord Chancellor himself.

My own Government having given me the thumbs down made me that much more determined to attend the special commission meeting, which I indeed did on behalf of the international NGO, the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children. I want to raise five particular issues in connection with what happened at The Hague.

The first concerns ministerial attendance. For a considerable period the all-party group had been pressing that for the first time there should be a ministerial presence for at least part of the special commission meeting. We felt it important in terms of the profile of the meeting—and of the child abduction issue—that the Governments who are parties to the 1980 convention should demonstrate at ministerial level that there is a deep desire to see that the operation of the convention was improved.

I acknowledge that the British Government made strenuous efforts over a considerable period to get international agreement to ministerial attendance. There was no lack of effort and it was not the British Government's fault that that was not achieved. It was somewhat disappointing, however, that the British Government did not move to the fall-back position which

was to include a Minister in the British delegation at The Hague. The composition of the British delegation was entirely a matter for the British Government. The Hague secretariat and other countries have no role to play in the composition of individual delegations. It would have been possible for the British delegation to include a Minister. It might well have included the Parliamentary Secretary, who would have been an excellent leader if she could have been present for even part of the time. An opportunity was lost. If the British—and perhaps the British alone—had sent a Minister as leader of their delegation, it would most surely have been noted by a considerable number of countries. It would have been a litmus test of the British Government's commitment to the importance of the issue. If they had blazed a trail on the special commission meeting, other Governments would have followed subsequently. I hope that that can be borne in mind for the future.

Secondly, I want to raise the question of the good practice guide for the operation of the Hague convention. Some of us have been deeply concerned for a considerable period about the wide variations of practice in the operation of the convention. We have also been concerned about what appears in individual cases to be conspicuous non-observance and non-compliance with the letter—and often the spirit—of the convention by countries that are party to it. That weakness of the convention could be materially overcome as a result of the production of a good practice guide by the permanent bureau of the Hague secretariat.

In my view, agreement on the guide was the single most substantive and important outcome of the meeting. It was a considerable achievement. I can tell the Parliamentary Secretary, who was, unhappily, unable to be with us at The Hague, that that achievement was by no means easily brought about. The whole process by which agreement was reached was fraught with difficulty. A number of countries were undoubtedly worried about the production of a good practice guide. I suspect that some of them felt that the production of such a guide might expose deficiencies in their application of the convention.

Agreement was secured, however, and it was a signal achievement that is now reflected in the conclusions and recommendations of the Hague secretariat. I am delighted to see that paragraph 1.16 of that document states:

"Contracting States to the Convention should co-operate with each other and with the Permanent Bureau to develop a good practice guide which expands on Article 7 of the Convention. This guide would be a practical, 'how-to' guide, to help implement the Convention. It would concentrate on operational issues and be targeted particularly at new Contracting States. It would not be binding nor infringe upon the independence of the judiciary. The methodology should be left to the Permanent Bureau."

We now have a tremendous opportunity in terms of the production of the good practice guide. Will the Parliamentary Secretary explain how the British Government will contribute to work on the guide, the time scale that they envisage for producing it and how they will try to ensure that it is of the highest quality and helpfulness in terms of the operation of the convention?

Thirdly, I want to comment on access. As we all know, the question of access by left-behind parents to children who have been abducted from them is one of the most difficult aspects of child abduction. In my view, it is the provision of the convention that is most widely flouted. Happily, article 21 of the convention sets out the obligations for central authorities in unambiguous and clear terms. I should like to quote the two key sentences from article 21, which states:

"The Central Authorities are bound by the obligations of co-operation which are set forth in Article 7 to promote the peaceful enjoyment of access rights and the fulfilment of any condition to which the exercise of those rights may be subject."

That first sentence is followed by the crucial second one, which states:

"The Central Authorities shall take steps to remove, as far as possible, all obstacles to the exercise of such rights."

Those are unambiguous terms.

**Ms Oona King** (Bethnal Green and Bow): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for allowing me briefly to reflect on the issue of access. It would be inappropriate to raise individual cases falling under the convention, but having a constituent who has experience of the grave problem of access, I wish merely to support the right hon. Gentleman's comments and to request that the Minister elaborates on how British citizens and our constituents facing such problems will be helped to overcome them by the British Government and through the good practice guide.

**Sir John Stanley:** The hon. Lady will be glad to know that paragraphs 6.1 and 6.2 contain some positive recommendations on how access and adherence to the access provisions of the convention can be carried forward. Will the Minister, in her reply, set out how the Government will work towards the implementation of those recommendations? In particular, do they envisage a special commission specifically on access, which I believe was agreed at the special commission meeting? The broad view, which was not challenged at the meeting, was that there should be a special commission solely on access within one year of the meeting that took place in March. That was a valuable suggestion, which I hope has the Government's support.

The fourth point concerns new member states, which, again, was a considerable issue at the special commission meeting. I am aware that the Government are concerned about new member states that are not adequately equipped to carry out the convention's provisions becoming parties to the convention.

On 21 November last year, I received a reply from the then Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), listing a total of nine countries—Belarus, Brazil, Costa Rica, Fiji, Moldova, Paraguay, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Uzbekistan—which have each acceded to the Hague convention but whose recognition under article 38 has so far been withheld by the British Government.

The Minister of State, in his reply to me, said:

"We take our own obligations under The Hague Convention very seriously and will only recognise the accession of states whom we are confident can implement the Convention effectively and efficiently. We are not planning to recognise the accession of any new states (apart from Fiji) to the Convention until the 4th Special Commission to review the Convention which will take place in The Hague from 22-28 March 2001."—[*Official Report*, 21 November 2000; Vol. 357, c. 132-33W.]

That special commission has now taken place and it would be helpful to know the Government's view on the recognition of the remaining eight countries and whether they will give their approval under article 38.

*[Sir John Stanley]*

I hope that the Government will not be over-stringent about giving such approval. Where countries are willing to try to operate the convention, they should be given every encouragement to do so and, once they have acceded, we have an additional ability to help them to raise their standards and apply the convention in full.

Fifthly, several new obligations and a new work load have been given to the permanent bureau as a result of the special commission meeting. It is vital for the bureau to have sufficient funds to discharge its obligations under the convention, especially those that arose through the special commission meeting. It is no good conducting such meetings and asking the bureau to produce a good practice guide without funding the bureau so that it can fulfil the objectives that have been set. I hope that the Minister will assure us that the British Government will carry out their full financial obligations to the bureau, which has quite properly asked for a supplementary budget, and encourage other states to do that.

The special commission meeting was the most significant of the four such meetings that have taken place. It had the biggest attendance, but most important, it had the most substantive outcome. I try to be objective, but, as a Brit, I am probably biased. Having followed the matter closely, it is my considered view that of all the state parties to the convention, the British Government, in their preparation for the meeting, the working papers that they submitted and their work on the conclusions, made the greatest contribution to the meeting. The all-party group and international non-governmental organisations, such as Reunite and the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children also made a significant contribution.

I hope that the progress that was made in March at The Hague will be followed by an equally significant contribution on implementing the special commission's recommendation, with the British Government in the van.

7.22 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Jane Kennedy):** I am genuinely grateful to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) for creating the opportunity to discuss child abduction and allowing me to report to the House the outcome of the recent Hague special commission. I also thank him for his courtesy in alerting me in advance to the main points that he wanted to make. He is clearly aggrieved by the responses of my noble Friend the Lord Chancellor to the all-party group. If I have time, I hope to deal with those points in my speech. However, if the short time available does not permit that, I shall write to the all-party group and the right hon. Gentleman in more detail. I congratulate him on securing the debate.

Yesterday, I placed in the Libraries of both Houses the official report of the special commission, which was produced by the permanent bureau at The Hague. As the right hon. Gentleman said, he attended the special commission as one of the representatives of the International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children. He and his colleagues, who represent different voluntary organisations from around the world, made a valuable and distinctive contribution to the special commission's work alongside that of the various national delegations.

I shall briefly consider the role of special commissions. In the past, they have been criticised for not achieving as much as they might, and for having a focus that was too narrowly retrospective rather than looking forward to ascertain how the convention's operation might be improved in future. The United Kingdom Government, other member states and the permanent bureau of the conference were determined that the last special commission meeting should be a more high-profile event with an additional impetus to achieve positive improvements in the operation of the convention, to the benefit of abducted children and their parents. That determination was shared by members of the all-party group.

I am pleased to report, notwithstanding the right hon. Gentleman's criticisms, that we substantially achieved our aim. The meeting was a considerable success. We gained agreement that there should be good practice guidance, to which he referred, and more guidance to states that wish to join. Having agreed that, it is important not to lose momentum. The agenda that was agreed at The Hague should be driven forward successfully. We are determined to play our part, and I hope to reassure the right hon. Gentleman about that.

The success of the special commission owes a great deal to the hard preparatory work that went into it beforehand, both by the permanent bureau and by officials in the UK and elsewhere. I am particularly grateful to the Foreign Office and to our embassies abroad for the tremendous work that they put in, lobbying other countries to agree to the proposals that the UK delegation would be putting forward.

I wish to address the right hon. Gentleman's criticisms of the responses and role of the Foreign Office in drawing the work together and liaising with other countries to achieve the right outcome from the special commission. There was also criticism that we were less than helpful in the provision of information. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor committed to provide that information as soon as it was completed. In the event, we did not draft a communiqué; instead, a number of working papers were drafted. Unfortunately, these were not finalised in time to be provided to the all-party group before the meeting at the Foreign Office to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. My colleagues at the Foreign Office, which chaired the meeting, sent the details to the all-party group as soon as they were available. Clearly that was not quick enough. We are always willing to accept criticism where it is justified but, on this occasion, we simply did not get the information ready to provide it in advance of the meeting.

In the past, special commissions have essentially been gatherings of civil servants and lawyers, representing the different central authorities. We also thought that, this time, it would be helpful to have a judicial contribution and a political contribution, with Ministers attending for at least one session.

The first of these proposals went down better than the second. I must confess that although the special commission was attended by a very large number of distinguished judges, it had already become clear before the commission that the great majority of member states did not think that attendance by Ministers would be

helpful. It would have been wrong in those circumstances for the UK to have gone—even led by such an eminent Minister as myself—if it would have been unhelpful. I had been looking forward to going, so I did regret that. However, it was right for the special commission that the delegation should go ahead without ministerial involvement.

In the event, the politicians were ably represented by the right hon. Gentleman, by Mrs. Mary Banotti of the European Parliament and by US Congressmen. I should stress that ministerial non-involvement should not be taken as an indication of lack of concern by the Government. It was a judgment that we had to arrive at, given the feedback that we got from other states participating in the special commission.

There was also a question as to whether representatives of the all-party group should be included in the UK delegation. The Government decided that that would not be appropriate on this occasion. The right hon. Gentleman will disagree with the view we took, but the national delegations—as opposed to the representatives of the other interested voluntary and international bodies—spoke for and represented their Governments and their central authorities, or the judiciaries of their countries.

I do not think that hon. Members who are not members of the Government would have wanted to be constrained in that way. The right hon. Gentleman will have found that he was freer to lobby; he may not have felt constrained anyway. He will have been more able to express his point of view, as a representative of the organisation that sponsored his visit, than he would otherwise have been. Obviously, we can consider before the next special commission who should attend next time.

I wish to pay tribute to the four very distinguished and senior British judges who assisted the British delegation: the president of the Family Division, Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss; Lord Justice Thorpe; Lord Bonomy from Scotland; and Mr. Justice Gillen from Northern Ireland. One of the advantages of the way in which Hague cases are dealt with in the UK, as we pointed out, is that all cases are dealt with by a small pool of very experienced senior judges. This contrasts with the position in, for example, the United States, where there are an incredible 30,000 judges who could be asked to do a Hague case, probably for the only time in their lives.

The special commission has recommended that each contracting state should identify a judge able to facilitate communications between judges at the international level, and to act as a contact point between different systems. Lord Justice Thorpe undertakes this role in relation to England and Wales.

I am conscious of the fact that I am about to run out of time, and there are many other important points to address. I will undertake to write to the right hon. Gentleman—

*The motion having been made at Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour,* MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

*Adjourned at half-past Seven o'clock.*

# Westminster Hall

*Tuesday 24 April 2001*

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

## Hampshire Ambulance Service

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Mike Hall.]*

9.30 am

**Sandra Gidley** (Romsey): I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss issues surrounding Hampshire ambulance service. Although some of the examples that I shall cite give grave cause for concern, I have the greatest respect and admiration for those at the sharp end, who deliver the service every day under difficult conditions.

My interest in the local ambulance service was awakened not long after my election, when I was contacted by the clerk of Lockerley parish council. She described the tragic case of an elderly gentleman who had suffered a heart attack at home; an ambulance had been called. Hampshire's is a rural ambulance service, and the target then was that an ambulance should arrive within 19 minutes for 95 per cent. of calls. In this instance, the ambulance took over half an hour to arrive. It had been sent from Hythe, which is not local, as there was no nearer one available. The driver later admitted that he did not know where Lockerley was, and that he had come via Dunbridge because it was a village that he knew. He also said that, had someone not been waiting on the main road running through Lockerley Green to direct him to the property, he would not have been able to find it. There is no happy ending to this story. The patient died. We shall never know whether the early arrival of an ambulance would have made the crucial difference, but the situation of the delayed ambulance was stressful for everyone concerned.

Having spoken out on this issue, I was contacted by a number of concerned ambulance men. One letter said that it was

"far from unexpected, and not a rare occurrence. The problem stems from a shortage of vehicles, and how that shortage is used.

In 1990, ORH (Operational Research into the Health Service) carried out a survey of Hampshire Ambulance Service—the workload, available vehicles, their location in relation to the workload—and made recommendations as to how the vehicles should be deployed. This involved an element of re-deployment—which was accepted both by the management and staff-side (prior to the publication of the report)—and the main statement that stands out is that the level of vehicle cover, and its deployment would provide the minimum cover required to achieve the necessary response standards. Actual ambulance figures are available, but ranged from a total of 23, at night-time to a maximum of 47 between 11.00 and 17.00 during the week, with reductions at weekends, resulting in a...daily...average of 30.87.

Since that time there has been a progressive reduction in vehicle availability, with a drastic increase in workload".

The figures bear out the increased work load. In 1995-96, there were 62,800 emergency calls. That figure had risen to 85,500 by 1999-2000—a 35 per cent. increase in four years. I am told that the work load has increased by 50 per cent. in six years, but I have not checked the figures.

Vehicle availability is down to 20 at night. That is an average of one ambulance per 75,000 population. The maximum varies daily from 41 to 43 between 3 pm and 5 pm and the overall average has dropped to 30.45. That might not sound like a huge drop, but set against the background of increasing work load, it shows a highly stretched service. These figures are for the whole of Hampshire and in each case the number is the maximum rostered. The figure is frequently not achieved because of sickness, holidays and training.

Many people are concerned about the fact that, at night, Southampton city has only two vehicles to cover a population of 220,000. There are ambulance stations at Bursledon, Eastleigh and Totton, but they have their own catchment areas to serve.

It would seem that, in addition to the problem in rural areas, towns and cities are not receiving a five-star service. I witnessed an example of that when I was out with the police in Eastleigh and an ambulance had to be called. It came from Whitchurch. There are six or seven ambulance stations closer to Eastleigh than Whitchurch.

In June the national response times were published. They made grim reading, and not only in Hampshire. Hampshire is regarded as a rural trust and has rural targets. That means that 50 per cent. of calls should be responded to within eight minutes and 95 per cent. within 19 minutes. I want to make it clear that those targets are for the whole of Hampshire. Many people think that shorter target times apply for built-up areas such as Southampton or Portsmouth, but I am afraid that that is not so. Anywhere in Hampshire is regarded as rural. Targets are exactly the same for the towns as for the villages.

Hampshire ambulance authority previously had a good record of achieving targets, but in the past year the percentage of responses made within eight minutes dropped to 44.5 per cent. and that for responses within 19 minutes dropped to 92.6 per cent. Both figures are well below the targets. However, to be fair to Hampshire, the performance of a majority of ambulance trusts declined sharply. The results are very worrying. I learned of other relevant incidents in the Lockerley area. On 11 May, an ambulance called at 2.30 am took one hour to arrive. On 18 May, an ambulance took 45 minutes to arrive. The crew admitted to getting lost.

I have met the chief executive and chief ambulance officer of Hampshire Ambulance, who have been frank and open. Various problems are apparent, but the basic one is underfunding. I have a letter from Richard Mawson, the chief ambulance officer, in which he refers to the funding discussions with health authorities with respect to 1999-2000. He states:

"Despite having faced an increase in demand of over 36 per cent. over the previous 5 years the service has managed to exceed the performance outcome year on year without significant additional funding. However, it was recognised, prior to 1999/2000 that the service faced a 'step change' which required additional funding if an unacceptable further erosion of workplace conditions for staff was to be avoided, whilst attempting to maintain standards. Unfortunately...we were unable to secure adequate additional funding to meet our identified needs."

*[Sandra Gidley]*

That suggests that there is a problem with the morale of ambulance men and women. Since taking an interest in the subject, I have spoken to many of them, and some common themes emerge from the concerns that they express. I have been universally impressed by those people, who do a difficult job under extreme pressure. They do not like the feeling that, for various reasons, they have not been able to give of their best.

The work load is hectic, which means that meal breaks are constantly interrupted, if they happen at all. The staff do not mind, but the system is now so tightly run that it is an everyday occurrence. No one appears to have undertaken a risk assessment to show the effects on performance of long hours without food. None of the staff members minds working extra hours, but many of them described a trend towards being called out increasingly often just before the end of a shift.

I spent a day with the Hampshire ambulance service and witnessed some of the problems at first hand. The pace was constant and we were lucky that nothing too horrific happened. However, one ambulance man said: "The problem is, if we have a death or something unpleasant, we are often straight on to the next job. Sometimes you just need a quiet quarter of an hour to help to come to terms with something. If you can't do that, the stress just builds up and there are an increasing number of personnel suffering from stress-related illnesses."

The ambulance men and women in Hampshire were also universally scathing about the new command and control system; the falling standards were partly attributed to it. It is worth mentioning some of their concerns. The system looks very good. The ambulances keep in touch with the control centre by means of a satellite navigation system. The computer operators in the control centre can in theory see at a glance which ambulance is closest to any emergency. Unfortunately, back in the ambulance, the system is not very high tech. The ambulance is informed of the address of the emergency and given a page number and rough grid reference, such as A4, from the appropriate Ordnance Survey map book. Once the ambulance is mobile, the navigator has to trace the journey by turning over pages of the book. There is no ambulance navigation system. I have used those OS books myself, and it is not easy to work out a long distance when one has to turn over a number of pages.

In addition, the crews are no longer in radio contact with one another. That might not sound like much of a problem, but it means that ambulance crews can no longer help each other out. Previously, there were frequent occasions when an ambulance crew could point out to control that its ambulance was better placed to respond to a call than that of the designated ambulance. The system does not always take into account problems such as one-way systems or motorway hold-ups. Also, if an ambulance is dispatched slightly off its usual patch, an ambulance man with local knowledge might be able to supply additional verbal directions, which could be the difference between life and death. Another aspect to the lack of communication is that, on occasion, a crew will have prior knowledge that a potential patient could be dangerous or abusive. They might even advise police back-up before entering a property. A way of communicating such information seems to be missing from the new system.

I witnessed some of the problems at first hand. On one occasion, the control centre thought that we were in Winchester, when we were in fact in Southampton. That was closely followed by my crew's returning to base, only to cross the path of an ambulance going to an emergency, travelling in the direction that we had just come from. We should have been directed to that emergency, but were not, and the crew's response was, "At least you have seen it for yourself now." I am glad to say that the trust has now acknowledged some of the issues relating to command and control and has spent time and money on further training for staff.

Other issues relate to a lack of consultation and frequent references to a top-heavy management structure. Recently, ambulances have been deployed to strategic points around the county in an attempt to improve response times. Theoretically that is a good idea, but the knock-on effect on the staff is that, in the rare event of a short break, they must sit in a cold, uncomfortable ambulance with no access to refreshment.

When I visited the ambulance station, staff were also somewhat demoralised because the response times had not then been published for some months. Conspiracy theories abounded, but the common response was, "The times must be really bad now; otherwise, they would be put up on the notice-board."

**Mr. Philip Hammond** (Runnymede and Weybridge): Will the hon. Lady clarify something that she said? At the outset of her remarks, I think that I heard her say that in rural areas a 14-minute response for category A was acceptable. Will she confirm that Hampshire Ambulance—a rural service—is targeting an eight-minute response time across the county?

**Sandra Gidley:** I think that I said that the response time was 19 minutes for a rural area for 95 per cent. of calls. The eight-minute response time is for the new core categorisation, which I shall clarify later.

There was a problem, because the new command and control centre was installed shortly before the ambulance service moved towards core prioritisation. That prioritisation means a change in targets, and I wholly support the Government's aim in establishing new targets. The new system means that calls are now categorised. Category A calls are emergency or life-threatening. The new standard requires that, by 2001, ambulance services should reach 75 per cent. of category A calls within eight minutes. Response times for other categories remain unchanged.

How is the Hampshire service doing now? In March 2001, the category A response figure for the county was 43.62 per cent. However, for the Southampton and South West Hampshire health authority, which covers the bulk of my constituency, it was only 37.94 per cent. Over the past month, there has been an improvement, and it is only fair to acknowledge that the movement is in the right direction. The latest figures are 53.6 per cent. for Hampshire as a whole and 48 per cent. for the Southampton and South West Hampshire health authority.

The fact remains that those figures fall well short of the required target of 75 per cent. This year, Hampshire Ambulance has managed to secure the extra funding that it has been seeking for the past two years. A visit from the NHS executive team resulted in a confirmation that the working practices were not at fault, the case for additional funding was strong and the money should be found from the county's health budget.

Securing that funding has been a problem in the past, and has been something of a hit-and-miss affair. I have been told that the health authorities do not purchase to the targets. North and Mid Hampshire health authority is widely known to be undergoing financial difficulties, and in the past would have funded only 90 per cent. NHS trusts in Southampton and Portsmouth purchase services at a 95 per cent. level.

That leads me to some fundamental questions about the way that the nation's ambulance services are organised. Is it right that we use an arcane system of funding whereby the ambulance authorities have to go cap-in-hand to each of the health authorities in their area? Health authorities already have a hard enough time balancing budgets and setting priorities. It is simply not right that an ambulance service will not necessarily receive the amount of money that it requires.

There appears to be no nationally agreed formula for working out the desired level of ambulance provision for any area. There is a carefully worked out formula for fire service provision, so it seems logical that the same sort of exercise should be undertaken in respect of the ambulance service.

**Dr. Peter Brand** (Isle of Wight): Does my hon. Friend agree that, if we are to have a national formula, it should be funded? The Home Office has set a formula for the Isle of Wight fire brigade, but the standard spending assessment from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions falls short of the Home Office figure by about £1.25 million.

**Sandra Gidley:** Yes, there should be funding to meet the identified need.

Just as there is no national standard for ambulance provision, it is regrettable that there appears to be no single body to which the disparate ambulance services are accountable. Currently, each ambulance service decides many of its own procedures and protocols. That means, for example, that if a patient who needs a tracheotomy keels over on the Hampshire-Wiltshire border, we must hope that the ambulance comes from Wiltshire, because Hampshire ambulance men are not permitted to carry out that procedure. Similarly, there are variations throughout the country in the types of drugs that paramedics are allowed to administer. Surely it is time to introduce a set of national guidelines on all those matters. It appears that there are no mechanisms in place for sharing practice and spreading best practice—something that is done well in other areas of the health service.

The question is how best to achieve that aim. Many of the staff to whom I have spoken believe that the ambulance service should be accountable to the Home Office and should work more closely with the fire service. I am not advocating that that step should be taken here and now, but more accountability should be demanded by the health service. In addition, ambulance men would like their conditions of service to be more closely allied to those of the police and fire services because they feel that they are a Cinderella emergency service—an expression that I have heard repeated many times.

To return to Lockerley, have things got any better during the past year? A letter from Frances Hanks, parish clerk of Lockerley parish council, to the director of operations at Hampshire ambulance service refers to an incident on 8 December when a woman

"made an emergency call at 8.30 am when she found her husband and thought he was dead. She gave specific instructions"

as to how to reach her property, and the ambulance arrived between 9.5 am and 9.10 am—

"definitely over 30 minutes and probably as long as 40 minutes. The ambulance came from Hythe and told her all they were given was a grid reference 'which didn't help at all.'"

On 4 March,

"A GP call was made for an ambulance...The ambulance drove past the property and was found circling Top Green. The ambulance had to be redirected by a lady walking her dog. (Unfortunately the lady

Mrs. X—

"lost her husband to a heart attack last year, when she had to wait over 30 minutes for an ambulance to arrive. As you can imagine, this incident caused her further distress)."

On 7 March,

"An emergency call was made at approximately 9.15 am by...the proprietor of Lockerley Stores...The ambulance arrived at 10 am, 45 minutes later."

So the situation is not getting any better. Unfortunately, despite the fact that the letter was written on 9 March, there has still been no reply, which is less than reassuring.

However, my main concern is that constituents who live in rural areas will always fall within the 25 per cent. of the population who can expect a response time of more than eight minutes. It is the responsibility of all of us to ensure that people are not penalised just because they happen to live in a rural area. It is simply not good enough to trot out the tired old argument that they choose to live there knowing the risks. We have a duty of care to everyone and should be providing that care.

**Mr. David Chidgey** (Eastleigh): Does my hon. Friend agree that plans to regionalise the ambulance service, so that there is one centre of control for most of the south-east, will only make the disparity between rural and urban areas greater? For example, if the county of Surrey were in the same organisation as Hampshire, there would be a gravitation of resources to the critical mass of the urban areas of Surrey at the expense of rural areas in Hampshire.

**Sandra Gidley:** That is a concern. I will address it later, but bigger does not necessarily mean better, and I remain unconvinced that that will be the case with ambulance services.

**Mr. Hammond:** The hon. Lady talked about her rural constituents always being in the 25 per cent. who would have a response time of longer than eight minutes. The

*[Mr. Hammond]*

Government's target is that, by 2003, 90 per cent. of category A calls will receive an ambulance within eight minutes.

**Sandra Gidley:** I was not aware of those targets; perhaps the Minister could clarify them, but I thought that the 95 per cent. target related to a 19-minute response time. I hope that I was wrong.

There are new problems associated with the measures that are being introduced to reach response targets, specifically with the use of rapid response vehicles. They are crewed by one person only, and the aim is for that paramedic to arrive within eight minutes—so that the targets are reached—to stabilise the patient. However, because a rapid response vehicle then requires the back-up of a fully manned ambulance, the system is heavy on staff. If it saves lives, every penny will be well spent. However, what assessments have been made of the various ways of dealing with emergencies? Are overall outcomes better when a paramedic rapidly arrives on the scene or when transport to hospital is regarded as a priority? Those are fundamental questions, to which I have as yet been unable to find the answers.

I ask those questions because of a recent highly publicised case in Havant, which illustrates the problem. A motor cyclist was injured and a paramedic arrived—17 minutes later, although that is not the point in this case. A fire crew were already there and had administered first aid, but the patient then lay waiting in the road for another 30 minutes as his condition deteriorated. All ambulances in the area were tied up, so the firefighters took the decision to transport the injured motor cyclist in the fire engine. Obviously, fire engines are not designed for patient transport, and one fireman had to kneel on all fours to support the stretcher on his back, while a second fireman sat on the floor to hold the stretcher and prevent it from moving. If that does not illustrate the fact that Hampshire ambulance services are overstretched, I do not know what will.

Hon. Members should not be lulled into a false sense of security by convincing themselves that that story was a one-off. I have been told of several incidents in which firefighters have ended up either driving an ambulance or attending to a patient in the back of one; such incidents are almost always as a result of a singly manned ambulance arriving at the scene. We all know that ambulances should have two ambulance men on board.

Coincidentally, I picked up a copy of the *Andover Advertiser* yesterday, which had the front-page headline, "Ambulance crisis looms". I notice that the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) is present, and I expect that he will want to elaborate on this. The first paragraphs of the story say:

"Andover firefighters are becoming increasingly concerned about the time it's taking ambulances to arrive at incidents. They say financial limits imposed on Hampshire Ambulance Service are putting firemen under increasing pressure. But the ambulance service is denying there's an ongoing problem.

'We're frustrated and angry,' said Lud Ramsey, Andover's Fire Brigades Union representative. 'Ten years ago we would have attended fire calls, road traffic accidents etc. and we knew the ambulance would be only minutes behind us.'"

I have heard from a high level in the Hampshire fire authority that those incidents are being repeated in towns throughout the county. Indeed, the fire service is facing demands from firefighters for more first aid training and is considering whether defibrillators should be standard fire engine equipment. That is because firefighters feel that they can no longer rely on ambulances to arrive quickly enough.

When I was out with the ambulance service, one incident brought home to me the fact that ambulances are sometimes called out for what can only be described as non-urgent reasons. A letter in the *Romsey Advertiser* from Liam Sizer, the southern area convenor of Unison, sums that up. It says:

"Calls to people with rings stuck on fingers; to people with minor cuts often needing no more than a small Elastoplast; to people with toothache, earache and backache; to people who have been feeling 'unwell for a few days and it's not getting better' (I could go on, but it would become boring). These people account for such a large proportion of 999 calls that they are the biggest cause of the delays experienced by patients who really do need our speedy attention.

Finally, could I please ask that all people, notwithstanding where they live...make sure that their house name or number is clearly visible as close to the road as possible."

I urge the Minister to consider running a public information campaign in a similar fashion to that aimed at dissuading people from calling out their general practitioner for trivial reasons. Abuse of the system costs money and lives.

The final item on the agenda is the proposed merger of the Hampshire and Surrey ambulance trusts—mentioned hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey)—which will shortly go out to public consultation. To show my linguistic roots for a moment, let me say that the merger strikes me as a completely barmpot idea if ever there was one. I have not seen the final consultation document, but the following points need to be addressed.

Bigger is not necessarily better, but often results in an extra tier of management. Cynics have pointed out that, before the merger's announcement, the Hampshire ambulance trust board mysteriously increased in size and most new appointees were people who had recently retired only to return suddenly. Many people regard that as a cynical ploy to appear to be cutting jobs when, in reality, a few jobs were created for a short period to provide a cushion. The reality is that most long-serving people will keep their jobs under the new scheme.

Change is disruptive. Hampshire is experiencing problems in trying to get to grips with the new control system and is still nowhere near achieving the targets. Further disruption will result only in a worsening of response times in the short term, with no guarantee of an improvement in the long term.

Many people in the ambulance service regard the merger as a done deal, because it has been said that the status quo is not an option. Although I am here today highlighting problems with the status quo, I am still not convinced that there are any advantages to the merger. Surrey and Hampshire are not natural partners. Hampshire looks more readily to Dorset and Wiltshire, but those counties are now officially in the south-west, so we cannot consider a merger with a more like-minded county. The huge problem is that Surrey is an urban trust with urban response targets, but, as has been mentioned, Hampshire is rural; so what targets will the new trust have? I am sure that Surrey will not settle for a diminution in service, but it will cost a considerable

amount of money to bring Hampshire up to Surrey's standards. Hampshire is not even meeting its own standards at the moment, so heaven help us if we have to achieve higher standards.

In addition, reorganisations cost money. Who will pay for reorganisation? Hampshire secured extra funding this year only because it demonstrated that there was an operational need for it, but that need does not cover the likely costs of reorganisation. Why is the merger proposed when Operational Research into the Health Service conducted a survey two years ago on the regional office's behalf and concluded that there would be no benefits in a merger? There will also be pay differentials, as the two trusts are paid differently. I do not believe that recruitment and retention will be improved.

If the Minister is minded to consult on the scheme, I ask that the consultation be real and, if opinion is against it, for her to take note of that. Will she also make clear the cost to the public purse of the proposed administrative upheaval?

The speech that I have made today may sound somewhat negative. Most people who call for an ambulance get one quickly, but the problems that I have highlighted show that the system is under considerable strain. There needs to be serious consideration of Hampshire Ambulance Service NHS trust and other trusts to try to sort out some of those problems.

It would help if we had a set of national standards and guidelines that were matched by funding that automatically meant that those standards were attained. Clear accountability is also needed, because one thing that I have noticed in all this is that no one seems to have put their hand up and said, "It's our fault."

9.59 am

**Sir George Young** (North-West Hampshire): The House is grateful to the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) for the opportunity to debate the ambulance service in Hampshire. As she says, it is a topical matter in my constituency. Last week's edition of the *Andover Advertiser*, the voice of Andover, led with the story to which she referred. She quoted extracts from Caroline Inman's report, in which a fire brigade representative said:

"Ten years ago we would have attended fire calls, road traffic accidents etc and we knew the ambulance would be only minutes behind us.

Now, we're having to get more and more of our staff trained in emergency first aid".

I visited the Andover ambulance station in my constituency, the command and control centre in Winchester, and NHS Direct, which I understand is run by the ambulance service. Like the hon. Lady, I have a high opinion of those who are at the sharp end as well as those who are providing back-up services, those who are managing the command and control centre and those who are trying to run the service.

The debate that the hon. Lady initiated is symptomatic of a broader debate, which confuses my constituents and should worry the Government. We are coming to the end of a Parliament in which the health service has been a Government priority. We have all seen the NHS plan that was published last July, and we have seen the Prime Minister on the Frost programme, promising more resources. Many of us were in the House last November when the Secretary of State made a statement about more resources for the NHS. Yet the rhetoric does not match the reality of the everyday experience of my constituents.

The hon. Lady mentioned some worrying incidents. The delays for out-patients are now worse than they were. For example, in the third quarter of 2000, 1,058 out-patients were waiting 26 weeks or more, which was up from 548 a couple of years earlier. People are waiting for wheelchairs. Someone waiting for a wheelchair in my constituency may receive a letter from the Winchester and Eastleigh NHS trust that states:

"Equipment will either be refurbished or new. Owing to budget control it is not possible to order all new equipment immediately ... If you have not heard from us regarding provision of this equipment after four months please contact this office, when it may be possible to give the anticipated time before the items can be provided."

My constituents are confused. The reassurances that they hear from Ministers do not match what happens in their everyday lives.

The hon. Lady mentioned the resources that are available to the Hampshire ambulance service trust, and I want to focus on that for a moment. As she said, the trust receives resources from the three authorities for the area—the North and Mid Hampshire NHS health authority is the one for my constituency—which are resourced according to a formula. In my view, the formula is unfair. The NHS ambulance service in Hampshire is under pressure because the resources for the county as a whole are less than they should be. For every £100 of NHS resources allocated nationally, my constituents receive £80. We are deemed to be 20 per cent. healthier than the rest of the country. I do not believe that that is the case. Not all deprived people live in deprived areas. More than half of the most deprived individuals in the country live outside the most deprived 20 per cent. of wards. Any resource allocation to health authorities and ambulance services that targets only the most deprived wards will miss more than half of the most deprived people.

In April last year, the Minister set up a panel to scrutinise a document entitled "Meeting the Challenges", which was about funding for Hampshire health authorities. The panel was appointed to examine proposals aimed at achieving savings of £13 million in the health service in Hampshire. That panel said of the formula that funds the Hampshire ambulance service that

"The National Funding Formula for Health Authorities is at the heart of the problem. This is a challenge for central Government ... North and Mid Hampshire Health Authority receives 80 per cent. of the national needs assessment. Panel members felt strongly that this was too low."

The next remark is especially interesting.

"We heard no evidence to support such a large reduction in the national needs "norm". What is more, we were told of both urban and rural 'pockets of deprivation' within the Authority, where an 80 per cent. allocation was arguably inadequate ... This challenge lies at the door of Government but the authority should fight for it, too."

The formula is being looked at, but over a rather leisurely time scale and there is no prospect of imminent help for Hampshire, which needs a more equitable distribution of resources. That shortage of resources is

*[Sir George Young]*

at the heart of some of the issues raised by the hon. Member for Romsey. In a letter dated 20 July 2000, the chief ambulance officer wrote:

"Unfortunately, in common with many ambulance services across the country, we were unable to secure adequate additional funding to meet our identified needs."

That matter worries the Winchester and Central Hampshire community health council. General practitioners in my area have also raised the question of the ambulance service not arriving within the response time targets. There are possible plans to centralise paediatric intensive care at Southampton hospital. That may make good medical sense, but it will put a lot of pressure on the ambulance service to transfer those vulnerable babies. The CHC and the local MPs will keep an eye on that as it will mean an increased demand for the ambulance service and more funding will be needed if that is to be secured.

**Mr. Hammond:** I am sure that my right hon. Friend would want to note that the CHC will keep an eye on it for as long as it can, given that the Government are committed to abolishing it.

**Sir George Young:** My hon. Friend brings me back to our debates in the Committee stage of the Health and Social Care Bill. I hope that the House will soon have an opportunity to revisit that. I hope that the CHCs can continue to scrutinise the delivery of health care in Hampshire for some time to come.

When I visited the control and command centre at Winchester I learned that it was settling down but that it had had one or two teething problems, which may be behind some of the incidents that we have heard about today. It would be helpful if the Minister could give us a clear statement about where we are on reorganisation. It has been a diversion of management effort over the past few years to have the future of the ambulance trust put into question. There has been a lot of turbulence in Hampshire with the abolition of some trusts and mergers of others. I hope that the Minister will not go ahead unless she is convinced that this will directly alleviate some of the problems that have been mentioned this morning.

There is one issue on which the Minister may be able to shed some light. I understand that, in some parts of the country, the ambulances are no longer based at the ambulance stations but are sent to outposts in various parts of their area where it is felt that accidents are likely to happen. I can see that that would reduce the response time, but in my constituency ambulances are posted to a junction of the A303 and the A34. That may indeed be an accident site, but we have only two ambulances on duty and if one is permanently stationed at that junction it leaves the citizens of Andover rather exposed. Is there any Government guidance on how ambulances should be positioned?

I know that the Minister she will refer to the huge extra sum of money that she asserts has been made available to the health authority. When headline national increases of 8.5 per cent. were announced last November, I wrote to my health authority to find out the reality. Unsurprisingly, its perception was not quite as rosy as that of the Minister. In his reply, the director of finance at the health authority said:

"Needless to say, these headline figures only give the tip of the iceberg."

He added that the general increase, estimated at 4.9 per cent., was intended to meet the pressures on pay, prices and the cost of implementing the National Institute for Clinical Excellence recommendations. Significant cost pressures will need to be addressed, including a 2 per cent. rise in pension costs, the costs of implementing changes to junior doctor hours and the underlying financial deficit of the local health economy.

Some of the increase is ring-fenced to meet targets set by Ministers. If the ring-fenced and other money is deducted, it will be impossible significantly to improve the service. The penultimate sentence of the director of finance's letter says:

"There are many significant calls on this funding, particularly locally where there is an underlying financial deficit. Careful planning, phasing and prioritisation will be needed to deliver affordable and modern health services for local people."

Against a background of some £30 million of savings, some of which will affect patient care, I asked whether, because more money was coming into the system, those savings could be abandoned. The response was that they could not because when plans for the savings were drafted it had been assumed that the extra money announced in November would be forthcoming. I quote the director of finance again:

"as the funding announced for next year is in line with the assumptions underpinning 'Meeting the Challenges', the proposals"—

the proposals to reduce services—

"remain valid."

Will the Minister make clear whether the reorganisation of the health service in Hampshire will lead to further turbulence? What progress is likely to be made on reviewing the funding formula, which lies at the heart of the issues raised in this morning's debate?

10.10 am

**Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak briefly in this important debate on the Hampshire ambulance service. I recall the days of the original arrangements for the service in my Gosport constituency. Two ambulances based at the Bury Cross depot were responsible for transporting patients to and from the local hospitals and for undertaking transfers for out-patients. It was a locally based service that was well received. I had few complaints and I would like to add my tribute to the ambulance workers who undertook those services then and now. No one enters the ambulance service without a sense of vocation, which I discovered whenever I talked to ambulance workers in my constituency or in Hampshire generally.

The old arrangements could not continue into our modern, high-tech age. The new arrangements described today are now organised at the command and control centre in Winchester. They are intended to be much more efficient, but worrying teething difficulties have occurred. I recall a constituent telling me that an ambulance was called for her husband who had suffered a heart attack. It came not from Gosport, but from Hayling island, some distance from the constituency. The ambulance was delayed and, because the driver did not know the route into Gosport, the patient's wife had

to talk him through it. The patient's daughter was sent out into the road with a torch to guide the ambulance in. Unfortunately, the patient died.

That is not the only case. The reorganisation and restructuring has meant that ambulances have had to come into my constituency from a considerable distance away and, because the drivers and crew do not know their way around the area, unacceptable delays have occurred. We must all hope and trust that the new system described by the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young)—the high-tech control and satellite navigation systems and the upgrading at Winchester—will produce a more efficient system in the longer term. I am grateful to the Hampshire ambulance service for providing one extra ambulance in the Gosport area to take account of the extra demand.

I shall not repeat points already well made by the hon. Lady and my right hon. Friend, but I want to raise two further issues based on my experience of dealing with the Hampshire ambulance service and local circumstances in my constituency.

The Government have been slow to keep the Hampshire ambulance service abreast of developments in merger discussions and changed funding systems. The Government were slow and unresponsive to local concerns. It took two years for the ambulance service to clarify the Government's thinking on the proposed merger and refunding. Members of Parliament should not have to intervene in such discussions. I pay tribute to the Minister; I raised an issue with her in the House after a Division, which her office followed through. I am grateful for that first-class response. However, there seems to have been fuzziness in the lines of communication between the Minister's Department and the Hampshire ambulance service, which I hope can be clarified.

My constituents would not forgive me if I did not make the point that the range of difficulties created in the Gosport peninsula and south Hampshire have been seriously worsened by the Government's announcement that they propose to close the Haslar hospital in Gosport. It was originally announced that the closure would not take place before 2002, but its accident and emergency unit has already closed. We have fought the closure with absolute determination; 22,000 people came on the march in January 1999, which is thought to be the largest march in protest against a hospital closure. Because of our fight, the closure will not take place before 2007, or even later. The private finance initiative bid for Queen Alexandra hospital, which would enable it to take on much of Haslar's work load, has again been delayed. We therefore feel confident that we are winning our campaign. The number of out-patients who can be seen at Haslar hospital is to be increased from 55,000 to 60,000; Haslar also has an accident treatment centre. However, that does not diminish the fact that the closure of its accident and emergency unit has made life much more difficult for the ambulance service in the area. Ambulances now regularly have to mix with the tidal flow of traffic out of Gosport in the morning and back into the town in the evening. If the Government rethink their plans on Haslar—as they must—the pressure on the ambulance service will eventually decrease, to enable it to provide a better service for the people of south Hampshire. We will continue the campaign on that issue.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Romsey for raising the debate and to my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire for his informed contribution to the discussion. I add a plea that reorganisation and turbulence be diminished and that those responsible for the ambulance service in Hampshire be given the funding and the decision-making capacity that will enable them to continue to carry out their work.

10.18 am

**Dr. Peter Brand** (Isle of Wight): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) on initiating the debate. We all expect the ambulance service to be in place; we value it when we need it, but forget about it for the rest of the time. That is a tremendous mistake. As a practising doctor who does the odd bit of emergency cover, I am always more relieved than even the patient to have the support of a professional ambulance crew. The service has developed its role over the past 20 or 30 years in an amazing way and has a fantastic standard of training. As has been highlighted in the debate, extra stress is being put on the professionalism of a group of people who want to deliver a good service—I do not know a single ambulance man or ambulance woman who is not dedicated to that task.

Some of the organisational problems suffered by Hampshire may affect the services on the Isle of Wight. Having made a more general point about the conditions under which we expect ambulance personnel to work, I would also argue that those personnel are undervalued. It is partly a matter of wages, but it is also a matter of working conditions.

The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) mentioned the strange practice of putting ambulance personnel on standby in car parks. I would like to know whether that has made a difference to response time and the survival rates of patients. It certainly makes an enormous difference to the way in which ambulance personnel are valued. Proposals to close the ambulance station in Ryde—the second largest town in my constituency—and to base the ambulance personnel in a car park somewhere on the downs cannot be right for the working conditions for those involved.

I would also urge the Government to reconsider the ambulance services' request for better and more appropriate protective clothing. Luckily, the risk of involvement in stabbing incidents is not high in Hampshire, but difficulties can arise where there is alcohol and disruption. If individual ambulance personnel would like the protection of lightweight, protective clothing, it should be made available. Financial considerations should not interfere with that.

Much was said about the loss of local knowledge among ambulance personnel. I would like to touch on that, because we have had experience of what happens when one tries to be efficient and amalgamate services to create a larger unit. We have seen it in the case of NHS Direct—it takes about 10 minutes to get through to the service, another 10 minutes to set out the story and then it often takes another 10 minutes to find the appropriate

*[Dr. Peter Brand]*

person to deal with the patient's problem. Unfortunately, quite frequently the message that comes back from NHS Direct via the ambulance service to the doctor on call is incomplete. On two occasions, NHS Direct has not passed on to me telephone contact numbers for patients. It is essential to have a way of communicating with people. Such failures create duplication and delay.

In our region, we also have experienced the centralisation of the police control room at Netley. As far as the Isle of Wight is concerned, it has been a disaster. People are not sure whether they should be dialling 999 or getting in touch with the police control room. Those working in the police control room take an enormous amount of time to pick up the phone, and they often say, "This is not an emergency for us, ring your local police station tomorrow," not knowing that that local police station is not manned, and leaving people to deal with an answerphone. I would not want that sort of pattern to be repeated in the health service.

There is evidence that, when organisations get bigger, although that may result in efficient systems that can be tracked, people get lost in them. Before decisions are made on regional amalgamations, especially in respect of the ambulance personnel control room, I hope that the Minister will wait to see what the Audit Commission says about NHS Direct, to see whether that kind of regional structure is the most appropriate. She should also speak to those who are experiencing the effects of centralisation in the police control service.

**Mr. Hammond:** The hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) raised two issues relating to organisational structure: whether ambulance services should be placed under the control and responsibility of the Home Office, and what the services' relationship with the fire brigade should be. The hon. Lady stressed that she was not advocating any particular course of action with respect to those issues. As official health spokesman for his party, can the hon. Gentleman tell us what his party's position is on those issues?

**Dr. Brand:** I am grateful for that question, because I believe that the ambulance service should be an integral part of the national health service. We also believe that the NHS should be an integral part of local democracy, as should the police and fire services. The ambulance service should work with local doctors who work out of hours and with local casualty departments, so that local flow patterns can be established.

The important point that the hon. Gentleman is making is that the emergency services must work together. I have been disappointed that successive Governments have tried to improve efficiency by making the control systems and units of the ambulance service, police and the fire brigade bigger, but retaining their isolation. That may produce a regional fire brigade, ambulance and police service, but we need an integrated emergency service, which could also include civil defence and out-of-hours social services provision. In that way, each locality could provide an appropriate response to an emergency. That would eradicate some of the problems that have been highlighted during the debate, such as that of people who inappropriately contact the ambulance service. We cannot blame people for doing that if they do not know whom they should contact. NHS Direct should be able to cope with that problem, but, in my experience, it does not always get it right. I hope that it will do so in time.

It would be much better if local services were integrated. Hampshire is almost too big for that, but the health authority areas should be able to integrate some of their services. Some services would need to be town or city based, whereas others are obviously more rural. There are different response requirements in different places. Rural areas tend to be more self-sufficient. That does not mean that they should not receive a five-star service, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romsey said, but local general practitioners are often more responsive to out-of-hours work and there is more collaboration between the ambulance service, medical and even pharmaceutical services in rural areas.

This is a valuable debate, which is not only about Hampshire, but about how the Government see the interaction between the people who need the emergency services and those who provide them. I hope that they will not take the bean-counting route of "bigger is better" and look only to make efficiency savings in the cost of telephone operators, but that they will have regard to the quality of service that will result from the structures that they are considering.

I would be horrified if ambulance services on the Isle of Wight were forced to amalgamate with those in Hampshire because amalgamation of the police service has not been good for us. There is a risk that we will do just as badly from an amalgamation of the fire brigades, and I believe that amalgamation of the ambulance services would be a disaster.

10.28 am

**Mr. Philip Hammond** (Runnymede and Weybridge): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) on securing the debate. Like accident and emergency services, ambulance services are a matter of great concern to all our constituents and strike at the heart of the population's confidence in the service provided by the national health service. We must keep our ambulance services under constant scrutiny. Indeed, a couple of months ago, the Minister replied to a debate that focused on ambulance services in London, but in which some wider issues were raised. Some of those issues have been raised again today, and I hope that the Minister has some more general comments to make when she winds up the debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) would have liked to attend the debate but, unfortunately, he is detained by the Special Standing Committee that is considering the Adoption and Children Bill, so I am here instead. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) and my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) for their lucid and well-informed contributions to the debate.

My right hon. Friend focused on ambulance trusts and their funding, paying particular attention to the Hampshire ambulance trust, in the context of the other pressures on health authorities. We must always remember that the Government, who exhort and set targets, set them by the score. There are other pressures

on the limited purses that are the responsibility of the people who determine the funding of the ambulance trusts. Rightly or wrongly, the perception of my right hon. Friend's constituents, like that of my constituents in Surrey and those elsewhere in south-east England, is that funding formulas do not take into account the additional cost pressures on health providers in the relevant areas and that they underestimate the pockets of deprivation in areas that are relatively affluent overall.

I was grateful to my right hon. Friend for raising the issue of community health councils and their important role in scrutinising ambulance services' performance. The Government are committed to the abolition of community health councils—a decision that all the Opposition parties in this Parliament oppose and will continue to fight. The example of CHC involvement in monitoring ambulance services is interesting because it reveals a particular weakness in the Government's proposals to replace CHCs with patients forums.

Under the Government proposal, a patients forum will of course be associated with the Hampshire Ambulance Service NHS trust. However, ambulance trusts cover wide areas—a whole county in Hampshire's case, but even larger areas for some trusts. It is difficult to see how a countywide monitoring body, or one that is multi-countywide, will provide the focused scrutiny that CHCs have been able to give. That is another reason to add to the catalogue of reasons for the Government to reconsider their decision to abolish community health councils.

I was grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Gosport for highlighting the difficulties of communication that seem to have occurred during the progress of talks about funding, and, in particular, the merger proposals affecting Hampshire ambulance service. The point is important and it goes to the heart of some of the questions about morale, recruitment and retention.

My hon. Friend also made an important point that I had not heard before, in drawing attention to the effect of the apparently inexorable process of consolidation of hospital services into ever-larger units. That process is driven not just by economics but by the royal colleges' concerns about patient safety and the need for minimum levels of throughput for procedures to maintain safe practices. Such consolidation will affect the need for ambulance services. It is obvious that, as hospital services are provided in ever-larger units and patients must travel increasing distances to use them, ambulance services will have to expand faster than the health service overall.

**Dr. Brand:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the process will not have an even impact across the country? Some areas will be much more affected by that desirable way of providing services in certain fields of expertise. Some isolated rural and island areas will be very much disadvantaged.

**Mr. Hammond:** The hon. Gentleman is obviously right to say that the phenomenon is not evenly distributed, but it is still important. It is perhaps related to another point, made by the hon. Member for Romsey. She asked whether ambulances are considered primarily as a mode of transport to hospital, or as mobile treatment areas in which treatment is begun where the patient is picked up. That is part of the broader issue of how we create proper paramedic and ambulance services in a world where the distribution of hospitals and specialist care centres is different from that of 10 years ago.

**Sandra Gidley:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that as part of the "re-look" at the ambulance services we should consider the fact that ambulances are far too often used as an up-market means of transporting an old lady from one hospital to another, when there is probably no need for a trained paramedic and a back-up person? Is there not a case for a total review of the services provided by the ambulance service to identify more clearly the calls that need to be responded to by paramedics? Should we not also consider increasing the transportation side of the ambulance service in another manner? At the moment, all these services tend to be put into one big pot.

**Mr. Hammond:** The hon. Lady is right. The services should not be treated as being in one big pot. To be fair, many ambulance services separated their patient transport services—and they are now covered by separate contracts. However, she raises an important point. I hope that the Minister will say more about it.

I am confused about whether ambulances should get patients to hospital as quickly as possible or, begin treatment at the scene. I have seen data that send conflicting signals about which approach gives patients the best chance of survival and recovery. It would be interesting if the Minister could update us about current thinking, and tell us what the indicators are from the latest available data and how she therefore expects ambulance services to develop. I suspect that the consolidation of hospitals into ever-larger units certainly for specialist treatment—will continue. That is key to establishing patient confidence in the service.

People are conscious of where their nearest hospital is. However, anyone who looks into how the system works will quickly become aware that a patient is not necessarily taken to the nearest hospital. To use a Hampshire example, a patient suffering a head injury following a motor accident in Winchester will not be taken to the hospital in Winchester; he will be taken past its door to the hospital in Southampton because that is where head injuries can more properly and appropriately be dealt with. The matter is more complex than locating the nearest hospital and thinking of ambulances as a means of getting from A to B. Perhaps we have to take one step backwards in order to take two forward in thinking about the future configuration of ambulance services.

The hon. Member for Romsey has highlighted specific factors and issues relating to Hampshire, but in the process has touched on broader issues that relate to a much wider area. One such matter is the rationalisation and regionalisation of services in the south-east and the debate about the merger and reorganisation plans for ambulance services in the region, particularly the possibility of merger between the Surrey and Hampshire ambulance services. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire asked the Minister about that. I, too, should be grateful if she would tell us the current state of play.

*[Mr. Hammond]*

My perception, as a Surrey Member of Parliament, is that Surrey is different from Hampshire in that its northern and eastern fringes are of a much more urban character. Its problems are more akin to those of the London ambulance service than to those of a rural one. Having said that, there is a degree of co-operation between Surrey and Hampshire ambulance services.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) was in the Chamber earlier in the debate. He is not essentially involved in the discussion over Hampshire ambulance services. In his constituency, the majority of ambulance cover is provided by Surrey ambulance services under arrangements between the relevant health authorities. My hon. Friend believes that the arrangement works well.

Reference was made to the introduction of new technology for the Hampshire ambulance service. New technology often leads to teething troubles, but it is necessary to provide a modern ambulance service. It was, however, rather late coming to Hampshire, largely as a result of underfunding. Over the past two years, the Hampshire service has received only inflation-based increases, but demand—measured by the number of calls on the service—has risen by 8 per cent.

The Government set targets for the delivery of ambulance services and some money is passported through directly for the modernisation of ambulance services. The majority of the funding, however, comes from health authorities that face other huge pressures on their budgets. The health authorities that fund Hampshire Ambulance provide between 90 and 95 per cent. of the resources necessary to deliver the service. It is incumbent on the Government, when presenting and reiterating target figures, to address that issue. It is no good constantly reasserting the targets when adequate funding to meet them is clearly unavailable under current mechanisms.

Below-target response times are a widespread problem, but our debate on the issue has been confused. I shall clarify my understanding of the position and the Minister can correct me if I am wrong. Under the patients charter, the target for April 2003 is that for category A, life-threatening calls, an ambulance must arrive at the scene within eight minutes in 90 per cent. of cases. That information is set out in a bulletin from a website, which has just been printed out for me during our debate. That is my understanding of the Government's ultimate target. I assume that 75 per cent. is an interim target for April 2001.

The most recent published figures demonstrate that by April 2000, all ambulance trusts bar one—Staffordshire—failed to meet the 75 per cent. target. Another year has passed and the figures will not be published until June, but I hope that the Minister can provide some information about the percentage of ambulance trusts currently meeting the 75 per cent. eight-minute target.

I am not optimistic. The direction of travel has been backwards, not forwards. As I said, only Staffordshire had met the target by April 2000, and even that was a static performance in relation to the previous year. Several others in the list—Sussex, Dorset, Two Shires, Kent, Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Isle of Wight, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Hereford and Worcestershire and West Country ambulance services—actually went backwards. Hampshire went from a 52.8 per cent. response performance in 1998-99 to 44.5 per cent. in 1999-2000. The Minister told us today that, by March 2001, it had fallen further to 43.62 per cent. To what does the Minister attribute that dismal decline in ambulance service performance? Why has her Government allowed the service to deteriorate to that level when, for example, in the last year of the previous Government, Hampshire ambulance service was achieving a 53.2 per cent. eight-minute response? Given the figures, will the Minister revise the targets for 2003 downwards to reflect reality or will she, as the Government have done with their other targets in the NHS plan, simply ignore what is happening in the real world and continue to spin the target figures, as though they were an achievable reality?

As the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), the former Secretary of State for Health, said, the Government

"raised people's expectations sky high and have not delivered."

They are playing a dangerous game with public confidence in the NHS and the ambulance service in particular. The Government should look long and hard at performance, take proper advice on the realistic targets that can be met by 2003 and ensure that the figures being circulated in the public domain reflect them rather than some unachievable aspiration.

10.46 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Gisela Stuart):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) on securing the debate. I note that she has visited the ambulances, as have many other hon. Members present. I sometimes wonder whether ambulances are the most visited part of the national health service. That is a tribute to them. We all engage in their services considerably. I am aware of the hon. Lady's interest in the NHS ambulance service and this is a timely debate on ambulances, not just in Hampshire, but across the country.

Hampshire Ambulance Service NHS trust provides services for the residents of three health authorities that cover the Hampshire area: North and Mid Hampshire, Southampton and South West Hampshire, and the Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire. The trust covers an area of some 1,400 square miles and provides emergency and non-emergency services for around 1.5 million people. In addition to the urban and congested areas of Portsmouth and Southampton, it has some rural and sparsely populated areas including the New Forest. The trust has nearly 500 staff, 68 emergency ambulances and eight fast-response vehicles, and last year it handled around 86,000 emergency calls.

I am sure that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) will join me in taking the opportunity to thank all the staff of the Hampshire ambulance services for the tremendous work that they do, day in, day out. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) was right to say that because of their reliability, we tend to be grateful on the days that we need them but there is a danger that we may forget their daily work. I want to reassure ambulance services

everywhere that they are not forgotten. I hope that the extra investment and the development work in their role and function over the last few years will reassure ambulance services everywhere that, although formerly they could justifiably have been described as the forgotten service, that is not the case now. They play a vital role as part of the NHS family.

I was grateful that other hon. Members reiterated that, while it is an emergency service, the ambulance service is seen as an integral part of the NHS family and should remain so. The value of the work of Hampshire ambulance service is abundantly clear from the way that it has provided medical care in times of need such as the recent major chemical fire in Portsmouth. The Government have given a high priority to improving emergency response times to those patients who are severely ill or injured. Anyone reading the national service framework for coronary heart disease or the NHS plan will see just how much emphasis has been placed on the need for improved response time standards.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge highlighted the function of ambulances. The question whether a patient should be just transported or receive immediate care varies, depending on the circumstances. We must get away from seeing the ambulance service as people carriers. They are highly trained paramedics who can fulfil important functions.

**Mr. Hammond:** I am not trying to make a political point, but I have seen data that have thrown into question the hypothesis that treating trauma patients at the scene and thus delaying their admission to hospital improves the outcomes for those patients. Does the Minister acknowledge that that is a genuine issue of concern, which should be investigated?

**Ms Stuart:** I certainly do, and I recently had discussions with trauma surgeons about the best way forward. However, for patients with cardiac arrest, there is no doubt that the quicker a paramedic arrives at the scene, the better. Even more to the point, we are investing heavily to provide defibrillators in public places—some 700, at a cost of £2 million—because the help that they provide does not require the presence of a paramedic.

I should like to resolve some of the confusion about the challenging national targets that we have set. Our expectation is that all ambulance services should respond to life-threatening emergency calls, which are generally known as category A calls, within eight minutes 75 per cent. of the time, irrespective of location. That target should be reached, whether the call is in the centre of London or in the most rural area. We must find ways to achieve it. I do not accept the argument that we cannot because there is a big difference between rural and urban areas. The solutions for meeting our expectations will be different in different areas.

**Sandra Gidley:** Will the Minister give way?

**Ms Stuart:** If I might make a little progress, many of the questions will be answered.

I would like to see the website that says that the Government have set a target of 90 per cent. by 2003. I am not aware of such a target. Officially, we have said that we want every service to reach the 75 per cent. target first, and then we will move on from there. That is important.

We want to ensure that ambulance services everywhere get to more patients in time to make a difference. That is not about creating league tables but about saving more lives. Clinical evidence shows that faster resuscitation, quicker heart shocks using a defibrillator, and the earlier delivery of clot-busting thrombolytic drugs can all make an important contribution to the effort to reach the demanding targets that we have set for saving more lives.

Since 1997, ambulance services have improved their response times by using a range of measures, including more staff and vehicles, faster activation, better matching of resources to demand, dynamic as opposed to station-based cover, effective relief levels and rotas, and flexible 999 responses. I emphasise the issue of where ambulances should be located. The ultimate aim is to get effective help to immediately life-threatening category A calls within eight minutes.

Developing new ways of fighting the war against heart attacks is very important, especially in the more rural areas where ambulance responses tend to take longer. First responder and community volunteer responder schemes buy time during the vital first minutes and until a fully equipped and crewed emergency ambulance arrives. In some areas, first responders work with the fire service. That is right and proper; the aim is to get people there quickly.

Across the country, NHS ambulance trusts answer and respond to more calls year on year. In the past five years alone, emergency 999 calls have risen by nearly 1 million—an increase of 30 per cent.—and the number of patient journeys has also increased.

**Dr. Brand:** I am fascinated by the Minister's comment that it is policy to allow the other emergency services to provide a service. I am totally in favour of that. However, will she speak to her colleagues in the Home Office who base fire brigade funding entirely on callouts to fires and do not consider any accident or emergency service that they might be providing?

**Ms Stuart:** We have discussions with our colleagues about those areas where the services work together, but it is not always funding alone that is the problem. Other concerns are whether people are trained and how they co-operate. I must put the record straight in relation to the hon. Gentleman's point about NHS Direct. His perception is that it takes 10 minutes to answer the call, 10 minutes to tell the story and 10 minutes to give the answers. He might have picked up on one incident where that happened, but the figures do not bear him out. The statistics show that NHS Direct in Hampshire answered 64 per cent. of calls within 15 seconds; it took 16,000 calls in March. There will be further improvements.

On Hampshire ambulance services, the national increase in demand has been reflected in Hampshire—

**Mr. Hammond:** Will the Minister give way?

**Ms Stuart:** I should like to make progress, because a number of questions have been asked.

**Mr. Hammond:** They have not been answered.

**Ms Stuart:** May I have the chance to answer them?

Against the backdrop of increased call levels, ambulance service response times have improved significantly since we came to power. A year ago, only one ambulance trust—Staffordshire—was meeting the required target, but it is expected that most services, including Hampshire, will be achieving it by the autumn. By March 2001, 14 services had reached the target.

**Mr. Hammond:** Will the Minister give way?

**Ms Stuart:** Very briefly, and probably for the last time.

**Mr. Hammond:** I am very grateful. The Minister asserts that response times have improved since the Government came to power. Can she explain, then, why the percentage of eight-minute responses in Hampshire in 1997-98 was 51.8 per cent., falling to 44.5 per cent. in 1999-2000? Those are Department of Health figures.

**Ms Stuart:** Overall and in whole areas, performances have improved. As I said, a year ago only Staffordshire was meeting the 75 per cent. target; now, 14 of the 32 services are meeting it. I expect at least 29, including Hampshire, to have reached the target by the autumn. I know that progress in Hampshire has been slower than anticipated. That is simply not good enough. Hampshire ambulance trust and the local health authorities know that, too.

What is being done to increase the speed of progress? At my request, the Department's winter and emergency services team recently visited the trust and examined its improvement plans to ensure that all obstacles to progress had been identified. The trust's plan includes recruiting and training 58 more front-line staff, adding 11 emergency vehicles, strengthening control and support functions and changing staff rosters.

Hon. Members have spoken this morning of the need for additional resources for ambulance services. We recognise that, and the Government are committed to delivering first-class public services in Hampshire and throughout England. Because we are managing the economy better, we can afford record investment in public services. In 2000-01, we invested an extra £21 million in national health service ambulance services in England to help them to continue making progress by investing in extra vehicles and front-line staff. That funding has been made available on a recurrent basis and is being backed up with significant local investment. In Hampshire, that included £450,000 last year. A further £1.2 million is expected this financial year—an extra £1.7 million in total.

However, improving ambulance services is not just about more ambulances on the road; it is also about planning and partnership. The right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) made a point about where vehicles are located. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) referred to ambulances being told to wait in car parks, which are not proper conditions in which to work. In fact, we are talking about a sophisticated process of anticipating where accidents will happen. Ambulances do not always return to the same base. In some areas, for example, they may share facilities with the fire services. In my area, ambulances make what they would call pit stops, for cups of tea and so on, at their stations. All the services are working together, and the best way of using vehicles in the most appropriate places is kept under review. That is the partnership to which I referred.

With Hampshire ambulance service, we have seen co-operation and collaboration on many initiatives that have benefited patients and helped the ambulance service. Further investment has been made. We have invested £3.5 million in modernising the accident and emergency department at Southampton general hospital.

The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) referred to Haslar hospital. The reconfiguration process has not always been entirely happy, but the current arrangements mean that the services at the accident treatment centre will be continued. There is no particular timetable for Haslar's closure; we have said that it will coincide with the opening of the new private finance initiative hospital in Cosham. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is reassured that his constituents will continue to be served.

As for the review that many hon. Friends have mentioned, a formal period of statutory consultation will shortly commence. No decision has been taken; there is no fixed plan, as some hon. Members have suggested. We hope that implementation will be possible by 2002.

Our driving motivation is a better ambulance service, which serves the populations of all areas in the interests of patients, and responds to the changing needs of patients and to the reconfiguration of the NHS.

## Digital Television

11 am

**Dr. George Turner** (North-West Norfolk): I am delighted to introduce a debate on the future of digital television. Events are moving fast, in terms of both technology and commerce, and important concerns have been raised in the report of the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport, published last month, and the recent survey conducted by the Consumers Association. The latter has attracted much media attention because of the doubts that it raised about the practicability of the Government's timetable for the switch-off of the analogue signal. As the Minister knows, I have a strong constituency interest in the future of digital television because large numbers of my constituents in west Norfolk have long suffered from reception problems with analogue television. Regrettably, when the previous Government legislated for the introduction of digital television, they dismally failed to take account of the problems experienced by my constituents—and, as previous Adjournment debates have shown, those of hon. Members representing many parts of the country. Some 40 or 50 hon. Members have constituents with cause for complaint.

Since entering the House, I have been working to ensure that when the Government legislate—early in the next Parliament, I hope—my constituents' problems will be addressed. I shall briefly remind the House of the nature of those problems. The services of each regional television broadcaster are transmitted from specific locations, but in some areas the lie of the land and the physical characteristics of UHF electromagnetic waves prevent communities from receiving signals from transmitters assigned to their appropriate regional broadcaster; they may be able to receive only the signal from a transmitter targeted at a different region. Those viewers can watch only regional programming services intended for others. That is the nub of the problem. Many of my Norfolk constituents receive regional programmes that are in broad measure intended for Yorkshire and the north of England.

For many years, solutions using additional transmitters or relays have been considered, but constrained by the possible number of channels when using analogue broadcasting, which is greedy in its use of frequency space, and by the severe interference problems that arise when adjacent transmitters are not well separated in frequency. It is a particular problem in my part of the country because of the adjacency of European transmitters across the sea. That is why analogue broadcasting has genuine difficulty in providing more than four universal channels: not surprisingly, many of my constituents cannot properly receive Channel 5.

Many thousands of homes in west Norfolk are affected. The borough council estimated the figure to be as high as 20,000, which represents an audience of up to 51,000 in my constituency alone—and they want something to be done. As I hope hon. Members will understand, they want to watch their own regional television programmes. They are not alone in giving high priority to regional broadcasting. Surveys repeatedly show that 90 per cent. of the British public want regional news, which has more support than any other kind of programme—30 per cent. more than for soap operas. The programmes that many viewers most want to watch are the very ones denied them—and my constituents in particular—by the anomaly in broadcasting.

Issues of community and regional identity are increasingly important, especially since the Government came to office. My constituents are served by health authorities, social services, education services, library services, police services and fire services, all of which are administered on a county basis within Norfolk. Through the establishment of regional development agencies, the Government have made it clear that local and regional identity is increasingly important. Ministers are encouraging communities to become involved in community safety and local transport strategies, and see a strong role for the community in developing policies on access to the countryside.

**Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): On the point of regional identities in England and national identities in Wales and Scotland, the National Assembly for Wales does all the work that the hon. Gentleman referred to on a regional and national dimension, and more. However, does he share my concern that 10 per cent. of analogue receivers in Wales do not get any Welsh signals, which means that 10 per cent. of the Welsh population do not know what the National Assembly is doing in their name?

**Dr. Turner:** I certainly sympathise with the hon. Gentleman, and I well understand why he is among those who have been pushing for a solution.

Let me return to the importance of regional identity. My comments illustrate a growing and serious democratic deficit—which the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) referred to nationally and I see regionally—if people cannot have access to news and information about their own communities via the most popular and effective medium, which is television. Like the majority of viewers throughout the country, my constituents want to know what is going on under their noses and in their communities. Access to television is much more important than might be suggested by its entertainment content. In today's society, access to information is central to quality of life; television is a key provider of that information and will become even more important in the digital era. Technical solutions to our problems exist in the digital era, but there must be the political will to ensure that they are exploited. That is why, on behalf of my constituents, I want to see continued scrutiny of the process of change.

As the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport acknowledged, the success of commercial pay television in the UK since launch has been striking. BSkyB has been so successful in converting analogue subscribers to digital that it expects to switch off its analogue signal later this year, when it will provide digital services to about 5.5 million homes, which is some 20 per cent. of households. ONdigital has built up a new subscriber base from scratch and recently announced that it has more than a million subscribers, which is also roughly the current level of uptake of digital cable television.

Given that fast uptake, one might ask what the problem is. Put simply, the problem is that not everyone will want, or be able to afford, pay television. The

*[Dr. Turner]*

Consumers Association survey found that 32 per cent. of people who do not have digital television say that they will never get it. Perhaps more importantly, almost half those surveyed said that they would only want to watch free-to-air channels after analogue switch-off. The latter figure is close to the estimate of 40 per cent. made by the British Radio and Electronic Equipment Manufacturers' Association. Even if we take the BREMA figures—the lower of the two—some 9 million homes will need access to either proper digital sets, which are normally referred to as integrated digital televisions, or appropriate converters by 2006-10 if the Government are to stick to their schedule for analogue turn-off. The scale of the problem is apparent. Some 4 or 5 million sets are sold annually, but only 90,000 were digital televisions last year, despite the fact that analogue televisions will become useless in a few years. Projections for this year say that only 180,000 digital television sets, which have a long and guaranteed lifetime, will be sold.

**Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): The hon. Gentleman is making important points. Does he agree that many advertisements for new televisions are grossly misleading in that they refer to digital television sets but are selling sets that are incapable of receiving a digital television service?

**Dr. Turner:** I accept that. The Government have started to address the problem of confusion in the marketplace, but need to do more.

With an uptake of 180,000 this year, the figures provide little support for the view that, without further intervention, total sales will be anywhere near 9 million by 2010, let alone 2006. Something must be done. The consumer has clearly found the marketplace unnecessarily confusing.

The chosen marketing tool for digital television has been the provision of free set-top boxes. The service provider suffers a significant initial loss, which it hopes to set off over time by income from subscriptions. That is why the providers are targeting better-off households. A side effect of this market-led process has been that many analogue sets, supported by a continued price differential, are still being sold without the consumer realising that they have a limited lifetime.

I am pleased to note the Government's prompt response to criticism of labelling and the introduction of kite marking so that potential purchasers of non-digital television sets are clearly warned about the potential limited life expectancy. I am also pleased to note that the Government are trialling free provision of digital access in a limited number of areas. I hope that the Minister will tell us more about that, particularly the period of the trials and when we are likely to hear the results.

I agree with ONdigital's proposal, which would require changes to European law to ensure that a date is set for the mandatory inclusion of digital receivers in new television sets. The resulting increase in the production of digital televisions would result in significant economies of scale and a marked reduction of the current high prices.

There is a clear role for the Government. They must ensure that all citizens, not just the wealthy, can share the potential benefits offered by digital television. Disadvantaged groups must not be left behind and we must acknowledge that a significant minority will be unable to afford the premiums for pay TV. The Government's commitment to availability and affordability criteria and the conditions for analogue switch off must remain central to policy development.

I was pleased that the White Paper so clearly acknowledged the specific problems of my constituents. Along with others around the country, some are denied access to regional programming. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can report progress on the consultation process promised by the White Paper. She knows that I am keen to be involved in finding solutions and she is aware of my impatience to do so.

Last year, the Minister visited my constituency and she will recall her visit to Hunstanton and Heacham. On Saturday I was visiting homes close to the sensory garden that she visited on that occasion. She will understand the frustration of my constituent who complained that his family subscribed to ONdigital so that digital terrestrial broadcasts with many more channels were available, yet was still unable even by payment to watch local news and other regional programmes. The same is true for satellite television. We must press for early resolution of that problem.

The introduction of digital television is made immensely more complicated by the need to maintain analogue broadcasts with all the problems of interference that arise. Transmissions are limited by the availability of frequency and by power, which leads to the frustration of subscribers. I fear that the result of consultation on removing the anomalies in my locality will reveal a dependence on analogue turn-off. Only then will the digital era truly have arrived.

In light of the facts highlighted by the Consumers Association, the Government will have to do more than provide a legislative backdrop. It is in the national interest to exploit the opportunities of the digital revolution and a Government who acknowledge the need for encouragement of the entrepreneurial spirit of our nation must themselves be willing to encourage and adopt radical solutions to public interest problems.

The National Consumer Council has stressed the complexity of the marketplace for digital television. It argues for clear and accurate information about the differences between analogue and digital and the advantages and disadvantages of different platforms and packages. I strongly support its argument for a high profile, Government-led public information campaign on digital switchover. If people are to continue to buy analogue televisions with a limited lifetime, they must do so knowingly, not because the salesman found it the best sale to make. There is much evidence that digital is often equated with pay television and that is an unattractive proposition for many. The content and services offered by free-to-air public service broadcasters will be of critical importance in increasing digital take-up and making digital broadcasting popular with a wider section of the population.

We must ensure that there is a proper framework for the delivery of public service broadcasting. A large proportion of those who will, at best, be reluctant to transfer to digital television will be pensioners. I have 23,000 of them in my constituency and I am well aware of that fact. The Government should do more to

encourage and help them to benefit from the improved services of the digital era. I urge the Government to extend the free television licences available to those of 75 and over to households with elderly people of 65 and over. That extension could be a financial incentive making digital television affordable. It would also address the many anomalies in licence requirements for that age group.

I was disappointed that the Stewart commission failed dismally to resolve a situation where, depending on the nature of accommodation and with no regard to the ability to pay, some pensioners receive free television licences and others do not. I can assure the Minister that an extension of free television licensing would be immensely popular. In a brief period before the Budget I attracted 3,000 signatures to a petition calling for free television licences for people over 65.

Given that the nation stands to benefit financially from the analogue turn-off, further Government measures to encourage the take-up of digital television should at least be considered. Some in the industry believe that it might be appropriate to consider the use of a preferential rate of VAT. Even a limited period of reduction would help to kick start the volume of sales which will themselves reduce prices and address the issue of affordability that the Government have identified as central to the problem.

As I have explained, my constituents have a particular interest in seeing fast progress in the full introduction of digital television. The Minister has shown considerable sympathy for the problems of my constituents and has been generous with her time in discussing them with me. I hope that she can do more today and promise solutions and a timetable. I hope that she will confirm the Government's commitment to legislation, if necessary, to ensure a proper balance between commercial interests and public good in broadcasting. I hope too that she will acknowledge the need to take further action if we are to meet the Government's timetable for analogue turn-off. I strongly commend the help that I have suggested for the elderly to ensure that they too benefit from the early introduction of the digital era.

11.18 am

**Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): First, I thank the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) for initiating this useful debate which is certainly of great interest to many of my constituents and many people in Wales. Access to analogue signals in the past has been a problem in Wales in that up to 40 per cent. of the Welsh population receive signals from the regional stations in England rather than from those in Wales. As I said when the hon. Gentleman kindly allowed me to intervene, 10 per cent. of the Welsh population find it difficult to receive any Welsh signals. That means that they are deprived not only of Welsh language broadcasting, but of information relating to the growth of systems of government such as the National Assembly for Wales.

North-east Wales and the area that you represent, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is one of the areas that traditionally have difficulty in accessing the full range of services. The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk was correct to say that digital television provides the opportunity to get rid of that discrimination and to give people in all areas access to the full range of entertainment, information and other useful services that will come on stream.

**Mrs. Jackie Lawrence** (Preseli Pembrokeshire): I endorse the hon. Gentleman's comments completely, but would he not also agree that in areas such as my constituency digital television will also enable those who are monoglot English to gain access for the first time to channels such as Channel 4? While he stresses the fact that it will give Welsh speakers access to Welsh language programmes, it will also mean that monoglot English will have access to their choice of channels.

**Mr. Thomas:** That is true for everyone in the United Kingdom. It is now possible to have access to Welsh-language television here in London, which I welcome, as no doubt the hon. Lady's constituents will welcome access to Channel 4 in Pembrokeshire. We are debating the effects of digital television, and one thing that will disappear in the near future is the idea of an entire community watching the same television programme at the same time. That will end, as television, radio and the internet all merge into digital information, which we will choose to use, download or watch in whichever way we see fit. The hon. Lady's constituents will make their choices, and my constituents will make theirs. However, I am concerned that we should protect Welsh language needs and I will address that shortly. Obviously, the world is dominated by English language broadcasting—if that is the right term for what happens on the web—particularly in digital transmission.

I want to concentrate my remarks on two aspects of the future of television digitalisation: diversity and access. We in Wales attach a particular emphasis and importance to what would pass for regional television in the remarks of the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk. It is important to note that, in Wales, regional television is our national television. Our national broadcasting depends on the regional arms of either Carlton Communications through HTV or the BBC, or our one national station, which is S4C — Sianel Pedwar Cymru. However, S4C is also diversifying into digitalisation and taking up the opportunities that lie beyond the boundaries of Wales.

A difficulty that arises is the manner in which regional television sometimes plays out in national terms. I will give two examples. The first is, perhaps, a rather light-hearted one: Anne Robinson's recent comments about the Welsh were not well received in Wales. Many of us treated them with the respect that they deserved. Somebody who wants publicity so that she can enhance her manor house in Gloucestershire is welcome to any publicity she can get. However, people in Wales did not want to see a repeat of that programme. They would have preferred something that was a bit more positive about Wales, or a different "Room 101" programme, but that was not possible. The repeat programme was broadcast nationally throughout the UK. So, through regionalisation, we get a rather warped perception of our national concerns.

The second and more important example concerns news broadcasts in Wales. Although the moves by the BBC to integrate—I would say tag on—Welsh news into the main news are welcome, we must wait for 27 or 28 minutes before we get the news from Wales in the

*[Mr. Thomas]*

broadcast at 9 o'clock in the evening. That might not seem so important, and it might be that news from elsewhere in the world, particularly from London, is more important. However, in the present foot and mouth outbreak, we are missing an opportunity to transmit a clear message about the situation in Wales with respect to tourism and access to the countryside. Such information is broadcast at the end of other stories that are not as pertinent to the Welsh situation. That skews perception and is one issue that we should examine as we move to digitalisation. We should change the arrangement so that we have a different feed in the Welsh context. As the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) said earlier, people would have more choice of news programmes under digitalisation.

**Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): My constituents wait for 28 minutes to hear news about East Sussex, but then get traffic reports about Dorset on the local news.

**Mr. Thomas:** I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's constituents find that very useful. A similar situation exists in parts of Wales along the Severn estuary, where people get news about Bristol before they get news about Cardiff and Swansea.

I emphasise the importance of S4C in terms of diversity—not just for Wales but the UK. Valuable initiatives have been undertaken by the Minister's Department, with the cultural diversity network trying to demonstrate cultural diversity on all platforms of television. As I hope she already knows, S4C is the jewel in the crown of cultural diversity in the UK and Europe. It was difficult to establish S4C, but it has been an undoubted success. It has proved value for money and has shown how Welsh language broadcasting can compete with English language broadcasting; it is just as entertaining, informative and valuable to its own constituency.

Importantly, S4C has also fed a cultural revival in Wales. We have had the metamorphosis of Welsh language bands such as Catatonia and Ffa Coffi Bawb—which became Super Furry Animals—which have become international successes and a Welsh language film, "Hedd Wyn", being nominated for an Oscar. Such success could not have happened without S4C or while Welsh language programming was scattered over various channels. That concentration of resources has been of huge benefit in Wales. Bands such as Catatonia may be rock bands, but they have shown how Welsh language influences come over into English and influence Wales through that medium. We also have the opportunity to create an English language S4C, if that is the right term—a channel devoted to English speakers in Wales that views Wales and the world from their perspective. The BBC has taken up that challenge and is considering BBC2 Choice in Wales to fulfil that role. We need to consider how we can protect it.

Resources are a problem. S4C gets £48 million a year, which I am sure is generous, but Channel 4 gets £650 million a year. One of the problems for S4C is that it cannot buy programmes from sources other than the BBC, HTV and independent producers in Wales, although it makes an increasing number of back-to-back productions with Russia and other European countries. Many hon. Members will have seen over Easter the animated tales of biblical stories that S4C produced in association with other European countries. S4C is therefore an international player, but it cannot simply buy "Friends" or "Frasier" from American channels because they are not in Welsh. Dubbing programmes into Welsh was done to death when we tried to dub "Shane". That experiment has gone down in Welsh history and will never be tried again. Welsh language programming, and the diversity that exists, need to be protected, as I shall explain later.

On the important issue of access, mentioned by the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk in opening the debate, the Government have made it clear that the switch from analogue to digital will not take place until around 95 per cent. of all subscribers or consumers have access to digital. That 95 per cent. should not be just a UK figure. There should be a way of disaggregating it down to Wales and Scotland and possibly also to regions of England. If anyone in west Wales—in Ceredigion, for example—wants to buy a mobile phone, he or she may go to a mobile phone service that covers 97 or 98 per cent. of the population. However, the 2 or 3 per cent. of Britain that is not covered comprises west Wales and the highlands and islands of Scotland. It will be difficult to justify a complete switchover to digital in Wales until we can show that the Government's 95 per cent. target is also being met in Wales and that we are not disenfranchising Wales and repeating the mistakes that we have made with analogue. However, the situation is encouraging in that take-up of digital in Wales is higher than in England. I have asked questions on the issue, but official figures are not available; my information is that take-up in Wales is somewhat higher than in England. I am not sure why that should be but it is welcome for the future.

Take-up is mainly of satellite. We have three main digital platforms: terrestrial, cable and satellite. However, most people in Wales cannot access either cable or terrestrial digital platforms. Terrestrial digital take-up in Wales is very poor, as is access to Channel 5, which the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk mentioned. Cable is available in Cardiff, its environs and some other parts of south Wales, but not in north Wales and certainly not in mid-Wales, which includes my constituency. We therefore need to consider how we can have access not only to digital as such, but to the full range of digital platforms, because there will be differences among what is offered by cable, satellite and terrestrial platforms.

**Dr. George Turner:** Would the hon. Gentleman say that, for his constituents—and mine—free-to-air broadcasts, which can be received in any room in the house if they have a normal household aerial, are the most desirable platform?

**Mr. Thomas:** Indeed. That is the most desirable platform as it would not force people to pay for digital. It is vital that we support public service broadcasting. The Government need to recognise that digital is not yet available throughout Wales, and terrestrial digital access will not be at 95 per cent. when the switchover takes place. It is simply not good enough to say that people have access to satellite. Whichever way we

consider it, we are paying for satellite. The boxes may be free upfront, but the pressure to subscribe is enormous. As the hon. Gentleman said, that is the only way in which the companies can get their money back. Free-to-air terrestrial broadcasting is also the only way in which an English language channel for Wales will be created.

Let my conclude by explaining how we can achieve our objectives in Wales or at least try to protect access and diversity. We need to address questions, not difficulties, about diversity as we work though the rollout of digital broadcasting. The White Paper suggests that we have a new office of communications—an Ofcom. I suggest to the Minister that serious thought is given to the establishment of an Ofcom for Wales. The National Assembly for Wales has said that it would like to have a Wales office of Ofcom and that it would like to appoint the Wales member of Ofcom. However, questions of accountability are raised if one body appoints to another body, which is in turn answerable to another body. My preference and that of my party is to consider an office of communications for Wales that can integrate radio, television and the increasing amount of digital broadcasting that will take place and consider them from the Welsh perspective.

The experience of the BBC Wales governor, sterling though his work is as an individual, calls into question whether we could have in one person sufficient protection of Welsh interests. At the very minimum, we certainly need a Welsh consumer panel in Wales. It would not be acceptable to establish a consumer panel for the UK and simply have a Welsh office of it. We need a Wales consumer panel that is based completely in Wales and considers Welsh consumer needs. Welsh language broadcasting is a unique feature of Wales and needs to be embedded in the future.

We have seen the importance of communications in the cultural life of Wales and the need to protect them. The Welsh language would not be alive today if the Bible had not been translated into Welsh when it was the most important method of communication. That is why the Welsh language is alive, but the Cornish language is not. The most important method of communication was translated into Welsh at the right time, when literacy was growing and people could use it to maintain a sense of Welsh identity through the Welsh language.

That is no longer the case. Wales is not a monoglot Welsh-speaking country; we are a bilingual country. To maintain Welsh culture during globalisation, which involves the break-up of Welsh-speaking communities, people in Wales must have access to Welsh and English language programming that gives them experience, entertainment and information from their own communities. That is provided in the main, but with some difficulty on occasion. Government decisions on the future of digital television and particularly access to it will determine whether we can ensure that we have a thriving Welsh language and English-speaking communities in Wales in the future. I hope that the Minister will act accordingly.

11.34 am

**Mrs. Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) on securing such an important and timely debate.

I should also declare an interest, which is not pecuniary, but a constituency interest. My constituency contains ONdigital's main customer service centre, which employs about 1,400 people. My hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) has an equally important ONdigital customer service centre in her constituency. Both my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson) and I were keen to have in our city a company that we believed would be at the cutting edge of 21st century communications, and we worked hard to encourage it to come to Plymouth when it was looking for a suitable base for its customer service centre.

Neither the company nor we have been disappointed, and ONdigital has found that Plymouth is a good place to do business. As my hon. Friend the Minister knows from several recent visits, it is a beautiful city with a pool of people who can make an excellent and talented work force and have skills that are adaptable to the high-class customer service that is expected of a company such as ONdigital. The company's expectations have been met, because that work force has been able to attract 1 million customers in two years, which the company set itself as a target, and has made an important contribution to the rollout of digital television services. The company is confident that it will attract 2 million customers within four years, which is its next target.

As constituency Members, we feel that ONdigital has brought something valuable to Plymouth. It is a key player in my constituency and in our city, and has helped us to achieve one of the biggest drops in unemployment in the country. I have visited ONdigital many times and, with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, have found it to be a modern, enjoyable and interesting place to work; many constituents who work there confirm that. The general manager, Alan Lawson, not only provides leadership to the customer service base that ONdigital operates, but plays an active role in the call centre forum, which was set up to promote high standards in call centres in Plymouth and to identify common interests. Through that constituency interest, my interest in the future of digital services, including the television services that are the subject of today's debate, has developed.

Of course, the Government want to encourage all platforms, including satellite and cable, but, of the three, terrestrial will have the key role in winning the hearts and minds of those who are yet to commit themselves to digital television services. Those services must be available, affordable and attractive. Digital terrestrial will be the way in which most UK homes ultimately find both availability and affordability. Almost all homes—but not all, as we heard from the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas)—have an aerial through which the services can be delivered, whereas cable passes by about 50 per cent. of homes, and there are severe cost-effectiveness constraints on rolling out cable to as many homes as aerials can serve.

Availability and affordability are closely linked with the service provided through satellite. The hon. Gentleman referred to predominantly premium pay services that have a target income per consumer of £300 to £400 per annum to sustain the service. In constituencies such as mine, where I inherited from my Conservative predecessor the poorest ward in England, that is an insurmountable barrier for many people.

*[Mrs. Linda Gilroy]*

Some might say that if it is attractive, people will pay for it. However, we are sadly some years—perhaps even a couple of decades—away from people across the country having incomes that can sustain that level of payment for television packages.

There are two barriers to the attractiveness of digital television. My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk has referred to the confusion about the benefits of digital television. There is also confusion about what equipment can receive digital signals. The question of whether the market is operating in a sufficiently robust and competitive way to allow it to deliver attractive programme packages at affordable prices is another issue. That, as hon. Members will know, is the subject of a Competition Commission inquiry. It is probably appropriate to mention that in passing today, but not to go into the issues that are being examined by the commission. However, those issues are very important to the future availability and—crucially—to the affordability of the pay TV sector.

If rumours in the press over the weekend, in *The Sunday Times* and in the *Financial Times* on Monday are correct, there could be an interesting development this week among some of the key players in television and digital services, which might have a significant impact on the market and its ability to operate in a competitive manner.

On customer confusion over equipment, a number of hon. Members have spoken about the difficulties of finding digital televisions. At Christmas—a popular time for buying televisions—if one went into an outlet of one of the major retailers, it was quite common to find 200 televisions on sale, of which only five were digital televisions truly capable of accepting digital signals.

Some hon. Members have campaigned on that issue. I am pleased to say that there is an early-day motion before Parliament congratulating my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce. Her Department, working with the digital video broadcasting consortium, has developed a logo that will be visible on the screen of all digital televisions as well as boxed digital televisions. Hopefully that will give an impetus to sales, helping to create the volume of sales required for cost savings to be made so that digital televisions can become more affordable.

Beyond resolving that particular source of confusion, there is a further need to raise awareness among the 70 per cent. of British adults who do not yet have digital television. They need to know that, in buying a DVB-labelled TV, they get free access to a wider range of channels, including BBC Choice, BBC Knowledge, BBC News 24 and ITV 2. According to the recent Consumers Association report, "Turn on, Tune in, Switched off", which has already been mentioned, only 29 per cent. of respondents to the survey conducted by the association knew that the five existing terrestrial channels would not cost extra after analogue switch-off, let alone that there are new free channels available on digital. As my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk said, digital television is wrongly associated with pay television, and if we are going to get sufficient numbers of people to switch over to digital initially, we must crack that myth.

The Consumers Association report identifies a range of challenges that need to be overcome. There is a great deal of confusion. The expense of digital television is a key barrier to take-up. That report identifies many, particularly among the young, those with children and those in lower social grades, who say that they do not need or would not use the extra channels. Just under half of people who have not thus far switched are aware that the Government plan to switch off the analogue signal in the next five to 10 years.

A lot more needs to be done. The challenges that have been identified require a concerted effort to raise awareness, to advocate the benefits of digital television and to bring about action. The DVB consortium was set up in 1993 and I am sure that it will play a role in that process. It is an industry-led consortium of more than 290 broadcasters, manufacturers, network operators, software developers and regulatory bodies that are committed to designing global standards for providing digital television and data services. I do not think that the consortium alone will be able to achieve the required level of awareness, advocacy and action. It played an important part, together with the Department of Trade and Industry, in launching the logo. That is effectively a kite mark, reassuring people that when they pay, at present prices, more than £1,000—sometimes as much as £2,000—on a television, it will at least do what they expect.

A bigger and wider job remains to be done, which calls for a digital services and communications champion. I hope that the Minister will confirm that the Government intend to institute something of that kind this year, because if we are to achieve analogue switch-off in the time scale that the Government hope for, we need someone to help to develop the appropriate awareness and see that digital services are advocated inside and outside Government. A clear, consistent message is needed to bring about not just action, but joined-up action, across the plethora of meetings and players involved, which include the Independent Television Commission, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the broadcasters. All have an interest in driving matters forward. Many meetings are being held and huge energy and commitment are being expended on the task. Nevertheless, the Government should soon appoint one person to focus that effort on bringing digital services in the required time to as many people as possible. I look forward to the Minister's observations on that question.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk on initiating this important debate, which has been a helpful opportunity to discuss the challenges ahead. My constituents have an important contribution to make. They and the House can count on my interest in and commitment to work on the policy and legislation that will help to develop digital provision.

11.48 pm

**Mr. Norman Baker** (Lewes): I congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) on initiating the debate. I agree with all his points, as well as those made subsequently. The technology is far reaching, but does not give rise to political differences. That probably makes it a bad story for the media.

Digital technology will make a big difference to our communities. I have identified three key differences: the freeing of spectrum to make space available for extra channels and services; the fact that digital signals are of better quality than the analogue signals that have been around since the 1930s; and the fact that digital signal uses spectrum more efficiently, which means that, at least in theory, it is possible to achieve a better and wider range of services and to deal with the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised about regional coverage.

I think that the hon. Gentleman receives Yorkshire television in Norfolk and I touched briefly on a similar problem in an intervention. Part of my constituency receives a signal from the Isle of Wight, which means that we receive lots of interesting local news about Hampshire and Dorset and not very much news about Sussex. That difficulty needs to be rectified. For many people, that is the great bonus of digital television.

Of course, there are not only problems relating to regionalisation. Channel 5 has already been referred to. My constituents and others who live along the south coast cannot receive Channel 5 because of conflicting signals from French television. We cannot even receive French television, but we can receive a series of wavy lines, which, I am told, are not as good as Channel 5 on a good day. I have received a few letters from constituents who want a 20 per cent. reduction in their licence fees on that basis. I have not put their point to the Minister or to the BBC, but I have told them that their plea is unlikely to be successful.

Like the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), other areas of my constituency, such as the village of Kingston, have difficulty receiving normal signals. We must use the digital revolution to improve regional coverage. The capacity exists, but it must be seen in conjunction with what has happened to regionalism generally. There are conflicting developments. There is a move towards regionalism in this country, which I welcome, with greater powers for the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament—and, in time, no doubt, for the English regions. That is underpinned by the trend in the European Union towards recognising regions. However, at the same time, regional identity is being eroded. The sort of houses that were distinctive in a certain area are being replaced by Barratt Homes, so that an estate in Ceredigion looks very much like an estate anywhere else, which is unfortunate. A shopping mall in Burnley is not only the same as one in Glasgow, but is probably the same as one in Ohio, with a traditional Tesco toytown clock, like the one in Lewes.

We need to protect and enhance our regional identities, and this technology gives us a way of doing that. However, it is important that technological developments should be mirrored by a political determination to ensure that regional television is protected and enhanced. We are moving towards one ITV, but ITV has been the traditional deliverer of regional services—more so than the BBC. If one lives in Tyne Tees, Yorkshire or the Meridian area, one tends to look to the ITV network more than to the BBC for local news, although that is not the case everywhere. It would be an irony if we did not use the regional capability of digital technology and were instead to retrench towards a national ITV. The Government must make it clear that ITV cannot be allowed to reduce its regional coverage, because that is its main public service element, or its regional production facilities. We do not want everything to come from London.

I have mentioned the potential benefits, as well as some of the problems, of digital television. I understand that the Government are moving towards the introduction of digital neighbourhood schemes, whereby local neighbourhoods will receive digital television free of charge as a way of raising awareness and monitoring people's reactions to the technology. Perhaps the Minister will say something about that in her reply. However, if the Minister is looking for areas of the country to take part in that scheme, I offer her Lewes or any part of my constituency.

No one has mentioned digital radio in any detail, and it is important not to overlook it—[*Interruption.*] I apologise—the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) did mention it, but I want to develop the point. It is important for the Government to set targets for digital radio, as they have done for digital television, so that we know when digital radio will kick in. I accept that there may be a longer time frame, and that it might not be as easy. Nevertheless, those for whom radio is their preferred medium, as well as those who prefer to watch television, are entitled to attention. The cost of digital radios is rather high. That needs to be addressed, not simply by the market but, ideally, by Government action to stimulate that market.

Hon. Members have referred to the problem of labelling. I am pleased about the useful initiative that the Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce has taken. One of the biggest inhibitors of digital take-up is the uncertainty that exists around the technology. If people could be confident that the digital set was the norm in the shops—so that they did not need worry about it, knowing that it would serve their needs in the years ahead and that it was ready for the technology—they would buy it and take more interest in the matter. If they have to fiddle around and work out what is what, then worry about where it works and what it does, what digital means and whether the sound quality or the signal is an issue, they will say "I cannot be bothered with this" and will wait until it has developed further.

The Government have a major role to play in getting things right. This change is more complicated than previous ones. People in the industry compare it to the change from 405 to 625, or that from black and white to colour, and say that consumers coped. It is not the same. The concepts were simple to master; this is complicated for those who are interested not in the theory, but in the end result. It is up to the Government to make it easy for them to get digital access and to be confident that what they are buying is what they want to buy.

The Government's targets for digital take-up are, by and large, right—99.4 per cent. of households being able to receive a digital signal, 95 per cent. of households signing up to digital television and digital television being affordable. However, I agree with the hon. Member for Ceredigion about the importance of a regional perspective. We have to ensure that those are the percentages in the area in which the consumer lives, rather than national figures that do not apply to him. There is a degree of unanimity across parties and in the country at large. That is healthy. Digital technology can undoubtedly bring many benefits to our communities. It is up to the Government to remove the obstacles that

*[Mr. Norman Baker]*

have been identified by me and by other hon. Members in order to ensure that those benefits are freely available, and that their provision is supported.

11.57 am

**Mrs. Jackie Lawrence** (Preseli Pembrokeshire): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) on securing the debate. It is pleasant and unusual to have a debate in which everybody agrees on the objectives and wants to work towards achieving them as quickly as possible. As my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy) mentioned, I also have a constituency interest in the issue. ONdigital, one of the terrestrial suppliers of digital television, is a major employer in my constituency, so it is important to Pembrokeshire. It represents a growing industry, which has provided 800 jobs in the last 18 months and is set to provide 1,100 by the middle of summer, bringing further benefits to my constituency, which has always had high unemployment.

I am a convert to digital television. Anyone who has watched both digital and analogue broadcasts will know that the difference in sound and picture quality is incredible. There is no comparison. The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) mentioned choice, and that is another major benefit offered by digital television. A spin-off, of which the broadcasters are aware, is that as the choice increases the onus will be on them to provide ever better quality programmes, because, in the long-term, that will be the only way in which they can secure viewers who have that increased level of choice.

Another element, which I do not think has been mentioned today, is that digital television could contribute significantly to the Government meeting their commitment to get everyone in Britain on-line by 2005, giving people who are not familiar with PCs or other computers access through their television set. That would be very valuable. The main work provided by ONdigital in my constituency is customer service support for ONnet. That is a growing sector and an industry that I hope will be of increasing benefit to my constituents.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) spoke of uncertainty in the public mind. There is more than uncertainty; there is confusion. The problem is that most of the public do not understand the difference between analogue and digital. For example, they do not know that there are three ways in which they can receive digital television—via satellite, cable or terrestrial networks.

It is important to reaffirm the need to ensure that, as digital television signals come in, the current 70 per cent. rate of coverage will be increased dramatically so that everyone is covered, wherever they live. In Wales, we have our own specific problems. Unlike the rest of Wales, the terrain of my constituency is characterised by dips rather than hills. However, it is just as difficult to receive signals in coastal valleys as it is in hilly areas. It is a massive job to ensure that when digital television expands it covers all areas of the UK.

There is also a major problem with shared aerials, which I do not think has been mentioned this morning. In the UK, 6 million homes have shared aerials, and if we want terrestrial digital television to expand, that is important, because many of those homes are owned by councils or housing associations. The Government have a major role to play in encouraging and supporting local authorities and housing associations in providing the facilities to enable those homes to receive digital television.

We must tackle public confusion on the matter. Many people transfer to digital because of an interest in sport. Consequently, digital television has the reputation of being a pay television service. People do not always understand that they can receive the service in a different way, without having to pay great sums of money.

There are three ways in which the Government can help, some of which have already been mentioned. First, there should be a Government-led, not an industry-led, information campaign. That is very important. My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton touched on a Office of Fair Trading inquiry. The necessity for that inquiry is testament to the involvement of vested interests and to the fact that the drive to provide people with information about the benefits of digital television needs to be independent and Government-led.

Secondly, the Government should appoint a digital champion with responsibility for driving forward the take-up of digital television and ensuring that people are informed. Finally, considerable effort should be made to ensure that all televisions sold after 2004 contain a digital receiver. Presumably, that would be done through European legislation. Such a measure would go a long way to ending the confusion and protecting the consumer.

12.3 pm

**Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): I also congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) on securing this debate. During his time in the House he has frequently raised the problems of the regional dimension of television broadcasting and how it affects his constituents. I remind hon. Members of my long service as a consultant with ITV and prior to that with Yorkshire Television. I know only too well what a headache the issue raised by the hon. Gentleman was for Yorkshire Television. Digital television undoubtedly provides a great opportunity to correct the problems that this country's analogue signal arrangements have presented for many viewers.

The debate is timely, not just because of the news coverage about the potential restructuring of ONdigital—I was interested in what the hon. Members for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy) and for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) said about the importance of ONdigital in their constituencies—but also because of the Select Committee report and the comments of the Consumers Association on digital uptake. The starting point for our consideration of this matter must be that it remains in Britain's grasp to become the first country to achieve an orderly roll-out of digital television. That was the previous Government's objective as well as being the present Government's and it largely drives the consensus that exists between the parties on many relevant issues.

As the hon. Members for Sutton and for Preseli Pembrokeshire have shown, there are huge benefits to be gained from technology manufacturing jobs, the

manufacturing of television and associated equipment, and the potential export markets. If we become the first country to do what is necessary, that opportunity will open up. None of us need doubt that the project is worth while.

Some worrying signals are being sent concerning key issues relating to take-up. For example, are there not signs that the number of subscription-based packages that consumers are prepared to purchase to gain access to sport and films has reached saturation point? Consumer behaviour in this respect is potentially a key barrier to the take-up of digital television. One wonders, too—this is partly behind the potential restructuring in ONdigital—how much longer those who provide digital television set-top boxes can continue to do so free. Those things are expensive.

Those considerations prompt thought about the resistance referred to in the Consumers Association report—particularly in the households of elderly people, but also among some young adults who watch less television these days—to converting to digital and paying more than the licence fee for television programmes. Such considerations are reasons for encouraging the free-to-air channel development that I know that the BBC and ITV have studied, and that other broadcasters are also preparing.

The Government have a leading role to play in raising awareness—something that many hon. Members have alluded to today—and selling the benefits of digital delivery in the long term. Picture and sound quality are not the only issues. I have some sympathy with what the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) said about radio, but I do not have time to develop that topic now. However, the opportunity to establish a range of additional, free-to-air channels should also be stressed. It should not be necessary for everyone to sign up to a monthly contribution to which the family budget might not stretch in the long term.

I agree with the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire that internet services are also part of the issue. The hon. Member for Lewes argued that the conversion programme is not comparable to the change from black-and-white to colour or 405 to 625; gosh, we are all getting old. It was a long time ago, but it does not seem like it. It is important to make a greater effort to raise consumer awareness about the issues in question.

I want to concentrate my remarks on stressing the important role of Government in relation to the regulatory framework. We welcome what has been revealed about the target date for analogue switch off. I suspect that the date will be nearer to 2010 than 2006. We need to end the confusion about what a digital television set is. We believe that there is a large role for industry to play in that. Digital television should mean digital reception, not analogue reception.

The Broadcasting Act 1996 established a competitive environment. It was a deliberate intention on the part of Government to encourage competition in the development of different digital television systems. However, that development is now hampered by the regulatory framework. A new communications Bill has been delayed for too long and is now an urgent task for the new Parliament. Changes are also necessary in the rules relating to ownership, and the hon. Member for Lewes mentioned the possibility of a single ITV, which I believe will become a reality.

It is a matter of resources. We need competing infrastructures to drive down prices and increase innovation, as well as to pay for the major investment that will be needed to ensure digital take-up in every home in Britain. It will not be for the Government or the BBC to provide that. It must be provided by the industry, and the industry must be capable of organising itself in order to achieve that. It is equally important that the Government should recognise the important role of advertising and the need to support the advertising industry in its demands for continuing self-regulation against a tide of opinion in Europe in favour of a more regulatory framework. Without advertising revenue, no one will be able to provide the necessary investment, and advertising revenue will provide many more free-to-air channels.

On regulation, we also need neutral platform delivery and open access changes in the legislative framework. As I have often said—I hope that the Minister will forgive me if I repeat what I have said to her before—as a veteran of the Standing Committee that considered the Broadcasting Act 1990, that we missed a trick when we established the framework, which placed too much power in the hands of one super satellite broadcaster. That has caused difficulties in gaining access.

We need to end the confusion and the restrictions on what channels are available through different platforms. That is driven—understandably—by market share over platform delivery, but in the long run we must have a framework that allows viewers access to all the channels of their choice, regardless of origin. The new regulatory framework should strive for that. There are technical and logistical difficulties, in particular in geographical reach and equality of access, to which hon. Members have already referred, and the Government must continue to press for the digital signal to be strengthened.

I was heartened when the hon. Member for Sutton said—her remarks were echoed by the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire—that we must have a clearer view about how universal digital coverage will be delivered. I have already declared my interest in ITV, but hon. Members do not sufficiently appreciate that if we are to have universal digital delivery, a significant contribution will be made by terrestrial digital delivery. That will not be achieved by cable and satellite, or if it is, it will take an awfully long time.

Many of us represent rural constituencies and know that satellite dishes are banned in many parts of our constituencies, and not everyone wants a satellite dish on his or her house. I believe that the hon. Member for Sutton said that the television aerial on the roof provides all that is required. The hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire mentioned shared aerials, and I agree entirely with what she said. If we want universal digital delivery and, eventually, the analogue switch-off that everyone is seeking to achieve, we must allow the terrestrial digital companies the opportunity to compete on fair and equal terms. I hope that I am not making too partisan a point when I say that the most pressing need is for the Government to address the issue of regulation. That, more than anything else, is what the Government can do to speed on the process. There must be an opportunity for real competition.

*[Mr. John Greenway]*

In the mobile telephone market, the competitive framework and the level playing field for all operators have driven down the cost and created universal access to such a point that the problem now seems to be that consumers wonder why, if they already have a mobile telephone, they need another one. In a sense that is now the situation with television. People need to be convinced that, although they already have five or six television sets, they need to change them all to digital. That is why the awareness programme is important. In the end, that will be achieved by a more competitive environment in the television industry. We are all in agreement and I think that we can pursue the matter on a cross-party basis once the election is out of the way and my hon. Friends and I are, I hope, sitting on the Government Benches. If we want analogue switch-off to be a reality and not merely an aspiration, we have to ensure that the industry can provide what this House desperately wants it to achieve.

12.16 pm

**The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Janet Anderson):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) both on securing this important debate and on the determination with which he has pursued the matter on behalf of his constituents. Having visited his constituency, I know how important it is there. I can well understand the concern of people who cannot receive their regional ITV service and I hope that we shall be able to do something about that. Let me remind the House of what we said in the communications White Paper where we specifically referred to the issue:

"The potential of digital broadcasting provides an opportunity to look again, in consultation with the industry, at how best to address these problems. We intend now to initiate discussions on this issue with relevant broadcasting companies. Should any viable solutions emerge, we will consult members of Parliament and local communities in the areas affected about whether changes to services to resolve the problem would have the backing of the local population."

Since we published that White Paper, some discussions have taken place. I shall touch on them later. As my hon. Friend said, technically solutions exist; it needs a political will to make them happen. I assure him that that political will is there. He made a number of suggestions to drive the take-up of digital. I assure him that we have taken them all on board and they will form part of our deliberations when we publish a draft Bill, which I hope will be in the summer. The response to the consultation process has been very valuable. We recognise how important the issue is. The hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) mentioned an opportunity that he thought had been missed in the 1990 legislation. It is a complicated area, and that is one reason why the Government intend to publish a draft Bill.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) raised a number of issues, which I shall try to address. I agree with him about S4C; it certainly is a jewel in the crown. He referred to a recent series of animated tales from around the world. I believe that they were broadcast in conjunction with Channel 4. I had the pleasure of helping to launch that initiative, and I remember saying at the time that it would not have happened without public service broadcasting. I am very well aware of the contribution of S4C to diversity and access.

My hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy) mentioned the important contribution to her constituency by ONdigital, which employs around 1,400 people there. That is another example of the jobs that can be created by that means. The hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) and the hon. Member for Ryedale emphasised an important point: there are no political differences. We must use this digital revolution. We are united about the need to drive its take-up because it will mean more choice, better quality and a more efficient use of the spectrum.

The hon. Member for Lewes mentioned in particular ITV and the move towards one ITV company and expressed the hope that that would not diminish regional coverage or regional programming which is perhaps even more important. I remind him that ITV was born in the regions. I am confident that that will not happen. I speak as the Member of Parliament for a north-west constituency and we in the north-west are proud of Granada. He also mentioned digital radio. That is much further down the road. I hope that as the price of digital radio comes down, more people will take it up. There were some reasonable ones on offer last Christmas. We are hopeful that the same will happen this Christmas and encourage more people to buy them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) also spoke about the contribution of ONdigital in her constituency. There are 800 jobs now, increasing to 1,100. She also mentioned the better quality programming that was available and the proliferation of channels. That is one good reason why public service broadcasting will be so important in this digital revolution. She also mentioned access to the internet, which I will touch on in a minute.

The hon. Member for Ryedale is much more knowledgeable about these issues than I am. He has a background in broadcasting. He emphasised the need to encourage free-to-air development and said that digital terrestrial would be the platform that would drive that. I could not agree with him more. I am grateful to him for his support on this. I can reassure him that the whole intention of the White Paper was to produce lighter regulation in order to ensure a dynamic market and protect services for the consumer. We understand the importance of that.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk was particularly concerned about those viewers in his constituency who cannot receive the appropriate regional service for their area. Although the priority in utilising limited spectrum is to ensure that as many viewers as possible can receive a service, the provision of correct regional services was also an important issue for the BBC and the Independent Television Commission in developing the present analogue transmitter network and we very much hope that the position can be improved with digital broadcasting. We recognise that there are problem areas where typically local news and features and other regional variations are not available to viewers, and we fully appreciate the frustration that that can cause. We hope that the development of digital television will offer some solutions.

In our White Paper, "A New Future for Communications", which we published last December, we emphasised our commitment to the provision of regional programming. We fully recognise the important part that regional programming plays in identifying and reflecting the concerns and interests of local communities and we also believe regional programming to be a vital element of public service broadcasting in the UK and that viewers should be able, wherever possible, to receive the regional programming intended for their community.

Digital technology has the potential to provide a fresh opportunity to consider how best to resolve the problem of regional anomalies. We hope that that can be achieved before the full switchover to digital broadcasting. We have already initiated some discussions within the broadcasting industry. My hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman), who, sadly, is unable to be here today, has also been quite determined in his pursuit of that issue on behalf of his constituents.

Since the communications White Paper was published, ITV has announced that it has secured transponders on an Astra satellite that will provide enough capacity to enable it to provide 16 regional ITV services. I understand that a number of technical issues are still to be resolved and that ITV hopes to launch its services on satellite by the end of this year. Of course, we recognise that viewers who do not have digital satellite receivers may face additional costs, but it is an encouraging development and will be an important step towards increasing access to the correct regional services in problem areas.

We are also keen to find digital terrestrial solutions to regional anomalies. For example, it may be possible to take advantage of the fact that digital technology enables multiple broadcast services to be carried simultaneously on a single frequency channel. In theory, some digital transmitters might broadcast more than one regional service—one appropriate to the transmitter's location and an out-of-area service to resolve a regional anomaly. It is still not an easy technical option. In particular, it would require sufficient digital capacity to accommodate additional programme services on multiplexes that are already full. It remains one of the possibilities being explored.

Several hon. Members stressed the need to drive the take-up of digital. I assure them that the Government are similarly gripped by the need to do so. We are working with the broadcasting industry on a number of fronts to develop digital television in the UK. Work is under way to equalise coverage across all six digital terrestrial multiplexes, which aims to increase the core coverage to 73 per cent. of the UK population.

The Government are also working with the ITC, the BBC and the broadcasting industry on how to extend digital television services further to achieve the best possible coverage and reception. To that end, the Government recently wrote to digital broadcasters, seeking their commitment to plans to double the power of digital signals on eight key transmitters. The plans were developed by the ITC and will improve the signal quality, giving more homes access to terrestrial free-to-air and subscription services. That announcement will be widely welcomed by hon. Members who have spoken about the issue today.

On consumer issues, we are aware of viewers' concerns about switchover to digital television and we need to ensure that consumers are made fully aware of all aspects of digital television, especially to enable them to make informed decisions about purchasing equipment and services. We have been working closely with broadcasters, manufacturers, retailers and consumer groups to ensure that viewers receive accurate and sensible information and that misconceptions are corrected promptly. A set of clear and simple messages has been agreed, which can be used to promote and encourage take-up. Broadcasters have launched information leaflets on free-to-air digital television, which are available to consumers from electrical retail outlets and from broadcasters.

The problems of people who live in blocks of flats with a communal aerial have been mentioned. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I were aware of the problem some time ago. It is interesting to note that 20 per cent. of the population live in such housing. My officials are in discussions with the Local Government Association, the Housing Corporation, the National Housing Federation, the ITC and other Departments to ensure that landlords and tenants are informed about the options for receiving digital television. Local authorities have an important role to play. Some are more advanced in that respect than others. We continue to liaise with the Local Government Association to do whatever we can to drive that agenda forward.

The Government are particularly keen to ensure that consumers can shop for digital television sets with confidence and are not misled into buying sets with digital features such as digital sound, under the mistaken impression that they are actually getting a digital television. Following discussions with television manufacturers, retailers and broadcasters it was agreed to promote the DVB—digital video broadcasting—logo as a means of identifying televisions that can genuinely receive digital transmissions.

UK manufacturers and retailers are also working together to ensure that all new digital televisions carry the logo, and that sales staff are trained to understand and explain the advantages and differences of digital televisions over both analogue and so-called "digital ready" sets. The Government announced this initiative on 27 March. Since then, the DVB logo has been given wider promotion on the ITV network.

The Govt also recently announced plans for a programme providing a series of neighbourhoods located across the country with free conversion to digital television. Our aim is to help both Government and industry to understand better the practical and social issues that people face in deciding whether to switch from their existing analogue to digital television. We expect that the first digital neighbourhood will be identified in the next two months and actioned in the next six months. One important part is that people in the pilot areas will also be able to use their television set to access interactive internet services, including learning and shopping, and send and receive e-mail—

**Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair):** Order. We must move on to the next debate.

# Electronics (Northern Ireland)

12.30 pm

**Mr. William Ross** (East Londonderry): It is sad when Ministers are cut off in full flow, just when they are getting to the bits and pieces that some hon. Members find interesting, but perhaps the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting will complete her speech elsewhere, so that we can hear about the exact long-term effects of digital television.

Similar to digital broadcasting is the future of Northern Ireland's electronics manufacturing industry, and I am grateful for the opportunity to debate it, although somewhat surprised. I am sure that this debate has been allowed only because of the United Kingdom-wide implications of what is happening in the electronics industry in Northern Ireland and the unemployment issues associated with it in Northern Ireland, the rest of the UK and throughout the world.

The subject is of particular concern to my constituents because of the recent announcement of job losses at the AVX plant in Coleraine. Some 95 people were laid off a month ago, and it is feared that 150 more will lose their jobs in the near future—protective notices have been issued. As the Minister will know, the presence of AVX in Coleraine is vital for the town, because the firm employs around 1,300 people, many of whom are highly skilled and educated people. If AVX and other electronic manufacturing companies are to hold on to their most talented workers and attract other equally talented individuals, stability in the industry is essential. Unfortunately, that stability has been lacking recently.

The problems at AVX are far from unique in Northern Ireland. Earlier this month, Valence Technologies announced that it would be laying off 181 workers at its plant in Mallusk. Redundancies have been announced at Leaf Technologies in Newtownabbey, and it has emerged that 270 jobs are to go at the Nortel plant in Monkstown. Additionally, Nortel announced a total of 20,000 job losses at its plants across the world. That unfortunate statistic demonstrates the crux of the problem—the volatility of the global market in electronic components. Some hon. Members who can remember the 1960s will recall Northern Ireland putting many of its eggs in the basket of man-made fibres. They were all quickly broken, and we do not want the same situation to arise.

When one hears of job losses on that scale in other industries, one might be forgiven for concluding that the industry in question is in terminal decline, but that is not the case in the electronics manufacturing industry. We are living in the electronic age and demand for products made by companies such as AVX—miniature electronic components for mobile phones and computers, for example—is still high throughout the world. Despite that, the industry is going through a difficult period. As I said, the market is volatile, and that has been demonstrated most graphically recently by the continuing fall in stocks in global technology and telecommunications. So, what can be done to introduce a measure of greater stability for the work force, product lines and sales of such companies?

Since devolution was restored to Northern Ireland, we have been fortunate to have Sir Reg Empey as Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment. That role fits his talents especially well, and he has been the deserving recipient of quite a lot of praise from all quarters for his efforts on behalf of every shade of opinion in the Province.

As soon as I was informed of the first tranche of job losses at AVX, I contacted Sir Reg to discuss the problems at the plant, and we have kept in close contact since then. However, as the difficulties are far from unique to the Province, I thought that it would also be useful to seek the views of a Northern Ireland Office Minister, who could outline thoughts about the problems of the electronics industry from a Government perspective.

AVX has been in Coleraine for quite a long time. Its ownership has changed more than once, but the management is excellent and comprises high-quality people, who are working hard with trade union representatives to explore every available option to reduce costs and safeguard jobs. The honest and open nature of those discussions is to be commended and can only help to maintain the unity of purpose between management and workers at the plant. In the longer term, management and workers at AVX should be confident of an upturn in the company's fortunes.

As I said, the industry is volatile: there have been considerable increases in employment followed by quick drops, which is what concerns workers more than anything. However, AVX is well known for its commitment to new products and it has a portfolio of high-calibre customers throughout the world. With a well-focused marketing campaign, the firm will, in time, be able to combat the difficulties in the global market and resume its growth with corresponding and, I hope, long-term employment prospects for even more people in the Coleraine area.

To speed that process, Government assistance is required. The Northern Ireland Executive will play their part, and Sir Reg Empey is already doing what he can, but what on earth are the Government doing? Although these matters are devolved, the Government cannot escape some measure of responsibility throughout the United Kingdom.

As the Minister well knows, there is a large number of electronics manufacturing plants in Great Britain, and I am sure that the Government are as concerned as I am about the state of the global market and the on-going consequences of that. The number of redundancies announced in recent months in the electronics industry in Northern Ireland totals about 1,000, and I am told that that would be the equivalent of 30,000 lay-offs in the electronics industry in Great Britain. That statistic puts the impact of the problem in the Province into perspective. Many jobs are involved in the electronics industry, which is a growth industry. It has expanded extremely rapidly during recent years, and I believe that it will go on expanding, but we do not like to see downturns.

The latest especially vivid demonstration of the poor state of the global market came on Friday, when Ericsson, the Swedish-based telecommunications company, announced that 12,000 staff would be made redundant. That brings the total number of job losses in the global telecommunications industry in the past 10 weeks to more than 100,000—an astonishing and horrifying number. Mr. Kurt Hellstrom, Ericsson's chief executive, said on Friday that we were witnessing

"the fastest dive in the industry that we have ever seen."

The number of redundancies certainly confirms that.

The global downturn seems to have come about because of a number of factors. There is a fear of recession in the United States of America, and it is sometimes perception rather than the actuality that matters. That fear has, in turn, adversely affected markets in Asia and, with that, orders for companies such as AVX, because all purchasers of the relevant materials are looking some months ahead. As we all know, however, they sometimes get things wrong rather than right.

The events at Ericsson have demonstrated the particular problem with the mobile phone market. The explosion in sales of mobile phones seems to be over, at least for the moment, and the recent announcement by the largest UK network providers that the cost of calls is going up underlines the fact. We are all aware of concerns about the colossal amounts paid by such companies for licences to provide third generation services, when no one is sure whether there will be sufficient demand for them. It is the third generation of mobile telecommunications that would have provided the market for the electronic components that were mentioned.

The global computer market is also in a particularly difficult state with sales of personal computers also on a slide. Such developments have a huge impact on the fortunes of companies such as AVX. However, my experience of PCs is that as soon as one is bought and taken out of the box, it becomes obsolete and one has to start thinking about buying the next one, so the slide is unlikely to continue for long. The pressures to buy a new computer system will continue and the sector will soon experience an upturn.

During recent weeks, I have been in contact with several people at AVX—mainly people working on the shop floor, whose opinions I wanted to ascertain. As can readily be imagined, morale is low at the moment. I encountered one young man who recently got engaged. He had obtained his degree in England and returned home to Coleraine to work at AVX. He thought that he had a long-term job, but sadly soon found himself in a position where he had to return to Great Britain to find a decent job to provide a living for his fiancée, himself and, hopefully, his children in the not too distant future.

Such an eventuality is a great loss to Coleraine and to Northern Ireland as a whole because we want to keep highly skilled graduates in the Province. Education is important for people to gain the technological skills that they need at their fingertips. Northern Ireland's manufacturing industry and the long-term prospects of the Province depend on it. It is a shame when people such as this young man—there are many more like him—leave their local areas in Northern Ireland.

The brain drain from the Province to more distant parts has thankfully been stemmed in recent years and I hope that that will continue as manufacturing industry develops and more young people stay at home and find employment in industries with good prospects of expansion. Sadly, the uncertainty over long-term job prospects—at AVX, for example—will do little to help the problem or to encourage people to establish roots in their home territories and stay there.

At the weekend, I was quoted in the local media as saying that AVX is the jewel in Coleraine's crown. That was underlined recently when the company was presented with the Queen's award for enterprise for its success in international trade. It is a successful company with many highly skilled workers. I want to see its success continue and I hope that the Government will play their part in helping AVX to maintain its remarkable achievements in the future. For that to happen, the work force must be able to look ahead with anticipation rather than dread. I therefore hope that the Minister will today have something positive to say to me and to the workers and people of Northern Ireland.

12.44 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. George Howarth):** I congratulate the hon. Member for East Lóndonderry (Mr. Ross) on his good fortune in securing a debate on this important subject. I share his surprise that the debate was allowed, but it is important to have the opportunity to debate the UK-wide economy, even though there are important regional differences that are rightly reflected through the workings of devolution.

It is also important to place on record the healthy performance of the Northern Ireland economy in recent years. I am not saying that there are not still problems—I will address those in a moment—but all the key indicators point to a healthy economy, consistently outperforming other regions of the United Kingdom and competing successfully with other European countries. Northern Ireland has enjoyed a good rate of economic growth during the past 10 years and, with an unemployment figure of 5.9 per cent., compares favourably with other parts of the European Union. The high unemployment of the years of the troubles is thankfully now receding, although it is apparent, as the hon. Gentleman made clear in his speech, that there are still problems that must be overcome.

Northern Ireland has benefited during the past few years and particularly during the life of this Parliament, and that is well illustrated by the confidence that has been shown by companies that are investing in Northern Ireland. More than £2 billion in investment was announced or promised by companies in Northern Ireland between 1996-97 and 1999-2000, of which some £500 million was inward investment. The hon. Gentleman raised the problems of AVX in his constituency. That example shows that the economy in Northern Ireland is not immune from outside events, although in macro-economic terms there is a good story to tell. Electronics and technology companies in Northern Ireland, as in the rest of the United Kingdom, have been affected by the worldwide slowdown in the economy, to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Foot and mouth disease and BSE have affected Northern Ireland's agriculture, tourism and related industries. Dealing with those difficult problems is now primarily a matter for the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly and I am confident that Northern Ireland Ministers will continue to build up the strong and competitive economy that exists in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Gentleman asked what the Government are willing to do to help the Executive and Ministers in their efforts on that front. We have been, and will continue to

*[Mr. George Howarth]*

be, helpful in several areas, mainly to do with the general manner in which the macro-economy is managed. For example, it is important that the success that Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK have enjoyed is allowed to continue. That means building a strong and competitive economy to enable companies in the UK to compete around the world and, of course, with other European countries. A key to that is low interest rates and inflation. The Government and the Chancellor have been successful in that area, particularly in terms of controlling inflation, and it is our intention to continue to do that.

The right hon. Member for Upper Bann (Mr. Trimble) has been present throughout the debate. He is the First Minister, and I believe that he will accept entirely that the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the Minister of State and I are willing, available and more than happy to help Ministers in the devolved Administration. We remain willing to raise specific issues on behalf of the Executive within Whitehall.

I regret that I cannot respond directly to the hon. Gentleman's specific points on the electronic manufacturing industry in Northern Ireland, as responsibility for economic matters in Northern Ireland now rests in the very capable hands of the Northern Ireland Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Sir Reg Empey. The matters raised by the hon. Gentleman are therefore no longer a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

We are, of course, happy to work alongside Sir Reg Empey and other Ministers to address the points raised during today's debate. It is appropriate that when we pass on the points that have been made today to Sir Reg, we also pass on the House's good wishes for his continued success in building up Northern Ireland's economy. Such a relationship already exists between hon. Members present here today and that work is continuing. Although it is a devolved issue, the key principle is that we are willing to be as helpful and accommodating as possible with Ministers in the devolved Administration.

12.51 pm

*Sitting suspended.*

## Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham

1 pm

**Mr. Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): I begin by acknowledging that there is a problem and a need to make a decision about the future of transplant facilities in this country. There has been a reduction in the number of transplants, largely because fewer organs are available as medical advances and road safety measures reduce the number of early deaths, something for which we should all be grateful. The Royal College of Surgeons was right to draw attention to the number of doctors who should be employed in transplant units, their work load, and the need to ensure that their skills are used on a regular basis.

The present size of units is based on historical accident, and to a large extent on the contract culture that was a dominant feature of the previous Government's approach to the NHS. In the early 1990s, the Department of Health recognised that there was a problem and envisaged evening out the size of units over time. Sadly, it never introduced mechanisms for achieving that, hence the situation in which we find ourselves today.

I regret to say that there is a strong feeling in Birmingham and the west midlands that the current National Specialist Commissioning Advisory Group's proposals, which pose such a threat to Birmingham, represent smash and grab opportunism by the established players in London and the south-east. As I have said, I recognise that the number of available organs is an issue. The Government recognise that even if their 10 per cent. target to increase donors is achieved, it will result in only about 30 additional transplants nationally per year.

There can be little argument that there is a need to examine where transplant resources are located and how they are used. We need to do everything in our power to increase the potential for organ donation and I welcome the Government's moves in that direction. We also need to ensure that any review treats different parts of the country equally, and takes account of issues such as geography, existing health factors per region and access to treatment. I do not accept that a fair review can simply focus on the traditional claims of established units in London and the south-east.

Birmingham has a strong demographic and institutional argument for retaining its transplant facilities. Our centre is sited in one of the largest conurbations in the United Kingdom. We already have an institution with excellent organ transplant infrastructure. The unit recently completed its 250th heart transplant and its 2,000th liver transplant. The unit has surgeons such as Robert Bonser, Tim Graham, Ian Wilson and Bruce Keogh, and cardiologists such as Sarah Thorne. We have first-rate people of whom we can be really proud. There is so much to be optimistic about in terms of the NHS in Birmingham.

**Mr. Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): Looking to the future for Birmingham, a new hospital has been announced, which will be a great addition. On a shorter time scale, there will be a new cardiac unit, which also promises to be a great addition to the Queen

Elizabeth-Selly Oak complex. The opening of that unit is a further reason for keeping the transplant facilities in Birmingham.

**Mr. McCabe:** I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. We have an excellent new cancer unit and several leading cancer experts. As he says, a new, 33-bed cardiac surgery critical care unit will open, on schedule, in about eight weeks, which I understand will be the largest in Europe. The university hospital trust also received strong encouragement to establish what is only the second adult congenital heart disease programme in the country. Adult survivors of congenital heart disease are, as I am sure you are aware, Mr. Cummings, extremely likely to require transplants later in life, yet, astonishingly, after encouragement was given for the setting up of the programme, the NSCAG proposals would mean, if not the removal of the surgical arm, at least amputation of all but a stump. They would severely reduce a key area of potential treatment.

Birmingham, with all that it has to offer, is considered the right environment to host a centre for defence medicine for the men and women of our armed services. It may be the right place to treat them, but it will not be the place to go if one needs a heart or lung transplant.

**Mr. Paul Keetch** (Hereford): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on obtaining the debate. He mentioned heart and lung transplants and he will know that the excellent centre in Birmingham covers not only the metropolitan west midlands but the rural parts of my constituency, and extends into Wales. It is a very large area. My constituent, Keri Davies, who is 47 years old, has been waiting three years for a heart and lung transplant. The additional stress of thinking that the unit might be closed has worsened his condition. Indeed, he was taken to hospital in Hereford last night. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government must respond urgently and that as soon as possible they should decide to keep Birmingham going?

**Mr. McCabe:** I take note of the hon. Gentleman's comments and I see real urgency in the situation.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State recently gave the go-ahead for the building of Birmingham's first new hospital since 1938, for which we are all extremely grateful, but if NSCAG gets its way we shall be building a brand new hospital denuded of a key treatment facility. That will mean that patients from the midlands, Wales and the surrounding area, such as the constituent of the hon. Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) who require transplant surgery, will have to travel weekly to Harefield or Papworth, two of the least accessible hospitals in the country. In some cases, the travelling time will be so long that it will deny people the chance of a transplant even if a suitable organ becomes available.

One of the strangest things about the NSCAG proposals is that not only do considerations of geography, access and travel appear to have been ignored in their preparation, but most other aspects of transplant activity also seem to have been discounted. Those include assessment, donor retrieval and early and late follow-up activities. In fact, the proposals appear to show bias in favour of the status quo and they are heavily weighted in favour of stand-alone units rather than units that are part of a multidisciplinary service. That seems to be rather at odds with all recent advice, and contrary to the philosophy that we are encouraging elsewhere in the health service.

I do not know whether the Minister can help, but I find it difficult to explain to my constituents that the review has been fair and serious when those involved seem to have ignored any significant reappraisal of donor zones. If, for example, we were to increase Birmingham's area of activity to incorporate the east midlands, the Cardiff-Newport area of south Wales, Bristol and Oxford, we could change the donor catchment area and preserve the Birmingham unit. I am not trying to pit one unit against another. A proposal like this would result in a reduction in Papworth's influence in the east midlands, but that could easily be compensated for by a similar boundary review in the south.

As I said earlier, I agree that the Royal College of Surgeons was right to draw attention to the number of surgeons needed for each unit and the volume of work for each unit, but is it seriously being suggested that the only way to address such issues is to close down a highly successful solid organ transplant unit, which serves 6 million to 7 million people? Has no one ever heard of tele-medicine or video conferencing? Is it impossible for highly trained surgeons, whose skills we want to protect, develop and enhance, to travel occasionally to another hospital to perform or assist in a transplant operation? After all, the NSCAG proposals envisage sick people travelling hundreds of miles every week to obtain essential treatment. Would not such an approach be more in keeping with the spirit of partnership and co-operation—rather than competition—that we want to encourage in the health service?

**Mrs. Caroline Spelman** (Meriden): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing a debate on this important issue. My point relates to his argument about organ donation zones. The reduction in the number of transplant centres, which would effectively do away with a transplant centre for a population of 6 million to 7 million, can be compared to leaving Denmark without a heart transplant centre. Is it not also inextricably linked with the number of intensive care beds, because keeping organs ready for transplant becomes much more complicated as the number of transplant centres is reduced? That is an important consideration.

**Mr. McCabe:** I emphasise the point that has been made about the catchment areas for donor harvesting, which was borne out by the report of the Royal College of Surgeons. It is also important to acknowledge that the work load of a cardiothoracic surgeon is only a fraction of his or her total operative commitment—they do plenty of other work. None the less, it is a key sub-specialty, and a decision to rob Birmingham of such facilities will mean that we will lose highly qualified staff and have trouble attracting others. It will also have an unwelcome impact on the successful collaboration between the hospital and the nearby medical school.

The directors of the transplant programmes at Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield are all on public record as stating that, if given the go-ahead, the proposals will lead to deteriorating rather than improved patient access, particularly for the patients of the mid-north, midlands, south Wales and the south-west.

*[Mr. McCabe]*

There is a solution, which many more people than the 15 members of NSCAG are now proposing, and that is to agree to five units and adjust the catchment or harvest donor areas so that there is more equal distribution. That was originally envisaged as long ago as 1992, and it is perhaps regrettable that the then Government did not act when the problem was identified. That solution would also allow all the retained units to achieve the optimum annual number of transplants—about 50. It would also address problems relating to travelling, retain a wide spread of surgical skill across the country, and show those of us who do not live in London or the south-east that the people who manage and advise on the health service take our needs into account, as well as the views of the old-boy network, with its contempt for those of us who live north of Watford.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to raise this matter on behalf of the people of Birmingham and my Birmingham and west midlands parliamentary colleagues. I ask the Minister to try to ensure that the full extent of the Birmingham situation is understood when the matter is finally decided on, and that the arguments in favour of five centres are seriously considered before a decision is taken. I also ask her to support the request made by Birmingham Members to meet with the Secretary of State so that we can put our case directly to him.

1.15 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) on securing the debate. As I am sure that he is aware, this is the third debate in this place on the future of the national cardiothoracic transplant service. We have already had debates on the centres in Sheffield and Manchester. My hon. Friend is right to point to the strengths of the case for his own area. We have had representations from Yorkshire and Manchester Members, in particular from those in whose constituencies the services are situated. We have also received extensive representations concerning the Birmingham centre from Birmingham Members, including those in the Chamber this afternoon—my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), and my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) and for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden).

The debate concerns the future of organ transplants at the Queen Elizabeth hospital, and it is worth reminding hon. Members that the hospital provides three important organ transplant services. My hon. Friend the Member for Hall Green was right to refer to the renowned liver transplant unit, which, on 7 July in Birmingham, will celebrate its 2,000th liver transplant. I should like to take this opportunity to congratulate Professor Paul McMaster and his team on an outstanding achievement that we all applaud. We all wish the liver transplant team well for what should be a wonderful day. The Queen Elizabeth hospital also has an important renal transplant unit, which we hope to see expanding as a result of the overall reorganisation of the organ transplant services.

My hon. Friend made it clear that the debate is about the cardiothoracic transplant service. It is also worth making it clear that the debate concerns cardiothoracic transplants rather than the wider issues around cardiac care. The cardiac unit at the Queen Elizabeth hospital already has a distinguished record of research into heart failure and is recognised for its work in aortic aneurysm surgery. A new £13 million expansion of the cardiac unit at the hospital is due to open in a matter of weeks. That will enable the unit to perform an additional 450 cardiac operations, which will help it to meet the priority targets set out in the national service framework for coronary heart disease. The cardiac unit will build on its many strengths and continue to be at the forefront of developments in the treatment of cardiac disease. There will be further opportunities to develop and expand cardiac services when the recently announced £291 million replacement for the Queen Elizabeth hospital is built in a few years' time.

My hon. Friend concentrated on the issues relating to the future of cardiothoracic transplants. That is a very specific area about which there has been considerable debate and discussion, over a long period. That discussion stems from a problem with organ donation by younger people. As I have made clear in previous debates, the Government have restated their commitment to do everything possible to maximise organ and tissue donation and to maintain the very high standards of our organ transplant services. The Secretary of State spelt out that commitment at an organ and tissue donation summit on 27 February, at which he announced an NHS action plan intended to double the number of people on the organ donor register by no later than 2010, and to double the number of kidney transplants by 2005.

We must also recognise that there is a longer-term underlying problem of organ donation which we must address. Improvements in road safety and prevention of strokes in younger people are important health gains and are to be welcomed. For example, between 1990 and 1999, deaths from road accidents in people aged 16 to 59, which is the usual age for heart and lung donation, fell by almost 40 per cent. That is clearly good news, but it has an impact on organ donation. In the past five years, organ donors under 60 have fallen by 15 per cent. That fall could have been greater were it not for the dedication of staff in intensive care units and the efforts of intensive care specialists, transplant co-ordinators and transplant teams in identifying and using available donors.

**Mr. Keetch:** I appreciate that the Minister and the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), cannot create organs for transplant out of nowhere, but are the Government giving any consideration to adopting the French system, whereby people must opt out of organ donation and there is a presumption of donation if one is tragically killed? Surely that would alleviate the problem overnight.

**Yvette Cooper:** The Government have considered a wide range of possibilities to increase organ donation, including at the recent summit to which I referred earlier. I am informed by my hon. Friend the Under-

Secretary that there have been some problems with the French model. I am not aware of the details, but I shall write to the hon. Gentleman on that matter.

The fall in younger organ donors has meant a year-on-year reduction in the number of cardiothoracic transplants. Cardiothoracic transplantation has been designated as a national service since 1986. By 1991, there were seven adult centres in England, and the intention was to ensure that each centre performed at least 50 transplants a year. That followed a major expansion of the service in the late 1980s, which was built on the belief that the number of organs would continue to increase. Four new adult cardiothoracic transplant centres were designated at that time.

The Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham is one of those centres. Last year, it performed 21 of the 290 heart, heart and lung and lung transplants performed in the seven English adult cardiothoracic transplant centres. One of the other new centres was St. George's hospital in London, which carried out 10 transplants before its programme was suspended following a run of poor results. The St. George's programme is the subject of an investigation by the Commission for Health Improvement. The other two new centres are the Wythenshawe hospital in Manchester and the Northern General hospital in Sheffield. The three original centres were Papworth hospital in Cambridge, the Freeman hospital in Newcastle and Harefield hospital in Middlesex. Those three hospitals already perform more than 50 transplants a year. The work to increase organ donation could lead to an additional 30 transplants a year, but even with that increase, there is little prospect that all seven adult centres could ever reach the original target of 50 transplants each a year.

When considering how to modernise transplant services, we accepted the recommendation of the Royal College of Surgeons on minimum staffing levels for transplant units. That is an extremely important factor. Because so much organ transplantation takes place at night or over the weekend, the Royal College of Surgeons recommended that surgeons should not be on call out of normal working hours more often than one day in four. That requires a minimum team of five surgeons. At the time of the report, only two of the seven centres had at least five transplant surgeons. If those surgeons are not able to perform enough transplants each year, it will be more difficult for them to maintain the necessary skills. If the current situation continues, there is a risk that members of transplant teams will begin to lose their skills and standards will fall. For the sake of current and future patients, we must ensure that each transplant team is well staffed, has access to all the support it needs and performs enough operations to maintain a high level of skill in all the members of the team. Patients who undergo such complex treatment as a heart transplant need to be reassured that their surgeons have the up-to-date skills and experience to treat them effectively. I should make it clear to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) that this is a debate about skills and staffing—that is why the reforms have been proposed—not a debate about intensive care.

**Mrs. Spelman:** However, the availability of intensive care beds is absolutely critical to any transplant programme. It is one of the major reasons why there is concern about ability to reach transplant targets, particularly in relation to renal transplant.

**Yvette Cooper:** The hon. Lady is right to say that intensive care provision is critical in order to maintain, if not increase, the numbers of donors. That is one of the reasons why we have increased the provision of intensive care. However, that does not affect decisions about the services, the appropriate configuration of services based on skills and staffing recommendations, and the need to maintain the appropriate level of skills among all those who are carrying out such complex operations.

The NSCAG is responsible for advising on which services should be provided nationally. The group has considered the impact of those factors and last year recommended that the national cardiothoracic transplant should be delivered in future from only four centres in England, which would allow each unit the optimum infrastructure to support a programme of about 50 heart transplants. Each surgeon would then be able to perform, on average, 10 heart transplants a year. That size of programme would maintain the skills of the whole multidisciplinary team and ensure that organ retrieval teams were available to retrieve and use all suitable organs. The NSCAG also recommended that, to minimise disruption to existing services, the two units that already have sufficient surgical staff—Papworth hospital in Cambridge and the Freeman hospital in Newcastle—should remain designated, that the transplant services based in London should be consolidated into a single centre and, finally, that a fourth national centre should be created by merging the three smaller transplant programmes provided by the Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield centres. Those recommendations are fully supported by many organisations, including the Royal College of Surgeons, the cardiothoracic transplant advisory group of UK Transplant, and Dr Roger Boyle, the director for heart services.

On the basis of the evidence that we have been given, the Government have agreed that the principles are right and that this reconfiguration of the service is necessary if we are to maintain the high quality of one of the best cardiothoracic transplant services in the world.

The decision still has to be made about the site of the fourth national centre, and we recognise the need to make it as early as possible to remove uncertainty. However, it is also critical that we take the right decision, which means ensuring that it is made on the best available evidence. We have asked for a detailed study of the three sites to assess the impact of a large team on the capacity of centres, to look at the potential capacity, and to assess other factors, such as access to patients, which my hon. Friend the Member for Hall Green mentioned as being so important. We are waiting for the final assessment to be submitted and we shall issue a document setting out proposals to inform the public and to seek comments. I assure my hon. Friends and other hon. Members that there will be opportunities for them to make further, more detailed representations when those proposals are put forward. During that process, we shall aim to keep the disruption of patients and transplant teams to the minimum. Patients on the waiting list will, wherever possible, be treated by the

*[Yvette Cooper]*

team that they know. We shall support patients as much as possible through any transitions that need to take place.

It is a difficult decision. My hon. Friend asked if I would pass on requests for a meeting with the Secretary of State. I shall certainly do that and get back to him.

**Dr. Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Will my hon. Friend respond to the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) that the Government look at the possibility of retaining five centres, given the fact that the Government are intending or attempting to increase the numbers of heart transplants in the future?

**Yvette Cooper:** The assessment that has been made already has been done on the best available evidence. It has also taken account of the potential and our determination to expand the number of organ transplants. The recommendation was made to us, and we have accepted its principles. My hon. Friend and other Birmingham Members will have the opportunity to make further representations when the detailed proposals are drawn up, and I hope that, once the decisions are made and we are able to proceed, as much as possible will be done by all the trusts and centres involved to minimise any difficulties that may arise.

**Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair):** Order. I regret that we must move on.

## Oxted and Limpsfield War Memorial Hospital

1.30 pm

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth** (East Surrey): I listened with interest to the previous debate about the problems of the health service in Birmingham. I have secured a debate on an issue that affects far fewer people, but is none the less creating acute anxiety in my constituency. I am grateful for the opportunity to return to the subject of Oxted and Limpsfield War Memorial hospital, which was last debated in the House on 1 July 1998, although I very much regret the need to raise the matter again.

The Minister will no doubt have read her brief on the issue, and will be aware of the hospital's history. She will be aware that it was the last war memorial hospital built in England, and that it was established by means of public subscription. The plaque at the entrance to the hospital was inscribed:

"This hospital commemorates the men and women of Oxted and Limpsfield who in the Great War 1914-1918 gave faithful service to God, King and Country. To the living, our thanks, to the Dead our unceasing remembrance."

Those are emotive words, which are not to be lightly dismissed. Of equal importance are the service that has been offered to generations of local people, who benefited from the presence of the hospital in their community, and the wonderful work of its staff since 1937.

When I last called a debate in Parliament on the future of Oxted hospital, in July 1998, the position was bleak. Despite the Government's welcome promise to devote resources to the provision of high-quality local community hospitals, Oxted hospital was known to be in a state of physical disrepair. It had been the victim of dither and delay over the implementation of a redevelopment scheme, which had been announced by the then Minister of State, who is now the Secretary of State, in September 1997. I dealt then with the events leading up to this unsatisfactory state of affairs. My purpose today is to address what has happened since, and to provide the Minister with an opportunity to answer questions about what will happen next.

If the situation was bleak three years ago, it is now grim. This is a story of broken deadlines, broken promises and broken hopes. Let me remind the Under-Secretary of what the then Minister of State said on 1 July 1998. He said:

"When I made my decision to approve the proposals by East Surrey health authority for the re-provision of Oxted hospital, I did so on two firm conditions, and I expect those conditions to be fulfilled in full. The first was that a viable private sector nursing home partner could be found; the second that adequate provision should be made at East Surrey hospital in Redhill to absorb the likely number of elderly patients being admitted there from the Oxted area."—[*Official Report*, 1 July 1998; Vol. 315, c. 334.]

The deadline for meeting those conditions, originally December 1997, was later extended to May 1998. It is now three years since that deadline expired, and I would be grateful if the Minister would state today whether there is any deadline in place at all, and, if so, whether it will mean any more than previous deadlines set on the matter by this Government.

On 10 September 1999, the Minister wrote to me, saying:

"Our clear view is that it is now a matter for the local NHS to implement the agreed plan."

However, it has failed to do so and, despite her attempt to shrug the matter off, it has again become something to which Ministers must give their full attention. What can she say about the present state of negotiations with a private sector nursing home partner? In her letter to me of 27 March this year, she said:

"I am advised that officials at the South East Regional Office of the NHS Executive are working closely with the Trust to ensure that the full business case for the new development should be received by June. It is anticipated that building work on the new site would hopefully start before the end of this year."

Is the Minister still confident that a business case will be put in place by June? When does she think that the trust will be in a position to sign a contract with a nursing home partner? Will the Under-Secretary confirm that she remains hopeful that the building work on the new hospital will start this year? Will she give a categoric assurance that the Government remain committed to a replacement hospital in Oxted? That question must be asked because, as the Under-Secretary will know, the worst fears of many were confirmed on 6 February when the chief executive of the Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS trust suddenly announced that the hospital was to close without consultation. The reasons given were dilapidation and the safety of staff and patients. It was known eight years ago that the buildings were in poor repair. For eight years, local people have worried that, without major refurbishment or redevelopment, they would be left with nothing. I have to tell the Minister that the nothing option is not remotely acceptable to my constituents, who look to the Government to fulfil the promises that have been made.

Matters have not been helped by the management or financial position of the NHS trust itself. In 1998, the Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS trust was labouring under a deficit of some £4 million. Three years and three chief executives later, the deficit has grown to nearer £10 million. I would be grateful if the Minister would confirm the current figure in her concluding remarks.

Without doubt, the appalling finances of the trust have been made worse by the extraordinary decision, announced a few weeks ago, to suspend the proposed merger of health services provided at Crawley and Redhill. It is difficult not to regard that decision, which is contrary to clinical advice and financial common sense, as anything other than a political scam. I will not go into that today, but I mention it because it places a further unexpected burden on an NHS trust that is already saddled with mounting debts, unacceptable waiting times and obligations that it is struggling to meet.

If the trust did itself no favours by announcing the closure in the absence of any positive news about the hospital's future, it compounded its reputation for poor judgment by attempting, against advice, to hold a public meeting to discuss its decision in the hospital building. Nothing could better illustrate how the trust so completely underestimated the passions that the plight of our local hospital have aroused. I leave the description of the meeting to Mr. Mike Moss, editor of *The Voice*, the journal of the Tandridge Voluntary Service Council. He wrote:

"The meeting was held in one of the wards, which, as anyone who knows the hospital could have predicted, was totally unsuitable, being small with glass half walls part way down the ward which effectively acted as baffles to prevent speech being heard. As well as these shortcomings, a microphone system was unavailable. The Chairman attempted to open the meeting but was howled down by those who couldn't hear what she was saying and by others who wished to make their own points.

From that moment on, the 'meeting' degenerated into what could be termed farce if the subject had not been so important. Chaos, disarray, turmoil, confusion—anything short of an actual riot—are just some of the words I use to describe the scene."

It is no wonder that people in East Surrey are, by now, deeply sceptical about the competence of the local NHS management. They are also doubtful about their real motives. The fear in Oxted, especially now that the community hospital has closed, is that the trust, the area health authority, the regional health executive and the Government will take the opportunity to sell the land on which the hospital stands and plough the proceeds into funding the deficit at Redhill. Local concerns on that point are neatly summed up in a letter from my constituent, Mr. I. S. Andrews, who says:

"My very strong personal feeling is that the NHS Trust has been determined to close the hospital come what may having made very little maintenance expenditure over the years. The view taken by many at the aborted meeting was that funds arising from the sale would be used to reduce the indebtedness of the Trust."

I am looking for a categoric assurance from the Minister today that, under no circumstances, will that be allowed to happen. I hope that the Minister will understand the importance of this assurance to my constituents. There have been too many disappointments and too many deadlines missed. Oxted needs a replacement hospital, and the Minister's answer will be studied with great care by thousands of people who feel that their security and quality of life is at risk. Having presided over the closure of the hospital, the Government have a clear duty to ensure that the promises made by the Secretary of State are fulfilled.

In my debate in July 1998 the present Secretary of State said:

"I hope that the hon. Gentleman is reassured by the fact that the implementation plan that is now in place will result in new in-patient, out-patient and therapy facilities, as well as a minor injuries service, being available in Oxted by the summer of 2001."

The summer of 2001 is almost upon us and all we have to show for it is a closed and boarded up hospital. The right hon. Gentleman went on:

"The time scale and detail of the re-provision depend crucially...on the planning decisions taken by Tandridge district council. The local authority will no doubt be mindful of the need for a rapid decision to allay the concerns of local people about the future of health services in the town."—[*Official Report*, 1 July 1998; Vol. 315, c. 336.]

That last sentence seems like an attempt to shift the burden of responsibility on to Tandridge district council, but before the council can determine a planning application, it must receive it. Tandridge councillors have waited and waited to be given an opportunity to determine a planning application for a new hospital facility in Oxted, but none has been forthcoming. The leader of Tandridge district council, Councillor Gordon

*[Mr. Peter Ainsworth]*

Keymer, recently again made it clear that he and his administration will do everything possible to expedite any reasonable proposal from the trust, but no planning application has been submitted. Not Tandridge council but the trust is responsible for the delay, and that is the Government's responsibility.

Since our previous debate there has been a further development: the complaint to the ombudsman on behalf of the Save Oxted Hospital action group, headed by Mr. Josh Cosnett, about possible maladministration by the Secretary of State as a result of his decision to order the closure of the hospital for redevelopment. I do not wish to prejudge the outcome of the ombudsman's inquiry, but it is worth placing on record my regret that the result, which was due to be published no later than January 2001, has still not appeared. I hope that the Minister will assure me that that delay has nothing to do with her Department. I am sure that she will make it clear that her Department has co-operated fully, providing timely, accurate and detailed responses where requested, although that has, sadly, not always been the case in correspondence, either with myself or my constituents on that issue.

It is most unwelcome that the decision to close the hospital was taken prior to the outcome of the ombudsman's report. One of the issues raised by the Save Oxted Hospital action group could usefully benefit from an answer from the Minister today. It is suggested that, as a private hospital, Oxted and Limpsfield War Memorial hospital was not subject to the National Health Service Act 1946. It is further stated that, under the terms of its 1939 constitution, the hospital board was required to vote on any change of ownership but that no such vote ever took place. Can the Minister give an assurance today that the NHS has not just closed a hospital to which it had no legal title? It is obviously vital that the issue is cleared up before any further action.

It is no exaggeration to say that, although it had long been feared, the sudden closure of Oxted and Limpsfield War Memorial hospital came as a terrible shock to the whole community. Today it stands empty and boarded up: a tragic emblem of broken promises and a symbol of the failure of the Government's health policies in east Surrey. The Minister has been good enough to reply to written questions on the subject of security but I hope that she will take the opportunity, first, to state that responsibility for the physical security of the building rests with the NHS alone and, secondly, to detail the specific measures that are being taken to protect it from vandalism.

The significance of the hospital's closure and the importance attached to the future provision of replacement facilities in Oxted were evidenced by the huge attendance at a meeting held at Oxted county school on 10 March this year. More than 800 people came to what was probably the largest public gathering ever held in the town. I have already raised many of the questions that were left unanswered at that meeting, but two more remain. Immediately prior to its closure, Oxted and Limpsfield War Memorial hospital held 17 patients. Even if the redevelopment plans go ahead, under the plans there is provision for only 10 NHS beds in Oxted. Can that be sufficient? I have asked that question before and have yet to receive a satisfactory reply.

My final question comes from one of the numerous letters that I have received on the subject. My constituent, Mrs. Joyce Spurr, wrote:

> "So what next? We were left in doubt as to whether the Trust really does have a nursing home partner at the moment. If they haven't, where does that leave their current plans?"

If the plans fall through, what will the Government do to meet their promise to provide a first-class modern health facility in Oxted?

I conclude by paying tribute to the staff of the hospital, who earned the respect and admiration of the whole community as they continued cheerfully to perform their tasks over a long period of uncertainty and in a building that was gradually falling apart through neglect. I also want to mention the constructive and helpful attitude of the outstanding local general *practitioners.* They have played a positive role throughout the sorry saga and, despite much provocation, have proved to be a valuable source of informed and level-headed information. I also commend the role played by the respected local community health council, which itself faces an uncertain future under Government plans. Finally, I hope that the Minister will join me in praising the local community of Oxted, which has demonstrated just how much it cares about its hospital. That community now looks for answers and, above all, action from the Minister and the Secretary of State.

1.45 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Gisela Stuart):** I congratulate the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) on securing this afternoon's debate on Oxted and Limpsfield War Memorial hospital. He has raised the topic with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and me in correspondence and parliamentary questions during the past few months. He also referred to an Adjournment debate from three years ago. I do not think that anything that I say today will come as a big surprise.

Of course, I acknowledge the strong local feeling about the future of Oxted community hospital and recognise the frustration caused by the time that the development of the new facility has taken. The people of Oxted were promised a new health facility by summer 2001, but it has not materialised. I share the disappointment of the hon. Gentleman and his constituents that progress has not been made as swiftly as anticipated. However, I assure hon. Members that Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS trust and East Surrey health authority, supported by the south-east regional office of the NHS executive, are committed to providing new facilities and fully implementing the re-provision of services in their area. The hon. Gentleman asked me for what he called a categoric assurance and I will give him that today—there is no question of any manoeuvring to stop that happening. Unfortunate circumstances have combined to delay progress, but we are fully committed to going ahead.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS trust deficits. If my figures are in any way inaccurate, I will get back to him, but, as I

have them, the deficits were £5 million for 1999-2000 and £4.4 million for 2001. That deficit must be managed, but meeting it by raising money from land sales is in no way part of the plan. The plan is to provide the services at Oxted and Limpsfield War Memorial hospital.

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** I am grateful for that reassurance. Will the Minister be courageous enough today to offer a new deadline for the completion of the provision?

**Ms Stuart:** I hope that, as I continue, the hon. Gentleman will understand why making such an offer would be a brave decision, as civil servants would describe it, and why it might not be possible to be so precise.

The hon. Gentleman will also note that the Government have set a challenging agenda for the NHS, *one which will turn the NHS of old into a truly modern* service. The NHS plan, which was published in July last year, set out the most fundamental and far-reaching programme of reform in its history. That 10-year plan aims to improve every aspect of the NHS—a reliable service that provides effective health care services and has patients' interests at its heart.

For the current financial year 2001-02, East Surrey health authority received nearly £290 million, which represents a 50 per cent. cash increase on the allocation of three years ago. The Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS trust has also benefited from specific capital investments—£200,000 to modernise the accident and emergency department, which was completed in March 2001, £700,000 to provide a major extension to the day surgery unit, and £150,000 to re-provide the child development centre. It is not that we do not believe in community hospitals. The Government are committed to making appropriate and effective use of such hospitals. We recognise the strength of feeling that people have for their local community hospitals and the value of those hospitals as part of the community that they serve.

The NHS plan announced that £900 million would be made available annually by 2003-04 for new intermediate care and related services to promote independence and improve quality of care for older people, of which around £255 million is to be earmarked specifically for NHS investment in intermediate care. We also pledged that, by 2004, there would be 5,000 extra intermediate care beds. Some of those will undoubtedly be in community hospitals, some in existing facilities and some in new developments.

I remind the House of the context for the changes in health services at the Oxted and Limpsfield community hospital. The re-provision of services at that hospital was consulted on, as the hon. Gentleman already knows, by East Surrey health authority during March 1997. The main drivers for that change were that the buildings were in a poor state of repair and suffering from subsidence. It was more cost effective and more appropriate for modern health care to look at building alternative facilities in Oxted rather than to attempt to upgrade the building.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to some of the issues raised in relation to the ownership of the hospital. The advice that the Department of Health received from the legal advisers was that Oxted hospital was transferred under the National Health Service Act 1946 and section 6(1) of that Act provides that voluntary hospitals shall be transferred to, and vested in, Ministers on the appointed day—the day the Act came into force in 1948. The interests in the property, where held by a governing body or by trustees, would pass to the Ministers free of any trusts. Furthermore, the re-provision of an in-patient facility as an out-patient facility is within the Secretary of State's functions and in keeping with the objects for which the property was used immediately before 1948. We are acting on the best legal advice, although I will not go into the finer points. The models of health care were changing and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that, as part of the original consultation, the number of beds was increased in the final plan from six to 10.

The proposed plans for Oxted reflected advice on safe medical practice and the changing nature of health care. They ensure that appropriate services, such as out-patients, therapies and nursing home beds, remain locally based and that more acute in-patient services shift to acute hospitals. The outcome of the consultation resulted in a decision to provide a new hospital to be built on land next to the existing hospital site. That will provide the same range of out-patient, diagnostic and therapy services as is currently available, but with the advantage of purpose-built modern accommodation. Furthermore, 10 in-patient beds are to be purchased from a private nursing home provider in the local community.

For a number of reasons, between 1997 and late 1998, the progress with developing a new scheme was relatively slow, as a number of local issues had to be debated and resolved before detailed work could begin. Those included the need to agree land development issues with the local council as well as agreeing the most appropriate option to deliver the preferred health care facilities. At the time of the last Adjournment debate, the anticipated time scale for completion of the project was July 2001. Although there had been some progress towards that target, a number of factors have meant that the project has suffered further delays.

An outline business case was approved at the end of 1999, a preferred bidder has been selected and negotiations have been under way with that private sector provider for some time. Notwithstanding the ombudsman's investigation, which I shall address in a moment, the trust is seeking to ensure that its proposed new build scheme represents best value for money to the NHS, and thereby the taxpayer.

As the hon. Gentleman stated, the trust recently had to close Oxted community hospital. That was partly due to the recent severe and prolonged rainfall. The fabric of the old hospital building has suffered a sudden and marked deterioration to such an extent that a safe environment for staff and patients could no longer be ensured. Representatives from the south-east regional office of the NHS executive visited the hospital on 6 February 2001 to ascertain the state of the building. Reports were received that examined in detail the building conditions, the impact on health and safety and

*[Ms Stuart]*

other important issues such as infection control. An independent health and safety report commissioned by the trust alone concluded:

"If the hospital remains open in its current condition, it will constitute an immediate and continually rising risk to staff, visitors and patients' health, safety and welfare."

It is fair to say that the building was not in the best condition before the recent spell of bad weather, but the trust would strongly disagree with any suggestion that it was due to negligence on its part. In cases where the provision of a new health care facility has already been agreed, a balance will inevitably have to be struck between committing resources to the further upkeep of the old building and funding the provision of health care services.

I am aware that, at a public meeting chaired by the hon. Gentleman, the trust declared its intention to close the hospital, and restated the commitment of both the health authority and the trust to deliver new health care facilities as soon as possible. Following closure, the trust and the health authority were able to take immediate steps to ensure that local health services were sustained. The majority of in-patients at the time of closure were either discharged or relocated to social services long-term care, a neighbouring community hospital or to the local acute hospital.

Out-patient services were relocated to spare capacity within the Oxted GP surgery and I am advised that it is working well. Any patients subsequently requiring care are referred to a local nursing home, the neighbouring community hospital or, if they require closer supervision, East Surrey hospital.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the ombudsman, who is investigating a complaint against the south-east regional office. It relates to the administration of the consultation process about the re-provision of services at Oxted hospital back in 1997. The complaint was formally notified to the then Permanent Secretary on 12 June 2000, and the inquiry has subsequently been in progress. I am advised that the NHS executive has complied fully with all the ombudsman's requests for information and will continue to co-operate fully.

The ombudsman has yet to report his findings. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that, because of the substance of this complaint, the trust will have to await the outcome of the investigation before proceeding with the permanent closure of the hospital and the provision of new facilities. It is inappropriate for me to comment further, pending the outcome of the investigation.

There is, of course, a need to respect the memory and history of the old War Memorial hospital and I would not wish to diminish its importance. The artefacts of memorabilia have already been secured from the closed buildings and safely removed to the care of local GPs. The trust will continue to work with GPs and the local community to establish the best way to make this memorabilia safe in the long term and to ensure that it is accessible to local residents.

The hon. Gentleman also inquired about the physical security of the building. Following consultation with the local police and crime prevention officer, I can assure him that measures to ensure the external and internal security of the building have been taken. I understand that a representative of the trust will be meeting the crime prevention officer tomorrow at the old hospital to confirm that the measures taken are satisfactory. In addition, rubble will be installed in the driveway on Thursday to prevent vehicles being taken on to the site, which has also been insured against fire risks.

I recognise that, the hon. Gentleman and his constituents are frustrated by the length of time that it is taking to develop a new facility. He will not be surprised to hear that I share some of that frustration, but I should like to reassure him and his constituents that that all parties are working together to ensure that the new health care facilities are provided as swiftly as possible. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate, however, that no contractual arrangements can be entered into or commitments given to a private sector provider until the outcome of the investigation by the ombudsman is known.

In the meantime, we are ensuring that the necessary frameworks are in place to allow us to make progress, once the investigation is over, as quickly as possible. I have instructed the regional office to monitor the position closely and to report developments regularly. Once the ombudsman has reported, I would welcome the opportunity to discuss subsequent steps with the hon. Gentleman. When the decision has been taken, it is crucial to move forward as quickly as possible. I hope that we can bring this unhappy tale to a conclusion that will, although late in the day, both allow new hospital provision and retain the memory of the War Memorial hospital. In the end, we want to serve the hon. Gentleman's constituents and all patients as best we can, and that is a shared objective.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.*

# Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 25 April 2001*

[MR. MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

## New Deal (Scotland)

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mrs. McGuire.*]

9.30 am

**Mr. Ernie Ross** (Dundee, West): I am very pleased to be here this morning to talk about a subject that is so close to my heart. I spent 10 happy years as a member of the Select Committee on Employment. Although they were happy years for me because I was doing something that I enjoyed, they were disastrous for the people of this country because they were part of the 18 years of misery that we had to suffer as a result of the infamous pact to bring down the previous Labour Government. I make that point because I note that, once again, no representative of the Scottish National party is here. It seems that the nationalists do not give a hoot for the unemployed or for people living in poverty in Scotland. We should not be surprised. No doubt, they will have some excuse that will satisfy some of their colleagues.

We are here to examine the new deal's impact on Scotland. The idea of a new deal was born from our experience and that of people who were unemployed or seeking employment during those 18 years of Conservative Government. During the 10 years for which I was on the Employment Committee, we examined various Government initiatives, but could perceive no coherence in the schemes: there seemed to be no policy framework surrounding them, other than an aim to reduce the claimant count, which was high and rising.

I fought the 1979 election alongside the Minister of State, Scotland Office, and my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall)—all of us aspiring MPs. I remember a poster—"Labour isn't working"—that had a picture, allegedly of a dole queue. By the time that we got rid of the Conservatives 18 years later, that dole queue could have been replicated three or four times, without reflecting accurately the damage that those 18 years had done to people, their life chances and the economy. That upset most of us who were trying to get our constituents back into work or help those seeking to enter the work force, for whom there was no ladder and no coherent strategy.

There was instead a series of schemes. I do not claim that every scheme that the Tories tried to introduce was wrong or bad—some were very good. I remember a community programme that many of us hoped might last, but did not, and there were other programmes that had a basis in good policy. The problem was that the Government did not believe in them. Their main criterion was to get the headline claimant count to below a magical number. We never really understood what that number was, but that was their idea. Every month, the Government would look anxiously at the claimant count, without noticing the individuals and their circumstances, families and communities—they were side issues to the main criterion of getting the claimant count down.

A group of people working at the Department of Employment was allegedly attempting to help people into work. I say "allegedly" because, although those civil servants had once been full of enthusiasm and fired by the belief that their task in life was to help people find work, once they were in the Department under the previous Government, they quickly learned that their job was to discipline the unemployed for failing to have a job—not to help the unemployed but to sanction them. Those civil servants became very dispirited. My experience on Select Committees, visiting various Departments and parts of the country and meeting officials from the Department of Employment, means that I know how the frustration and anger was apparent in those individuals. They wanted to do a job for which they knew they had the capacity, but the Government and their policies would not allow them to do it. They were particularly frightened at conference time, when prophetic speeches would be made at the Tory party conference.

**Mr. David Marshall** (Glasgow, Shettleston): Prophetic or pathetic?

**Mr. Ross:** Probably both, but they certainly excited the masses at the conference. The Tories are not the only culprits; occasionally, we do the same—or we did before we reinvented ourselves and got back on to the straight and narrow. However, making a speech at conference and translating it into something that will work in the real world are entirely different things.

I remember a party conference at which the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), then Secretary of State for Social Security, waxed lyrical about how he would drive the unemployed back to work; he received great cheers from the audience. He was supported by the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo), then Secretary of State for Employment. The idea was that itinerant people were wandering the country, living in hippy communes on the south coast, enjoying the palm trees and cream teas of Devon. They were supposedly enjoying the good life and turning up for job interviews in such a poor condition either of dress or of attitude that they could not be employed.

Those of us who understand the nature of unemployment and the way in which the unemployed are driven down know that after six months, one year, a year and a half or two years of unemployment and living in a household in which no one works, people are in no mental or financial position to turn up to an interview in an Armani suit and Gucci shoes. However, it was thought that if they did not turn up in such style, the employer could write on the green card that they would not employ that person because his or her attitude was wrong, the green card would be sent to the Department of Employment, and a sanction would be levied against the poor individual. That was the theme of the speech made at the Tory conference.

However, the two right hon. Gentlemen had to face reality when they came before the Employment Committee. I remember that I and other members of the

*[Mr. Ross]*

Committee questioned them closely. We asked them whether they would expect someone who had been unemployed for two years and was living on subsistence money to turn up to an interview in a sharp suit, clean shirt, tie and the latest shoes. Both said no. They did not say it as emphatically as that, but their answers—which are on record in the Employment Committee minutes—show them backing off considerably from their rhetoric at party conference.

That Government had no coherent policies or strategies, and no long-term aim. There was a succession of schemes, but I challenge the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) to name one scheme, which the Tories introduced during their 18 years, that went from start to finish.

**Mr. Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield): The statistics do not bear out the success of the new deal compared with earlier approaches. Since 1997, there has been a 25 per cent. reduction in youth unemployment because of the new deal, as the hon. Gentleman says; however, over a similar period previously, the reduction was 29 per cent.

**Mr. Ross:** I understand that the hon. Gentleman is here to defend the indefensible, but he did not respond to the question that I posed. Can he tell me of a single scheme introduced by the previous Government that started and finished? No, he cannot, because none of them did. Can he tell me of a single scheme for which there is any record of how successful it was? Again, the answer is no, because when we asked successive Secretaries of State for Employment and representatives from the Department for Education and Employment, we were told that no records were kept. That is not unusual. If one reads the latest Select Committee on Education and Employment report, one finds not enough record keeping is done even in respect of our own new deal programme. Our Government accept that we need to keep records and they are instituting a series of initiatives to ensure that we have a record of how successful such programmes are.

That was the overall situation. Then there were the trainers, who were a mixed bag, Mr. Chairman—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that this is not a Committee. It is the equivalent of the main Chamber of the House of Commons, and whoever is in the Chair ought to be addressed as Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Ross:** I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

As I was saying, the trainers were a mixed bag. I remember a training and enterprise council in or just outside London that was allegedly providing horse riding for the disabled. The Select Committee discovered that the chairman of that TEC had bought himself a nice ranch: he owned the ranch, the horses, the paddocks and the fields and, even though the scheme went bankrupt he was—lo and behold—still left with the horses, the fields and the ranch. The disabled were left with no facilities.

That was an exceptional case, but there were many different types of trainers and serious mismatches. Something had to be done. Those of us who were involved in trying to do something about it all agreed that a new start was required. We therefore promised, in the 1997 election manifesto, that we would use the receipts from a windfall tax on the privatised utilities to introduce a welfare-to-work programme designed to get young people and the long-term unemployed back into work. It was one of our early five pledges.

We can look forward to the election, whenever it comes, knowing that we have met that pledge. We have not met it in its entirety—I remind those present that we set out a programme that ran until 2002, so we have not met all our targets. We still have at least a year to go before it can be judged whether we have met our targets. However, we are well on our way to meeting the initial targets, which included getting 250,000 young people back into work—

**Mr. Grieve:** The hon. Gentleman says that the target of getting 250,000 young people back into work has been met, but the statistics show that at the time that the Government were elected in 1997, there were not 250,000 young unemployed to be got back into work. Is that not an example of how the new deal has been a complete piece of spin?

**Mr. Ross:** I now see the way in which the hon. Gentleman intends to approach the debate. However, it will not work. The fact is that those people are well on their way to benefiting from a whole package of measures.

If the hon. Gentleman had allowed me to continue, I would have said that we realised that getting people back into work was not just a matter of welfare-to-work programmes—there was more to it than that. We had to deal with the economy as well. I would like to refer to a speech made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland to the Centre for Scottish Public Policy on 12 March. In that speech my right hon. Friend clearly set out the criteria against which the Scottish economy should be judged as a part of the United Kingdom economy. She linked dealing with poverty, social deprivation, the long-term lack of investment and the need to develop the skills base of people in Scotland with the new deal—working hand in hand with measures to make work pay.

My right hon. Friend set out some facts that are worth sharing with the Committee. The new deal has helped 31,500 Scots to find work. The national minimum wage, which is part of the same package, is benefiting 120,000 Scottish earners. The working families tax credit is making work pay for 108,000 families in Scotland. My right hon. Friend clearly demonstrated that our overall economic strategy is right, both nationally and for Scotland. We can use the new deal to deliver programmes that will make people more employable and get them into real, long-term, sustainable jobs. The Labour Government have delivered a strong and stable economy as the foundation for such opportunities. Because jobs have always been at the heart of our programmes, we have provided employment opportunities for all and we are moving towards a stage at which there will be jobs for all.

Not only have we removed the barriers—such as low pay—to some people taking those jobs by introducing the minimum wage, affordable child care and personal

advice to the individuals, we have done more. When we said that there were four options, we also said that there was to be no fifth option. We made it clear that we would not allow people living in poverty, who felt that they would be disfranchised, to believe that that was the life that Government envisaged for them. We showed that we did not intend to allow them to languish on the dole queue and in communities that were breaking down, but that they had a future and that we would shape it in a way that would benefit them and their families.

Having won the confidence of the unemployed, we also won that of the civil servants in the Employment Service. They have realised that the new deal has made it possible for them to do the job that they are trained to do. I should like to recount some of our experiences in Tayside, which, although it is a small part of Scotland, plays a large part in our lives and in the Scottish economy. We have one of the best Employment Service teams imaginable. Under its manager, Bob Alexander, it is as good as any in Scotland. I make it clear to my hon. Friend the Minister that if there is any attempt to move Bob Alexander from Tayside, dead bodies will come into the frame. He is one of the best Employment Service managers in Scotland and has been a real find. Our new deal has liberated him and his team and I should like to share some of the positive things that have happened in Tayside as a result of their entering wholeheartedly into the scheme.

Since January 1998, Tayside has blazed the trail in the Government's crusade to fight unemployment and tackle the scourge of social exclusion. Helping people into work is the best anti-poverty strategy, and the Government's welfare-to-work initiative is a central plank in our efforts to achieve equality of opportunity. The new deal for 18 to 24-year-olds was the most important of the welfare-to-work programmes. It was introduced with twelve pathfinder districts throughout the United Kingdom, with Tayside piloting the programme for Scotland. The pilot was launched in Dundee by Donald Dewar, the then Secretary of State for Scotland who is sadly no longer with us; my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer; and my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), then a junior Minister at the Scotland Office.

When the new deal was launched in Tayside, we had to break the pattern of households with no working adults. Some of the young people of working age had never had a job and had become almost completely detached from society. We have enabled more than 2,250 people to find jobs, ranging from retail positions with major companies to jobs in information technology. Of these, 1,087 Dundee new deal clients gained employment between April 2000 and March 2001. We have helped 1,336 young people, 379 25-plus clients, 251 50-plus clients, 272 lone parents and 28 partners of unemployed people to find jobs.

Under Bob Alexander's leadership innovative practice has been introduced in Tayside that has now been copied elsewhere in Scotland. The new deal support personal adviser was something dreamed up in Tayside. We discovered that the period in which young people were most likely to opt out of the programme was the first two or three weeks; we would lose them completely. The new deal support personal adviser is an advocate working with the young person and the employer to prevent dropping out. The new deal aftercare personal adviser was first used in Tayside, and phased attendance for options is another innovative approach used there. When someone experiences difficulties in taking up an option after long unemployment, an agreement is made between that person, the personal adviser and the employer for attendance on an agreed number of days, for agreed hours, during the initial period, to enable the individual to get used to being back in employment. We are hoping in the near future to implement a follow-through subsidy for clients leaving options and entering employment. It could include a £200 payment to clients who enter employment from the new deal. It could benefit them educationally or otherwise, perhaps through the opening of an individual learning account.

The range of innovative practices that I have outlined has been used by the local Employment Service team in Tayside, which is committed to preparing the people with whom it works for employment. Those involved have been happy to work in the relevant programmes. As well as seeing their own success in their chosen activities, they have witnessed the success of people entering real jobs. Those people have returned to thank the team and to ask for further help if they have difficulties.

There is also good news from Tayside about lone parents. A lone parent aged 33 joined the new deal case load in June 2000. She was an honours graduate in ecology and had experience as a care assistant. Initially she was trying only to find a job as a care assistant, but because of the presence of the Scottish Crop Research Institute nearby, she was encouraged to look for a job there. It was discovered that she was over-qualified for the job that she applied for. However, because of her qualifications and dedication and the intervention of the personal adviser, she found a research job at the institute, which is paying for her to do a masters degree. A lone parent aged 31 attended an interview with a personal adviser and was referred for an interview on the same day. She was offered the job, but the hours were unsuitable. The personal adviser intervened with the employer and as a result suitable hours were arranged. Another lone parent with a child of three had been claiming income support since August 1997. She attended an initial interview on 11 September and was referred by an adviser for 15 vacancies and several speculative approaches to employers. The client found a post, the local employer was delighted with the new employee, the person concerned was delighted to be working again and she was approximately £34 a week better off. That effect was repeated for another client, who was approximately £47 a week better off and loved the new job.

The new deal has been a success for people in Tayside because of a group of people working in the Employment Service who are doing the job that they have been trained to do. They get up in the morning and want to come to work. Under the previous Government, there was a series of shady trainers, but we have tried to ensure that there are much better training companies under the new deal. I want to quote one example from Tayside that is close to me personally, simply because it offers the best. Back in 1987, the Employment Committee accepted that Workstart, based in Dundee, was one of the best training companies, delivering

*[Mr. Ross]*

training in a most helpful way. Workstart is now part of the Claverhouse Group, a not-for-profit charitable organisation in my constituency which provides training over the whole range of employment programme initiatives and, for the past 16 years, has tried to provide quality services to the local community.

More than 300 local employers throughout Tayside currently use the Claverhouse Group as their main source for new employees. Their occupation areas cover a wide range, but are predominantly factory work, packing, assembly, printing, catering, driving and office work. In 1999, the company managed to progress 590 unemployed adults into employment. That increased to 694 in 2000, and projected targets indicate that the figure for the current year will be close to 775.

I am a member of that company, although I receive no remuneration from it. In fact, my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, East (Mr. McAllion) and I have been associated with the company almost from the start. It is dedicated to providing the best training and helping people to reach the highest levels in their employment. It has not been prepared to cut the targets that it has set for itself or the targets that it has set in preparing people for jobs, even though it has meant that the company has occasionally lost contracts. Under the previous Government, it lost several contracts simply because the training that it delivers costs money. It does not cost as much as some other trainers, especially the bigger trainers in Scotland. The company provides the best training, but at a cost that the previous Government were not prepared to meet.

Last Wednesday saw the conclusion of all the company's efforts. The Claverhouse Group has been trying to provide a one-door approach for anyone who lives in Tayside and has a problem finding work or other associated problems—a one-door approach to getting people off the dole queue and back into employment. That one door is Claverhouse. Last week, the company signed a contract with the Employment Service in Tayside to deliver the new 25-plus programme—a £1.5 million three-year project. The contract will ensure that the company continues to deliver what businesses in Tayside require and what individuals require to get them back into employment.

When I was in Tayside last Wednesday for the signing of the contract, I noticed that one of the projects was called FUN, and I wondered whether the company had gone a bit too far. Then I was told that FUN stands for "further underpinning for novices". That programme recognises that some individuals need to acquire life skills in addition to training, and that unless they acquire those life skills, they will not be ready for employment. There used to be a community industry programme to deal with that, but the previous Government got rid of it. We now have an organisation that can get people job-ready for the employer and give them some knowledge of what will be expected not only from their employer, but from colleagues who will be working alongside them. That will ensure that they are ready for the job. The work force readiness certificate that people will be awarded at the end of that process will demonstrate to any employer that they understand the responsibilities that they accept if they take a job.

For Tayside, the Government's policies are right. They are committed to ensuring that the national economic situation is right, offering jobs and a way out of poverty. The Employment Service is dedicated to its job and has demonstrated through the innovations that it has introduced under Bob Alexander that it will respond to the challenge. We want training companies such as Claverhouse, which can implement programmes in a way that is acceptable to the employer and the person who has been offered a place as a client. We in Tayside are saying, "Yes, we have problems and we still need help." I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say.

**Mr. David Marshall:** My hon. Friend referred to Tayside. Does he agree that the story there is being repeated up and down Scotland and that far from being a story of spin, as the apologist for the Tory party said earlier, the new deal in Scotland is in fact a story of success followed by success? I say that as someone whose constituency had for far too many years the highest unemployment among adults and young people. The new deal has made a tremendous difference to my constituents—we cannot commend it highly enough.

**Mr. Ross:** I agree with everything that my hon. Friend said. He and I understood that unless we looked at the whole picture and got everyone working together, change would not be possible. No one assumes that the previous Government did not have difficulties or that the current Government do not. Governments do not make jobs as such.

**Sir Robert Smith** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): None the less, does the hon. Gentleman agree that Governments can destroy jobs?

**Mr. Ross:** Absolutely. However, much more disastrously, during their 18 years in government, the Conservatives destroyed people, communities and morale across the region. That is what I have been trying to say. They destroyed the organisation that was established to help the unemployed. Then, anyone entering one of the fortresses supposed to be centres to which people went to get themselves a job would have felt the tension. If we go into an Employment Service office now, we find it much more relaxed. I am not saying that there are not people who have got out of bed on the wrong side or who are trying to dodge the system; such things will always exist. However, there are now people in the Employment Service who see that they have a role in life and who can picture themselves getting on. They can enjoy the fact that some of the people with whom they work are moving into work either directly or after a period of training.

In the four years of our Government, we have managed with the help of many organisations and individuals—not least the Employment Service and training companies such as Claverhouse—to build a fairer society. We are on our way towards cutting unemployment, creating jobs and ensuring that the money that is intended to go round does so. Instead of using the trickle-down theory of the previous Govt, we are putting the money in at the bottom to ensure that it goes up. In that way, people will feel that their health and life chances are improving and that public service is

improving. What we are really doing is tackling the exclusion and hopelessness of the Tory years. The programme in which we are involved is based on job creation and increasing the employability of those who have been unable to find work for long periods. The new deal represents a radical and unprecedented investment in people and their futures. We recommend it to everyone. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made it clear that the programme will continue after the next election to ensure that gains that we have made in the first term are mirrored and expanded throughout the years that we are in power.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton):** Order. I remind the Chamber that winding-up speeches must begin by half-past 10. At least three hon. Members wish to participate in this important debate, and if they are reasonably brief, all those who wish to speak will be able to do so.

10.5 am

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): I listened with great interest to the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross), and I congratulate him on securing this debate. He talked about his experience on Tayside, and to generalise from a particular constituency is no bad thing.

I shall make specific points about the new deal, but go on to talk about the economic background against which the new deal has been experienced over the past few years to examine whether there will be a major change in the economic forecast, with the economic problems that are looming.

The hon. Gentleman skated over some of the perceived problems in the new deal. I would not suggest—as perhaps the Conservative spokesman would—that the new deal has been a major disaster in every respect. On the contrary, I think that it has done some—

**Mr. Grieve:** I assure the hon. Gentleman that I will not be making that suggestion. I do not think that the new deal has been a total disaster, but it has not been anything like it has been cracked up to be by the hon. Member for Dundee, West.

**Mr. Salmond:** I apologise—I was basing my remarks on the hon. Gentleman's two previous interventions. Obviously, he will develop the point in his own speech. I was going to suggest that a balanced view would be that there have been limitations in the new deal. For example, in the 18 to 24-year-old programme, 38 per cent. of people stay in their placement for fewer than 13 weeks, and after placement, 39 per cent. either move back on to benefits or to what is called an "unknown destination".

Many of us have doubts, scepticism and regret about the compulsoty element in the new deal. The hon. Member for Dundee, West described it by saying that there was to be no fifth option, but it is actually a compulsory element. I am experienced enough to remember when many hon. Members regarded compulsory elements on employment programmes as being too similar to workfare to give them unqualified support. For all that, many of the points made by the hon. Gentleman are correct, and every hon. Member can point to important life opportunities that have been given to people in their constituencies through the new deal process.

My main point—I disagree with the hon. Gentleman—is that the new deal has been introduced against an economic environment that has not been a success. I must re-examine the speech of the Secretary of State for Scotland to see the criteria by which he judged the performance of the Scottish economy as excellent. I would have described its performance over the past few years as disappointing, certainly in terms of international comparisons. Most of us support the International Labour Organisation's definition of unemployment, and on that basis, unemployment in Scotland is currently 6 per cent. compared with Austria at 3.6 per cent., the Netherlands at 2.8 per cent., Denmark at 5.3 per cent., Sweden at 5.4 per cent., and Ireland at less than 4 per cent. Therefore, if one compares Scotland's rate of unemployment with other small countries in Europe, its performance is disappointing.

Growth figures in Scotland over the past few years, have also been disappointing. The manufacturing industry in Scotland has experienced serious problems—since 1997, 32,000 jobs have been lost. Recent figures for manufacturing exports for the last quarter of 2000 reinforce that view. Food, drink and tobacco exports are down 24 per cent. since 1997, mechanical engineering exports are down by almost 20 per cent., and exports in textiles—a very troubled sector—are down by 34 per cent.

Despite the disappointing general performance of the Scottish economy and its under-achievement when one considers its potential, and despite the problems that have been concentrated on manufacturing and exports in particular, the service sector in Scotland has, generally speaking, been performing pretty well during the past few years. Many new deal placements—not all, by any means—have been in the service sector. I should be interested if the Minister, when replying to the debate, would give us an analysis of what proportion of new deal placements have been in manufacturing and in the service economy.

There are signs that we are moving into a much harsher economic climate. That was shown to all of us yesterday by the hugely tragic announcement in Bathgate, but we can also see across Scotland—with Compaq at Erksine and the Panasonic announcement a couple of weeks ago in East Kilbride—that continuing major job losses are on the way.

If we are entering a more troubled economic environment, it will be much tougher for a scheme such as the new deal to find suitable placements for young people. Of course, a tougher economic environment and a more difficult employment situation reinforces the argument for interventions such as the new deal, but one of the failings of the many schemes employed during the Conservative period of office was that they were always identified as attempts to disguise the unemployment figures as opposed to generating genuine employment opportunities.

**Miss Anne Begg** (Aberdeen, South): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the unemployment problem was often with the long-term unemployed? When people

*[Miss Anne Begg]*

were unemployed for more than six months, and especially for more than a year, it became increasingly difficult for them to get a job. The challenge for Government in situations such as that at Bathgate is to ensure that people enter new jobs as quickly as possible. The new deal can only help to achieve that, because it ensures that people will have experience of work in the near future, which makes them much more employable.

**Mr. Salmond:** I take the hon. Lady's point. Of course, there is structural unemployment. After a period of employment catastrophe such as there has been in many areas and many industries over the past 20 years, we would expect structural unemployment—those without experience of work, whose families have not had experience of work and who are not familiar with the work culture—to grow. It is obviously right for the Government to introduce policies to try to bring back work experience, lifetime opportunity and the work culture to people, families and communities who have been disadvantaged for a substantial period. My point is that that is much easier to do in a relatively benign economic environment. Attempting to address structural unemployment is much more difficult if general employment opportunities are limited, because the people who tend to be squeezed out are exactly those whom the hon. Lady and myself are anxious to help.

**Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that when long-term unemployed people enter the new deal but then return directly to unemployment and to claiming benefit, they no longer count in the statistics as being long-term unemployed? One of the successes of the new deal from the Government's point of view has been in disguising long-term unemployment.

**Mr. Salmond:** I do not absolve the Government from disguising the unemployment figures. I merely suggest to the hon. Gentleman that if they were looking for lessons on how to massage unemployment figures, they had 18 years of tutelage from his party. I accept that this Government—perhaps all Governments—tend to pick up bad habits from their predecessors. In several areas they have taken lessons taught by the Conservative party to excess.

**Mr. David Marshall:** The hon. Gentleman has mentioned bad habits. I can pick on one bad habit displayed by him and his party. I am loth to raise the matter of voting records, because we all miss votes. However, apart from the vote on the national minimum wage, when no Scottish National party Member voted, the hon. Gentleman is well aware that the Finance Act 1997 contained the policy of levying the windfall tax on the privatised utilities in order to fund the new deal to reduce unemployment in Scotland. The vote on that occurred on 29 July 1997, less than three months after the last general election. Not one SNP Member voted to help the unemployed in Scotland. Where were they? Had they all gone on holiday early? Can we have an explanation? The hon. Gentleman comes along and criticises the Government—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. That was a very long intervention. I hope that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) will deal only with the part of the intervention that is relevant to the debate.

**Mr. Salmond:** Unfortunately, that leaves me nothing to deal with, because the intervention was totally irrelevant. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the House of Commons Library has furnished me with a list of hon. Members that shows, among other things, voting records. He will accept that I have been serving in two Parliaments for some time, and I am happy to compare my voting record with that of Labour Members who serve in two Parliaments. However, I shall not do so, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because you might prevent me.

The Library document shows that, if we examine hon. Members' speeches, interventions in the Chamber and questions together, it appears that I come 10th in the list of 72 Scottish Members of Parliament. I shall not embarrass the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall) by saying where he ranks, but it is substantially lower in the list.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan is not taking my advice, but is addressing his remarks to matters that are irrelevant to the debate.

**Mr. Salmond:** I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am sure that you agree that I was sorely provoked and tempted. My final point to the hon. Gentleman is that it seems that I have been more effective in two Parliaments than he has been in one.

I shall return to the new deal, which is the subject of the debate, and make a serious point. If we are moving into a more difficult economic and employment environment than that within which the new deal has operated over the past four years in the service sector in Scotland, the challenge for the Minister is to explain why, in such an environment, the new deal will not fall victim to the same pressures that I believe were instrumental in undermining confidence in previous employment schemes that were devised by the Conservative Government. I hope that we receive a substantial answer to that, because I do not want the matter to be yet another area of policy in which too many bad lessons were learned from the previous Government.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I want to call at least two more hon. Members. I hope that the first hon. Member I call will be responsible and enable me to call the second.

10.18 am

**Miss Anne Begg** (Aberdeen, South): I apologise for being late, but I had difficulty getting up in the lift. However, now I am here safe and sound.

I want to reflect on a report by the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs about welfare to work in Scotland and the new deal, which was completed in January 1998. That was the first report with which I was involved following my election. It is worth looking at its recommendations in order to measure the success of the new deal in Scotland. As my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) said, we visited Tayside,

which was one of the pilot areas. It was interesting to note that people had concerns about whether the new deal would deliver everything that the Government said it would. It has already been mentioned today that there were such bad experiences of schemes under the previous Government that there was some cynicism. Those who piloted the scheme, especially in Tayside, had to overcome that, because people did not believe that the Government's intention was to get people—particularly young people—back into work, and that we were serious about the promised funding and help.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) referred to the major concern felt by people about the compulsory element. They were worried that the new deal would be compulsory and that many young people would disappear down a black hole, come off benefits and not gain from it. However, that fear has generally been proved to be groundless. Because it was such a good—I was about to say "scheme", but I must avoid using that word—project for the young unemployed, it was spread by word of mouth that it was worth while becoming involved in it. The compulsory element has not been the big issue that many people feared that it would be.

Another fear was that there would not be enough personal advisers, or that they would not be properly trained or any different from those in the old Employment Service who just managed unemployment rather encouraging people into work. That fear has not been realised either. There have been enough personal advisers. Indeed, their mere existence has been the major success of the new deal and set it apart from previous schemes.

There was a misunderstanding about the meaning of the new deal. Some people thought that it was a job creation scheme. It was never intended to be that. It was about making people work-ready so that they could take up the opportunities that already existed in the economy. As I said to the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, problems often arise for the long-term unemployed for whom the work culture and ethos have disappeared. Such people find it increasingly difficult to get back into work. Because of the success of the new deal for the young unemployed as well as for the long-term unemployed, many fewer people fall into that category in Scotland. In my constituency, youth unemployment has fallen by 90 per cent., which is an outstanding figure. It shows the deal's success. The drop in long-term unemployed is 46 per cent. The new deal is working.

I must remind hon. Members that several worries were expressed about how the new deal would work in Aberdeen, because traditionally we have low unemployment. It was feared that those young people who were not already in work would be difficult to place. My local enterprise company gave me a detailed brief setting out such fears and said that more options might need to be available so that people could swap between them. It said that in some cases the young unemployed needed a longer gateway to become work-ready. The Government have now put in place such changes, which have been an important development.

Provided that we continue to have a Labour Government, we can be optimistic that the new deal for disabled people will be expanded. It has not yet been fully rolled out and is only working in pilot form in some areas. I am picking up on the impatience that is felt among the disabled community. People with disabilities, particularly those with mental health problems, regard the new deal as a way of helping them get into work. They really want "a wee job", something that will get them out of the house and back into society. While I am hasty for the new deal for disabled people to be in place nationwide, I understand the difficulties in doing that too quickly. The personal advisers must be extremely well trained and sensitive to the needs of disabled people. It is no use putting people with severe disabilities into a workplace where they will fail because they have not been properly matched to it.

**Sir Robert Smith:** Does the hon. Lady consider that the Government should ensure that the subsidies provided to employers in respect of mainstream new deal participants are available in respect of disabled people?

**Miss Begg:** That should certainly be considered. It may help to encourage more employers. One problem is the search for more employers. Good work is being undertaken by one of the access to work groups in Aberdeen that operate from Choices on Westburn road. It tries hard to interest employers in employing people who are desperate to find work and to be productive members of society. The new deal has proved successful, and I hope that it will continue to roll out for the disabled and for people who are still not engaging in work or getting involved in society.

I am grateful for the debate, as it has provided an opportunity to state that Government policies can make a fundamental difference to people's lives. Because of the new deal, in the recent past fewer people have been out of work or experienced long-term unemployment. I hope that, in the future, if people find themselves unemployed because of the vagaries of the economy, they will be better equipped swiftly to find new employment.

10.25 am

**Mr. Bill Tynan** (Hamilton, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) on securing this important debate.

I have visited local Employment Service offices in my constituency and the people who work in them are enthused by the new deal because it greatly improves the service that they provide. There has been a significant reduction in unemployment among people aged between 18 and 24.

However, I am concerned by some remarks that appeared in a recent poverty report by the Scottish National party. Its attitude towards the new deal is very different from that expressed by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) this morning. He was conciliatory, but I want him to comment on the poverty report's statement that it

"has been an abject and expensive failure"

and that

"it has made little or no difference to the employment prospects of Scotland's people."

That is a staggering statement in light of the reduction in unemployment that has occurred because of the new deal. It is easy to mention statistics such as 5 or 6 per

*[Mr. Bill Tynan]*

cent., but it is important to remember that they refer to many individuals who may have found themselves without jobs and excluded from society and its amenities. The new deal successfully addresses such people's problems, so it is essential not to be negative about it but to examine how it fails people so that we can ensure that we move forward and provide the employment opportunities that are essential for the people of Scotland.

The new deal must be continued, and changes to it should be welcomed by all parties.

10.28 am

**Sir Robert Smith** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) on securing the debate, and I agree with the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) that it is important to recognise that we are discussing a matter that fundamentally affects how individuals become involved and take part in society.

The economy creates the wealth that funds society, and it is important that as many people as possible are able and willing to work. There are also non-economic reasons why we should try to ensure that people are involved in society and become engaged and connected with the wider community. I support the new deal's aspiration to create a climate in which there are no barriers to work, except for each individual's skills and experiences.

Like the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), I had decided to mention that it is important to recognise that the new deal has been launched and tested in the most benign of world climates. It will face harder challenges in the future, and the Government should tell us how they intend to ensure that it can cope with them. The Chancellor has issued vague warnings that we should not be quite as optimistic as in the past.

The hon. Member for Dundee, West was coming from two different directions; when I intervened on him, he said that Governments did not create jobs, but he spoke about job creation later on. Fundamentally, Governments do not create jobs, but they do affect the climate and the likelihood of jobs being created. We welcomed the Government's recognition when they came into office of the need for an independent central bank, which would bring stability to economic planning and take interest rates out of the political domain, so that they would no longer be subject to short-term decision making.

As the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said, there are changes on the horizon, as evidenced by what is happening at Motorola. If the world market for mobile phones collapses, it will have an impact on employment in this country. If the jobs are not there, the new deal faces a much bigger challenge in helping and supporting people back into work. The foot and mouth outbreak has exacerbated the problems of the strong pound for farming and tourism, especially in Scotland. As a result, the rural economy, and those parts of the economy that depend on those industries, face many challenges in providing jobs. The new deal cannot be judged in isolation. To achieve the goals of the new deal, we need to ensure that everything is being done to create a climate in which innovation takes place and jobs are created.

An important and welcome development, on which the hon. Member for Dundee, West touched, is the creation of the personal adviser, who provides a link with the individual. Although different factors affect the ability of different groups to get back into work, people must be treated as individuals. Rather than having a scheme for a group—whether of young people, disabled people, single mothers or the over-50s, or a group which does not fit into those categories—we should consider all those who face the challenge of long-term unemployment, and make sure that all of them have access to a personal adviser to help them get back into work. It does not matter to long-term unemployed people which group they are in; they still face the challenge of unemployment, and they need help and assistance. Once people become disengaged from getting work, they enter a cycle that must be broken; that is why intervention is so important.

The hon. Gentleman—rightly and understandably—went on a brief tour of Conservative failures. In dealing with the needs of individuals to get back into work, the new deal responded to the failure to invest in the education service to ensure that our young people—and the next generation—were equipped with the tools and life skills that they needed to meet the challenges that they would face.

**Mr. Eric Clarke** (Midlothian): Do you believe in a policy to tackle ageism? Old fellas like me do not get a chance because, for instance, they are over 50.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Gentleman must refer to the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) by his constituency, or as "the hon. Gentleman". On the matter to which he refers, I have no view.

**Mr. Clarke:** I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I forgot where I was, and used the word "you" as if I were having a conversation. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that a policy must be laid down to tackle such bias?

**Sir Robert Smith:** I recognise the challenge of ageism. Given increased life expectancy, businesses are wasting talent and opportunities if they do not embrace the experience that people who have worked all their lives still have to offer to business and the community. The idea that a cut-off point exists at which people no longer have anything to offer means that we are wasting opportunities for society and the economy. I deprecate ageism and recognise the need to challenge it, and I encourage business to embrace that experience.

To break the cycle and, in the long run, to reduce dependency on intervention at the new deal and unemployment stages, we must ensure that the foundations are right. Good education stays with people for life; no one can take their skills away from them. Whatever happens to the economy or society, those skills are their personal assets and underpin people's participation in society and the economy. It is fundamental to our future to ensure that we put the necessary investment into education. Although the

Conservative record was disappointing, the failure in the first two years of this Government to recognise that need was extremely disappointing, too, certainly for my constituents. The consequences on the ground were felt in the education system.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) said that, in our area, the challenge for the long-term unemployed might be even greater. Constituents whom I meet want to work, but are not finding out how to find work or match their skills. Lifelong learning and the abolition of tuition fees in Scotland to encourage more people into higher education are positive proposals that will help to undermine some of the need for the new deal.

The Minister should assure us that he understands the challenges that are to come in the wider economy. In the Scottish Grand Committee on 29 February 2000, I cited figures from Sheffield university that showed that 600,000 people in the UK were economically detached—that is, not employed and not on benefit—and did not show up in our statistics or have access to the new deal. I asked whether the Government had a breakdown of the figures, or had examined them, to find out how they applied to Scotland. Has the Minister any further information? The new deal is designed to re-engage people in society by employment, but we must find and re-engage those who are not even showing up in the statistics.

The challenge in an area of high employment, such as the north-east of Scotland, is to find the skills and the people. For the economy to grow, we need more people to work in our industries. In the North sea oil industry, there is a great skills shortage. Similarly, in parts of the country that face high unemployment, we need to ensure that the Government do everything to avoid damaging job creation and putting barriers in the way of jobs, such as the problems of the strong pound.

I hope that the Government recognise that there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that everyone has the best opportunity of getting a job. We welcome the work of personal advisers, and the Government must recognise not only the people who face unemployment, but the hard work of the people who make the scheme work, including the personal advisers. The service being provided and the atmosphere at employment centres is a breath of fresh air. We must congratulate those who are doing the work, give them all our support for their future endeavours and recognise the valuable contribution that they are making to improving our society.

10.39 am

**Mr. Dominic Grieve** (Beaconsfield): I congratulate the hon. Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) on having secured the debate. I listened with great interest to his comments, especially his personal references to how the scheme had operated in his constituency. In my role as spokesman for Scotland, I am conscious that my constituency, being located in an area with the lowest unemployment in the United Kingdom—

**Sir Robert Smith:** On a point of language, I hope that the hon. Gentleman meant to say "Conservative spokesman for Scotland".

**Mr. Grieve:** I think that the correct title is "Opposition spokesman for Scotland".

Representing a constituency with low unemployment, as I do, it is easy to be glib about what the new deal sets out to achieve or to be critical without paying attention to how it works on the ground. To that extent, I am grateful to the hon. Member for Dundee, West for bringing his personal experiences to bear on the matter. However, I hope that he will forgive me if I highlight one or two areas where I believe that his arguments—and, indeed, some further arguments that have been presented—seem to be a little out of touch with reality.

The first is the suggestion that the new deal has achieved some great revolution in getting people into employment. If one examines the figures, it is obvious that that is not the case. The process by which employment availability in this country surged began in about 1994, and was due to the previous Government's economic policies. It was also doubtless due to a revival in the world economy. So when figures are bandied about for the number of people who have been helped into work since 1997 through the new deal, I would simply say that more people were helped into work in the period from 1994 to 1997 than have been helped since.

By the time that this Government came into office, the back of the major unemployment problem—in terms of figures—had already been broken. Nothing reflects that more than the fact that one of the Government's key promises in 1997 was to reduce youth unemployment by 250,000. However, the statistics for 1997 demonstrate that there were not 250,000 unemployed people aged under 25 looking for jobs; it was pure spin. In fairness to the Government, I suspect that they came up with that figure before they discovered that it had sunk below 250,000.

**Miss Begg:** The most recent statistics I have show that 270,000 young people have been helped into work as a result of the new deal. We somehow seem to have helped back into work extra people who did not appear in the official statistics quoted by the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Grieve:** I should point out that 40,000 young people have been through the new deal twice. I wonder whether the Government's statistics involve some double counting. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) rightly emphasised that all Governments doubtless seek to massage statistics, but the massaging of unemployment statistics by this Government has been distinct. It is also worth remembering that the new deal was achieved by means of the windfall tax on utilities, which, frankly, amounted to a theft of £3.1 billion and had serious adverse consequences on the economy. I am sometimes left with the horrible, niggling feeling that if the Government decided not to do anything to help the unemployed, we would still see patterns of rise and fall for which no Government—Labour or Conservative—could take credit. I have a worrying feeling that the Government's intervention in such matters tends to be peripheral.

The Government have admitted that the new deal is flawed. They do not say as much in the House but, on one occasion—at the Franco-British Council—the Government admitted that the new deal was unlikely to bring new recruits into modern business and industry because those employers required youngsters with knowledge of new technology, which the new deal was

*[Mr. Grieve]*

unable to provide. Again, we have an example of the Government admitting shortcomings in the new deal to other Governments, but those did not emerge from the various panegyrics that we heard this morning.

**Miss Begg:** The hon. Gentleman must take account of the fact that the new deal is not the only way for young people to get into work. They go through the normal education process, and investment in further and higher education—in the new technologies in particular—will allow them to be trained in the area that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. The new deal is specifically to help young people who are not job-ready; it is not meant to be a panacea to get all young people into work. It was never designed for that and nor should it have been.

**Mr. Grieve:** I accept that entirely, and have no difficulty with it. The new deal was designed to target those who were having great difficulty getting into work. As the economy began to boom and unemployment fell, obtaining jobs appeared to be relatively easy for those with the relevant aptitudes and skills. Indeed, in my constituency, the problem is not unemployment, but finding people. Those who are unemployed in a low-unemployment area tend to be those who have enormous difficulties holding down or attaining a job. However, we must consider whether we are getting a return on what we have put in. Various figures have been put around, but I believe that the correct statistic is that it costs about £20,000 a job to get people into the new deal.

**The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes):** No.

**Mr. Grieve:** I shall listen in due course to what the Minister has to say on that subject. The provisions cost a great deal. The *Financial Times* noted last year that if one considered the amount of investment and the return—only about 20 per cent. of those involved hold on to a job in the long term—it is clear that we are not getting value for money.

I accept that the individual instances that the hon. Member for Dundee, West cited are heart-warming. I do not mean that pejoratively; it is pleasant to hear about them. I do not doubt that the staff are working hard and trying to help those who are trying to get a job. Nevertheless, the overall picture is not satisfactory. A great deal is being invested for a very limited return. In the long term, the number of people who are successfully placed in jobs that they then keep is poor.

**Mr. Ernie Ross:** Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the unemployed individual who believes that he is outside the system will feel 100 per cent. part of the system by getting back into work? There are different levels at which people get back into work. We are beginning to approach employers, as happened in America; that is where many of our examples have come from. We are looking for ways in which to offer individual employers specifically job-trained people. That is the new deal.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I hesitate to intervene, but we want to give the Minister sufficient time to reply.

**Mr. Grieve:** I am mindful of that and will try to ensure that that happens, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Dundee, West, which is why I listened with such interest to what he said about the circumstances and individuals in his constituency. However, that does not get us away from the fact that the issues that we are discussing have arisen in a benign situation, as the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) said. It should be relatively easy to get people into work and to help them, but it costs a lot to do so. Furthermore, when we consider the overall statistics—I obviously cannot comment on the individual instances to which the hon. Member for Dundee, West referred—the overall return appears to be very poor in terms of the number of people in jobs.

As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, my party has suggested that we can and should make a radical reappraisal of the situation and that there is much to learn from the United States. We have suggested that the key to getting young people and people generally back into work when they have difficulties is not training so much as getting people into the workplace, keeping them there and ensuring that they get training there. That is why we have come up with the "Britain Works" scheme, which the *Financial Times* described as one of the best programmes for the jobless ever. It seeks to offer job experience to the long-term unemployed, which increases—[*Laughter.*] Labour Members laugh, which worries me even more. We have been provided with a classic illustration of the way in which the Government have sacrificed objective analysis of how to get people into work, replaced it with massaged figures and presented many individual instances that do not show the whole picture. There are better ways to approach the task, but I shall wait to hear from the Minister how the new deal is progressing. I am interested, but I hope for considered analysis rather than what I fear we shall be given; a further panegyric on a scheme with serious flaws.

10.50 am

**The Minister of State, Scotland Office (Mr. George Foulkes):** I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) on securing this debate on a vital subject. His long-standing commitment to the training and employment prospects of young people is well known in Scotland and beyond and deserves the commendation of the whole Chamber.

I remind the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) that it is beyond even me to accomplish a detailed analysis of this subject in 10 minutes, but several important contributions have been made in an excellent debate and I shall reply to as many as I can. The new deal has made a huge impact on Scotland. Several of my hon. Friends have already paid tribute to its success and its effect on their constituencies. Contrary to the patronising contribution from the Opposition spokesman, and while the new deal may not be needed in the leafy lanes of Beaconsfield, it is vital in Dundee, Glasgow, Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley and in other parts of Scotland.

The success of the new deal is to be found not just in statistics, but in the individuals affected. I do not apologise for giving two examples. The first, from Dundee, concerns Patricia, aged 51, who was unemployed for more than four years. She talked to a new deal adviser. My hon. Friends are right to say that personal advisers are a crucial element in the new deal. Patricia had been a voluntary befriender for the Dundee Society for Visually Impaired People. A full-time job was advertised, the adviser told her to apply for it and she found a job. She is now part of the success story of the new deal 50-plus, and there are many more. I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Midlothian (Mr. Clarke)—I do so with personal commitment—that people over the age of 50 are still vital to this country's work force, as well as to Parliament.

My second example is from my constituency and concerns Andrea Gardiner. She had been unemployed for three years and joined the new deal 25-plus. With the help of a personal adviser, she took a medical secretary course at Kilmarnock college in August 1999. On completing it, she applied for a job as a medical records clerk at Ayr hospital and started work in October 2000. Those are just two of the many real stories of people who have benefited from the new deal. Such carping criticism as we have heard from the hon. Member for Beaconsfield does the project a disservice.

The success of the new deal is to be found in the profound improvement in the situation of people who are given a chance, sometimes for the first time. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) said, the Scottish National party did not acknowledge that in its poverty report. To be fair, the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) acknowledged it today. I think that he had to take his spokesman on poverty—or, rather, the spokesman of his colleague, the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney)—to task for not recognising the value of the new deal. It will be noticed in Scotland that not only did his party not vote for the new deal money, but it has talked it down day by day, month by month and year by year.

**Mr. Salmond:** On the subject of what will be noticed in Scotland, when the Deputy Prime Minister speculated yesterday about slashing Scottish public spending, did his analysis include cuts to new deal expenditure, or just to health, education and other public services?

**Mr. Foulkes:** If the hon. Gentleman reads today's papers, he will find an entirely different story.

When we introduced the new deal in 1997, unemployment among young people was effectively out of control. However, we did not accept the so-called accepted wisdom that, in a modern, high-tech, low-inflation economy, we could not find jobs for those people. We were determined to change a system that had consigned so many people to the scrap heap without any hope.

I would like particularly to talk about events in Dundee, because Dundee is a good example. Tayside has made a significant contribution to the new deal from the start. It operated as a pathfinder pilot area for the new deal for young people, testing and putting into practice our theory of work for those who can, and support for those who cannot. The pilot helped more than 1,000 young Scots into jobs in just six months. More than three quarters of those jobs were sustained. That answers Opposition Members.

Since the new deal for young people was introduced throughout the country in April 1998, Tayside has gone on to help a further 3,000 young people to find work, 780 of them from the Dundee, West constituency. Under the new deal 25-plus, Tayside has helped 639 long-term unemployed adults into work, 144 of them in the Dundee, West constituency. That constituency and Tayside are a microcosm of what is happening all over Britain and are an example to all of us.

We welcome the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan back to Westminster. I congratulate him on his Pauline conversion on the way to Macduff. He has suddenly realised, once again, the importance of this Parliament to Scotland, and its particular importance in relation to employment. There could not be a better example. However, his economic comparisons with other countries were highly selective. He picked the ones that suited his argument and left the other ones out. He forgot that unemployment in this country is at its lowest level for 25 years. That is the significant difference. The number of people actually in work is at its highest level since 1960, when I was just coming out of school, which shows how long ago that was.

**Mrs. Anne McGuire** (Stirling): Primary school.

**Mr. Foulkes:** No, I am afraid not.

It may do the party of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan some service to talk Scotland down. It may be wishful thinking on his part—he may wish to see more unemployment and more redundancies—but it does not help Scotland. If he is going to stand up for Scotland, not only must he and his colleagues turn up here, but they must speak up for Scotland and not keep talking it down. Of course there are job losses, but there are also significant job gains. If he had come with me to Atmel and to Caledonian Clear he would have seen job gains. Those gains must be significant, otherwise unemployment would not be steadily decreasing.

**Mr. Grieve:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Foulkes:** No, least of all shall I give way to the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan talks failure. The SNP talk failure all the time. Why will the new deal not fail? It will not fail because it is personalised. It is not a job-creation scheme. People get real jobs in the real job market—sustainable jobs.

**Sir Robert Smith:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Foulkes:** No, not even to the nice hon. Gentleman.

I will, however, reply to the ridiculous claims of the hon. Member for Beaconsfield about the cost of the new deal. Even the Conservative party's own policy announcement "Britain works" states that the cost per job is around £4,000, not the £20,000 that he mentioned today. For every £5 spent on the new deal, the

*[Mr. Foulkes]*

Exchequer gets back nearly £3 in lower benefit spending. That is the advantage of the new deal. It gets people off benefits and into work and they become taxpayers and contribute to society. Not only do they make an economic and practical contribution, but it is better for their morale.

In conclusion, youth unemployment is now at its lowest level since the mid-1970s. Long-term unemployment among young people was 15,700 in 1997; now it is down to 4,400. That is a significant gain. The new deal has made a real impact, but we accept that there is still more to do. I say to the hon. Member for Beaconsfield that it is relatively easy to place people with doctorates and degrees in jobs. As unemployment reduces, we must find work for those who are more difficult to place. We are determined to find work for lone parents, for those with disabilities, for all people. Only a Labour Government will do that. Thank goodness, there will be a Labour Government for the foreseeable future.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The fight is over.

**Mr. Brady:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** No points of order can be made now. We must move to the next debate.

## Child Sex Trafficking (West Sussex Social Services)

11 am

**Mr. Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): I am pleased to have secured this debate after many weeks of trying in the ballot. Over the past five years, the problem of child sex trafficking has reared its ugly head in West Sussex, largely because of the location of Gatwick airport—this is often forgotten—in what is a predominantly rural county. However, it is a problem that could spread to the rest of the United Kingdom. I hope that you will forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I speak at some length about the background, because it is a complicated issue.

As I see it, the problem is threefold. First, it reveals a serious loophole in the law. Police have been powerless to bring convictions against international traffickers in human beings, which is what this amounts to. In the eyes of the Foreign Secretary, it should contain a Government health warning, because it touches on the problem of asylum, an issue that dare not speak its name for the duration of the run-up to the general election, at least in the view of the Commission for Racial Equality and various Ministers. However, I make no apology for mentioning it today, given the direct threat that the inadequacy and failure of the present system poses to the lives and well-being of scores of young women from west Africa who arrive in West Sussex.

Secondly, it is a problem that needs the involvement of the Foreign Office, the Department for International Development and International Social Service, in taking preventive action to protect young women embarking on the perilous journeys from their families in Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

Thirdly, and more pertinently to my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), who is present, the problem has made an impact on the county of West Sussex, particularly, unwittingly, on the social services department of our county council. I pay tribute to West Sussex social services department, which has devoted significant resources and time to the problem, in collaboration with other agencies, particularly Sussex police. However, it is costing West Sussex social services department £1 million a year—a cost that that department can ill afford, given the many pressures on its budget due to the fact that our county has a larger number of pensioners than any other in the country. That is a nice problem to have, but it places additional financial pressures on social services and on the national health service.

I am glad that the Minister of State, Department of Health is responding to the debate, as I know that he is acquainted with the problem, having been to Chichester to speak to West Sussex social services officials and councillors. Colleagues from West Sussex will want to participate in the debate on behalf of all our constituents so that we can talk about the pressure being experienced by the social services department.

Recently, we have heard much about suspected child slave trade ships in west Africa. The Nigerian ship, the Etireno, sailing from Benin, was the focus of a big press story last week. Fortunately, it turned out not to have the dire consequences that had been feared for the future

of the young children involved. There has been a lot of publicity about the so-called chocolate slaves on the Ivory Coast, who cause much anguish in that part of west Africa, and about the young women trapped in the sex trade in the United Kingdom and on the continent, who come from eastern Europe in particular. Today's papers report police raids on various houses in Southampton over the past few days, where the deputy chief constable said that people trafficking is now second only to drugs as a major problem in the county. I am sure that that also applies in other parts of the United Kingdom. In West Sussex, we have seen what I can only describe as a modern-day example of the slave trade—an especially grotesque version that is unacceptable in this day and age.

Since 1990, 479 child asylum seekers have arrived at Gatwick airport in West Sussex and been placed in the care of West Sussex social services. Since 1995, 64 of those children have gone missing. Forty of them are young women who travelled from Nigeria—most are Nigerians, although some are from Sierra Leone. Strong evidence shows that they end up as prostitutes in northern Italy, predominantly in Turin. West Sussex social services became aware of the pattern of disappearing minors in 1997, the rate of which increased 50 per cent. year-on-year until the end of last year.

I pay tribute to the officers of West Sussex social services, especially the child asylum team officers such as Lynne Chitty, who have worked on the problem for some while. They are devoted to helping the young women, and provide a rapid response team at Gatwick airport to deal with the girls when they first arrive. I also pay tribute to the work of the dedicated colleagues in social services, in the children's homes where some of the girls are taken and the foster parents with whom some of them are placed.

A BBC "Southern Eye" documentary called "Lost Girls", which recounted some of the girls' stories, helped to raise the profile of this much-neglected issue a few months ago. Nigerian girls as young as 12 leave their families because they are abducted or to seek better prospects abroad. In some cases, the girls' families sell them to traffickers so that the girls can raise money from working overseas.

Once in the hands of the criminal traffickers, the girls are subjected to hideous voodoo rituals. One girl, who was traced to Italy by social services and police, revealed some of the details. Girls are subjected to macabre voodoo ceremonies involving up to 50 cuts about their bodies with razor blades. Things are placed beneath their skin, or so they feel. They can be taken into a room where there are human heads on spikes, and forced to drink the blood of dead women. In fear of their lives they are forced to do what they are told by the orchestrators of those evil practices and forced not to tell anyone about what is going on.

In the hands of the international pimps—the only way to describe them—the girls are flown to Gatwick airport, provided with false passports and given a story in order to claim political asylum. The teenagers are often dressed in the same clothes, have similar luggage, and a similar script from which to quote. In some cases, they arrive with one of the pimp's henchmen who claims to be a parent or guardian. In fear of their lives, the girls dare not deny that.

Some girls are under the impression that a better life awaits them—some expect to get jobs in supermarkets that will enable them to send money back to their families in Nigeria. Some have a slightly better idea of what insalubrious fate awaits them, but fear the consequences of what will happen if they do not go along with the traffickers who profit from this trade in human beings.

If the girls are under 18, they become the responsibility of the social services department, and are placed by West Sussex social services either in children's homes or with foster parents, some of whom are my constituents. As I said, some of the girls are only 12 years old.

In a matter of days in some cases, or up to four-and-a-half months in others, despite the best endeavours of social services, 40 of the girls disappeared, often in the dead of night or at gunpoint, picked up on the beach. Under the Children Act 1989, it is not an option to detain girls in secure accommodation, which might solve the problem. They are therefore free to go whenever they like—although they are obviously vulnerable to the evil men who are cajoling them to go on to terrible things. Most of the traffickers come down from London. There is evidence that, via the port of Dover, they cross to Belgium and then go on to Turin. Once in Turin, the girls are sold on to madams for a large fee and face a life of prostitution.

By that stage, a lot has been invested in the business. The traffickers will have paid for flights and travel, they may have paid fees to the parents and they might have paid for false documents. In many cases, they will have had to bribe immigration officials in Nigeria. The girls are therefore told that a lot of money will be required if they want to buy their freedom. In some cases, that has amounted to up to £38,000—an enormous sum that they have no hope of raising. In fear of their lives from the voodoo curses that they think have been placed on them if they do not obey instructions, and in fear of their lives because a large price hangs over their heads if they do not do what they are told, they are reduced to a life of prostitution in northern Italy. Few return; many are subjected to beatings, and at least seven prostitutes from Africa have been murdered in Turin during the past few years.

As I said, it is a modern version of the slave trade coupled with a grotesque modern version of the sex trade, which is wholly unacceptable. What is being done about that, and why is it happening? First, why are the girls not taken directly to their end destination in Italy? The Italians made their asylum-seeker laws somewhat tougher some years ago, and the United Kingdom is seen as the soft touch to bring the girls into Europe. Gatwick airport has been alighted upon as a suitable disembarkation point. The United Kingdom is seen as a soft touch by international criminals trafficking in human beings—profiting from human beings—so the problem comes to the United Kingdom, and specifically to west Sussex.

As I said, the police have been heavily involved with the problem; they have worked closely with social services and immigration authorities. A pattern of such abductions was established back in 1996, and operation Newbridge was set up by the Sussex police. They spent two years intensively investigating the matter and gathering evidence. They sent officers to Italy, liaising

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with the National Crime Squad and police forces on the continent. I pay special tribute to Superintendent David Gaylor and his team from Sussex police, who headed that investigation and who feel passionately that something must be done. Those policemen tracked down some of the girls and heard their stories, the accounts of which have formed part of my speech. In one case, they actually stopped an abductor in the process of taking a girl abroad at a port but nothing could be done within the law to prevent them leaving. They have raided houses in the county and found hair samples connected with voodoo ceremonies; they have collected a lot of evidence, but no criminal convictions have been obtained.

The National Crime Squad operation, Operation Egypt, which took place after operation Newbridge, was concluded last July as a result of the Crown Prosecution Service not supporting a prosecution against one of the trafficking suspects due to lack of appropriate legislation. Amazingly, strictly speaking it is not illegal to traffic in humans if they are apparently compliant—as the girls are, because they are in fear of their lives if they do not say what they have been told to say. If those criminals were trafficking drugs, a whole host of laws could be brought to bear upon them, and they would hopefully be in jail. Due to a loophole in the law, the fact that they are trafficking human beings means that they escape conviction. That is an obscene and strange anomaly in our legal system. The police are more frustrated than anyone, and have made many complaints about the weaknesses in the law. Superintendent Gaylor points out that we appear at present to have little contact with the girls' country of origin, despite the fact that there is clear evidence of corruption among airport officials in Nigeria.

Immigration authorities have sent staff to Lagos to identify potentially trafficked girls, and for a short while that resulted in a reduction in the number of those arriving at our airport. However, that was not sustainable, and staff who were sent over were subject to intimidation and threats, so the sending of such staff stopped.

The police will say that we must update legislation and review immigration regulations in order to frustrate the traffickers and protect the young women. The acts that we would consider to be offences are not sufficiently covered by the Sexual Offences Act 1956. Any changes must be joined up internationally to take such offences into account. In this case, the offence begins in west Africa, moves through the UK and ends up in Europe. That is the complexity of the crime.

West Sussex needs national help and Sussex police require more support from the Home Office. So far, the Home Office has declined to take any action, and that has only hindered local investigations. The Home Office has been cautious about attempts to identify the girls who have gone missing and to produce publicity, because it feels that that may endanger the girls further.

Following the BBC programme, I wrote at length to the Home Secretary on 12 March. I am still awaiting a reply. The Home Office's attitude to Sussex police is that this is not their problem. However, it is a problem for us all and a moral issue that concerns us all, especially those of us who are close to the problem in West Sussex. The Government must, and should, be seen to take direct action on the matter, and the Home Office is falling parlously short of taking such action.

We must examine the experiences of other countries, particularly Australia, which introduced the Criminal Code Amendment (Slavery and Sexual Servitude) Act 1999. That contains new federal offences directed at slavery, sexual servitude and deceptive recruiting. The legislation contained flaws, particularly the reliance on witnesses' willingness to testify, and in this specific case, that is a problem because the girls dare not say anything.

There is a suggestion from Sussex police that that the facilitation of removal or exit from the United Kingdom of children who have sought political asylum, or the accompaniment of such a child, should be made a criminal offence. If there were such a law, action could be taken at the point of exit—the port of Dover or wherever—when the abductors were taking the young women to the continent.

There is no specific law against trafficking people into the UK, but those who traffic and sexually exploit women are breaking a large number of laws. Technically, however, that is not happening in West Sussex. Superintendent Gaylor recently said:

"We feel neutered and disempowered."

I wholly agree with his frustration.

The other side of the matter relates to the Foreign Secretary. I also wrote to him on 12 March, and I am glad that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is keener to take the matter seriously than the Home Office. The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), replied to me and said that the FCO is aware of the problem and is liaising with the Nigerian authorities. That is a good start, and I wish to see practical results from it. However, the Minister also said that the UK is signed up to the United Nations convention against transnational organised crime, and that Nigeria has signed up to many conventions. However, the acts are still happening, because too many people in Nigeria are turning a blind eye, and too many people are profiting from the criminal trade.

We also need closer liaison with Nigerian social services so that they take the matter seriously. We must link overseas aid programmes that exist between Britain and Nigeria in order to address the problem, which is of immense common interest to Nigeria and the UK. We must stop it happening at source in the first instance, and keep the girls safe with their families, where they belong.

We must also utilise the media in Nigeria to show that prostitution is not a way out of poverty. If families were really aware of the true fate of their children, they would do more to prevent them from leaving the country. In some cases, there is evidence that families are selling their daughters into the ghastly business.

We also need help from the High Commissioner in London. We must use International Social Service, an organisation that has been around since 1924. It has 146 branches throughout the world. It is a transnational social and criminal problem and such an organisation should do something about it. We must stop the problem at source to ensure that the girls are safe in

Nigeria and stay there with their families. We want those girls who are obviously not genuine asylum seekers, although they are tutored to claim political asylum when they arrive, to be returned to Nigeria to live with their families in safety. We must ensure that there is a safe haven for them. As long as they are not in danger, that is the best place for them to be. We need to work internationally with the social services organisations, with the Nigerian Government and the overseas development industry to ensure that they are safe. They would like to return to Nigeria, but we must stop them embarking on the planes in that country in the first place.

**Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): I thank the hon. Gentleman for introducing such a debate. What he has told us is extraordinary. I am linking the problem with the so-called cocoa slaves and the slave ship that left Nigeria. Has the hon. Gentleman contacted UNICEF? In respect of the cocoa slaves, it was curious that UNICEF appeared to know about the children. It thought that the children were on the ship, but nothing else has happened or has been done. Is the problem not something with which the United Nations organisations should be concerned?

**Mr. Loughton:** I agree with the hon. Lady. Before she came into the Chamber, I referred to those whom I believe are called the chocolate slaves. It is a problem that hit the press recently and is one with which UN organisations and International Social Service should be involved. West Sussex social services has liaised with such organisations and other agencies. I have not done so personally, but I know that social services has been exhaustive in working with people to deal with the problem. The hon. Lady is right about which organisation should be dealing with it.

I realise that I have taken up a lot of time, but this is a complex issue, the details of which I want to put firmly on the record before the Minister and others respond to my remarks. This terrible business is an unfair and uncalled for burden on West Sussex social services because it is happening through Gatwick airport. I pay tribute to the excellent work of the social services department; to John Dixon, the director of West Sussex social services, who raised the problem with West Sussex Members of Parliament some time ago; to Councillor Barry Mack, who has been a most exceptional chairman of the social services committee over the past four years and to the child asylum team, especially Lynne Chitty, who feels passionately about the girls. She said recently:

"I can't believe how brave they are. They arrive here, they don't even know where they are. They deserve to be safe, to be cared for. They are children."

We have a moral duty to stamp out such abuse and to care for the girls. The problem is adding to the already intolerable pressures on West Sussex social services. It is costing about £1 million per year from its budget. West Sussex is acting as an unwitting warehouse for what is an international criminal trade in human suffering. The Minister knows the problem; he has recognised it on his visits to West Sussex, although with due regard to him, the financial compensation that has been forthcoming is woefully inadequate. He well knows the demographics of our county. He knows that a quarter of the population, and rising, of West Sussex is of pensionable age against 18 per cent. of the population nationally. He knows that the number of over-75s in West Sussex is increasing by 1 per cent. each year. He knows that 32 per cent. of my constituents are of pensionable age. In Chichester, the figure is a third; in west Worthing, it is the highest in the country, at 47 per cent.

There are big pressures on social services accommodation in our county and on the availability and cost of home helps. There are staff shortages and extra cost factors associated with employment and living expenses in the south-east. The Minister will also know about the particular pressures that feed through to the local health service because of the elderly population. That is why, in spite of the fact that Worthing hospital is an excellent hospital with dedicated staff and in spite of the Government's paranoia about setting targets rather than achieving results, we now have the seventh longest waiting times of any hospital trust out of the 259 in England and Wales. The average waiting time has worsened by around a quarter over the past four years. That is intrinsically connected with the problems of the extra costs posed by an older population. A recent letter from the chairmen of social services from the counties of West Sussex, Kent and Surrey stated:

"The situation in most authorities has now reached crisis proportions with care homes closing at an alarming rate, staff vacancies rising sharply and ever increasing numbers of older people being denied the care that they desperately need."

Local authorities provided on average 9 per cent. more than the standard spending assessment for their social services departments in the financial year 2000-01. That figure is forecast to increase to 11 per cent. more than the SSA in 2001-02, the current year. However, those authorities are not being profligate. They have been required to achieve 2 per cent. annual efficiency savings.

The Local Government Association, together with the Society of County Treasurers, the Society of Municipal Treasurers and the Association of Directors of Social Services, carried out a survey. Of 150 local authorities, 146 responded. Of those, 85 per cent. said that in the current year they will overspend in their social services budget. More interestingly for this debate, 64 per cent. said that children's services were the most under pressure.

The biggest problem is in children's services. In West Sussex, the pressure is compounded by child asylum seekers, on which we are second only to Kent. In West Sussex, the number of children being looked after has increased by 15 per cent. over the past year.

The Minister complimented the children's services provided by West Sussex. He knows what a great job our social services department does in almost impossible circumstances. That has been achieved at a cost—a great cost, because West Sussex now spends 10 per cent. more than its SSA on social services. In the past four years, the increase in service demands on West Sussex social services has cost us £48.8 million, but the increase in Government funding has been just £22.8 million. Over the past four years there has therefore been a shortfall in Government funding for social services of £26 million.

West Sussex realises that social services are a priority. By taking from other services and increasing council tax much more than we would have liked, it has agreed an

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£11 billion increase in this year's budget—£4 million more than we were allotted. This year we needed £12 million extra from the Government for social services in order to stand still and provide all the services that the authority currently provides and all the additional services that the Government require it to provide. In fact, we received £7 million, a shortfall of almost £5 million.

The Minister will no doubt cite in response Government grants for West Sussex and other, similar authorities. However, such grants are predominantly directed at new responsibilities and are intended to relieve pressure, supposedly, on health, especially winter pressures and mental health, and for children leaving care.

Demands on social services in West Sussex and in many other authorities throughout the country are at breaking point. Raiding the budgets of other departments or excessive increases in council tax are unsustainable measures. Nevertheless, West Sussex is doing an outstanding job in difficult circumstances. It is doing what the Government require of it and has also made efficiency savings of £14.3 million over the past four years.

The recent suggestion in the press that the Government may abolish the area cost adjustment—one of the few measures that recognises, although inadequately, those extra pressures—fills my county's social services department with absolute horror. That is one of the few measures that compensates for the extra pressures that we face.

I ask the Minister to recognise the state of social services in West Sussex, and to consider providing serious extra financial support for the specific problem of trafficking in children, in which West Sussex is playing an unwitting role as the warehouse for international criminals—a role that contributes £1 million to the cost of running social services.

Plainly, the law needs to be changed; we have a moral and international duty to stamp out that horrible business. It is absurd that we could catch criminals if they trafficked in drugs but cannot touch them because they are trafficking in human beings in those bizarre circumstances. That is an especially sinister abuse of the asylum system that again underlines the weakness of the United Kingdom regime and how we are seen by the international criminal fraternity as a soft touch. That obscene trade, which has no place in this century or the previous one, is profiting from that weakness. It is not fair or right that West Sussex has to bear the brunt of that.

There is one bit of good news, which is that so far this year, none of the girls in the care of West Sussex social services has been abducted. Long may that continue. I hope that raising the profile of the issue, as the media, West Sussex county council, Sussex police, colleagues from the county and I have done during recent months, has helped to get the message across to those criminals that we are on to them and will not tolerate such abuse of the system in our county. However, the risk remains that they may set up that obscene trade elsewhere in the United Kingdom—there is no reason why they could not do so. We must be aware of the problem across the country, not just in West Sussex. We need concerted help from the Home Office, the Foreign Office, the Secretary of State for International Development and, today, from the Minister responsible for social services, to prevent it in future. It is a truly complex problem that requires a properly joined-up approach from all those Departments to solve it. I hope that the Minister will recognise the seriousness of the issue and give those people working tirelessly within West Sussex social services and Sussex police some ray of hope that the problem will be addressed and will not rear its ugly head again in the future.

11.32 am

**Mr. Howard Flight** (Arundel and South Downs): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) on securing the debate. It is disgraceful that the problem should be occurring in this country in the 21st century and disappointing that the Home Office, in particular—although the problem covers the territory of other Departments—has declined to give attention and assistance to solve it. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, at the root of the problem is the need to change the law because the police, while aware of the problem and the culprits, have been unable to address the issue. I hope that the full airing of the facts given by my hon. Friend will cause the issue to be properly addressed.

I shall focus on the knock-on effects of the general underfunding of social services in West Sussex and especially of the increased child care obligations—although in many ways it is meaningless to separate the territory, much of the extra expense has been on child care. I repeat the tributes that have been paid to Councillor Barry Mack, the chairman of the social services committee, who has done a model job for the rest of the country, tackling major problems with inadequate resources, to John Dixon, the head of the department of social services in West Sussex, and to Lynne Chitty for her work on the particular problem of these poor girls. All three have played important roles in these problematic areas.

Social services funding fell by 7 per cent. in real terms in the six years from 1993-99. There has been a significant transfer of extra responsibilities from central Government to local government, especially in the area of child care, without the resources to finance it. There have been impressive efficiency savings, particularly in West Sussex, and transfers from other sources of funding. Part of the greater-than-desirable increase in council tax has gone to finance extra social services requirements.

In the past three years, however, services that formed part of the necessary care of the elderly in West Sussex and other local authorities have had to be withdrawn. The evidence is there to see. Residential homes are closing, which has a knock-on effect on acute hospitals and causes bed blocking. The Government have financed less than half the additional social security responsibilities placed on local authorities.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham referred to the detailed report and survey undertaken by the Association of Directors of Social Services, the Local Government Association and the societies of county and municipal treasurers. Some

146 of the 150 local authorities approached responded to that survey. The report shows that although local authorities provide, on average, 9 per cent. more than the standard spending assessment, the average overspend continues at 2.1 per cent. For the current year, the effective subsidy required by local authorities as a result of the absence of central funding will rise to 11 per cent., and that comes after 2 per cent. efficiency savings. Some 85 per cent. of local authorities expect to be forced to overspend.

As a result of the extremely effective reorganisation undertaken by Councillor Barry Mack and John Dixon, West Sussex has made savings of £40 million over the past three years in terms of improved efficiency, but that has gone nowhere near far enough to match the additional burdens that the authority is required to finance. The survey also showed that most social security departments are restructuring and withdrawing services again, particularly for the elderly.

In the first three-year settlement in 1998, large sums were effectively taken away from many social services departments, particularly in the south—where, as my hon. Friend pointed out, we have the particular problem of an ageing population—and transferred to other authorities, particularly in the north. The Government have funded West Sussex social services for less than half its extra responsibilities. In addition, the human trafficking tragedy has resulted in costs of £1 million being incurred.

Other social services departments have similar problems. The survey shows that 64 per cent. of local authorities are having to overspend, particularly on child care services. There is tangible evidence of all that.

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton):** I have listened carefully to the hon. Gentleman's arguments. He said that the Government have funded West Sussex for only half the extra statutory responsibilities that the authority has been given in relation to social services. I am completely lost as to what he is talking about. For the benefit of the Chamber, will he describe what he thinks those extra social services responsibilities are?

**Mr. Flight:** The additional responsibilities, to which I will come later, are largely in the area of child care. The Minister has the report from the Local Government Association and the societies of county and municipal treasurers, which sets out the territory. However, if the Minister will be patient, I shall focus towards the end of my remarks on particular additional responsibilities that have been imposed and answer his question specifically.

The Department of Health has said that it expects local authorities to develop new intermediate care services using funding included in next year's SSA and part of the £900 million that was announced for the purpose in the national health plan. From the available information, that represents about £110 million nationally from the SSA and £1.5 million specifically for West Sussex. There has been a reduction in the base promoting independence grant and there are new funding responsibilities in capital threshold, amounting to £18,500. The disregard of property for three months and responsibilities for top-up, preserved rights and residential care will cost another £1.2 million. There have been pressures for modernisation, including investment in IT and other infrastructure, but there has not been adequate funding through specific grants.

**Mr. Hutton:** Those are not new statutory responsibilities, which is how the hon. Gentleman described them. All those additional financial obligations, which we have required local authorities to meet next year, have been fully funded through their SSA or specific grants.

**Mr. Flight:** I do not think that the Minister's assertion is correct. He will be aware of strident correspondence between his Department and West Sussex social services on the issue. It is playing with words to ask whether "new" and "additional" mean the same thing. I accept the concept that the obligations are additional rather than new, but 15 per cent. of the children involved are new and need to be cared for, and there is no extra money for them. However, I shall pull out the argument later, rather than citing the individual facts in specific responses.

Generally, on an entirely non-party political level, I am asking the Minister to listen to what the experts on the ground are saying. They are not making things up and do not seek to make political points. They are suffering an acute underfunding problem. Detailed figures have been produced, and I ask him to go through them, to go again to West Sussex and to understand clearly what people are saying. It is technical territory, as he is well aware. However, the reality of what people are saying is there to be witnessed.

To return to the general points, let me say that there is tangible evidence in other areas of rising vacancies for social workers, which is due in part to low pay and in part to the stress of the job. In addition, the number of residential nursing homes that provide home beds is collapsing, in part because social services cannot afford to pay economic rates and in part because of the additional regulatory burdens that are imposed on private sector home care, which results in the withdrawal of facilities.

The fabric of social care is in danger of breaking down with a potentially costly impact on acute services, in particular as regards bed blocking. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham commented, it would be an extreme problem for us if the Government were intent on scrapping the area cost adjustment.

Since 1997, West Sussex social security essential requirements have increased by £49 million. Government funding towards that has increased by £23 million. Key measures and key problems have resulted from the 15 per cent. increase to which I referred in the number of children being looked after. There is also a 1 per cent. compounding increase in the number of people over 75 to be looked after.

On the national health front, additional tasks are required in terms of social services care in liaison with the national health service and the Department of Health. The local authority is expected to develop new partnership services. Cost efficiency savings of some £5 million have been contributed by West Sussex. In addition, as a result of the lack of central funding, the

*[Mr. Flight]*

subsidy from West Sussex county council has increased by 10 per cent., amounting to £10 million. For 2001-02, the figure worsens by a further £5 million. An extra £12 million is needed, but only an extra £7 million is being provided.

The most serious evidence of central underfunding is the rationing of services and its impact on the elderly. Those problems have been compounded by the difficulties experienced by private sector care homes as a result of the heavy-handed imposition of minimum regulatory standards. Many private sector homes have closed, causing a major loss of capacity, which has increased the burden on the local authority and acute hospitals. The lack of care facilities for the frail and elderly is becoming a serjous problem in West Sussex. The Government are now proposing—desirably—full nursing care facilities for the elderly, but they have failed to make clear how that will be funded, or to say how a distinction will be drawn between nursing care that is funded and other aspects of personal care for the elderly.

The Government are supposed to be caring for social needs. It is unacceptable that funding for the elderly and the young should be inadequate, and that fundamental problems should be worsened by the fact that the local authority has been left to deal with the specific problem of human trafficking. There is some element of pork-barrel politics in transferring money from the north to the south, but the real issue is the need to provide adequate finance for a growing elderly population and for considerable growth in child care requirements.

I conclude by asking the Minister, first, to recognise the problem of human trafficking and, secondly, to go back to West Sussex and go through the figures, so that he will recognise that there is inadequate central funding for the growing requirements of local authorities in providing social services care.

11.47 am

**Sandra Gidley** (Romsey): I congratulate the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) on securing the debate. I must admit that when I was preparing for the debate, I wondered why it was a health matter, because, as has been outlined, it is a multi-departmental issue. I have been somewhat horrified to find that the very important subject of the trafficking of young girls has been superseded, to some extent, by party political broadcast and diatribe against the Government's funding of social services.

I am not here to stick up for the Government. I have slightly more respect for the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), who was honest when he said that the funding problem stemmed from 1993. Obviously, the blame cannot be laid completely at the door of one Government, so it is a shame that the debate has been used to make political points.

**Mr. Loughton:** That is slightly unfair. The first 80 per cent. of my speech related entirely to the problem of trafficking. The debate was brought home specifically to West Sussex because the problem, in this form, is unique to the area. It compounds a problem of which the Minister is only too well aware. It is entirely fair, and there is nothing party political about it. The problem is happening as we speak.

**Sandra Gidley:** I agree that the hon. Gentleman spent a good deal of time on the issue, but I still feel that the overall debate so far has been too heavily weighted towards the issue of social services funding. There are problems with social services funding, but this is not the time to discuss them.

I wish that the point about our being a soft touch for asylum seekers had not been made. Britain is not a particularly soft touch. On the radio this morning, evidence was provided for our being at exactly the same place in the league for numbers of asylum seekers entering the country as we were four years ago. It is a shame that another chance of a cheap political point has been taken.

**Dr. Tonge:** Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not being a very soft touch to receive unaccompanied, sometimes very young, children at a port of entry and to see that they are properly cared for and handed to social services?

**Sandra Gidley:** I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention, because I wanted next to refer to people who have been referred to as young women, whereas in fact the vast majority of those asylum seekers are children. I hope that I speak for everyone in the Chamber in wishing that those asylum seekers had stayed in this country. I hope that I shall never be quoted out of context on that point. The disappearance of those children means that they have had to go on to a life that no one here would wish for anyone.

The current state of affairs is a problem for West Sussex county council, which I congratulate on its thorough approach. Other councils may have similar problems, of which we are unaware, and may not have delved into them in such depth.

I pay particular tribute to Lynne Chitty. An article in *Guardian Unlimited* states:

"She and her family have been threatened. Disturbingly, half a dozen of the young people fitting the "profile" are working with the gangs, corrupted by money and power. Chitty knows, and they"—

the gangs—

"know she knows."

It is rare today for people to be so positive, and so determined to do something about a problem, that they put themselves and their families in danger.

The problem of trafficking generally is discussed by the Home Office in the document "Setting the Boundaries: Reforming the Law on Sex Offences". That document cites UK research estimating that between 142 and 1,420 women a year were trafficked into the United Kingdom to work in the sex industry. I consulted a wealth of newspaper cuttings before the debate and I would be surprised if the figure were not even higher. The problem is huge and it is up to all Departments to do something about it.

As has been mentioned, there is no specific law against trafficking, but relevant offences exist under a range of different laws. It has already been pointed out that it is

difficult to get convictions and we should note that, on conviction, sentences are low—commonly 18 months. That is nothing if a large, international criminal organisation is involved. The law has few effective provisions on pimping or sexual exploitation of children, so there is a huge problem that needs to be tackled at several levels.

My worry is about how we can be sure that the problem affects only West Sussex. Yesterday in Southampton, a huge police exercise uncovered not asylum seekers but a great many illegal immigrants. I do not know whether there could have been, among that number of people, young children who disappeared. Social services simply did not know about those people and would not have been able to help. I believe that the problem is larger than has been highlighted. I should like the Minister to give an undertaking that he will liaise with the Home Office and the Foreign Office, because the problem should be attacked on a number of levels. The Home Office should look at the legislation, which can be done fairly soon under "Setting the Boundaries—Reforming the Law on Sex Offences", and the Foreign Office needs to consider how public information can be developed in countries such as Nigeria, because young people do not know what it is that they are coming to.

In those countries, people approach girls from poor families with the promise of good jobs. The girls think that they are coming here to be maids, or even to reach the dizzy heights of a supermarket worker, and their families think that they are going to a safe place in a good country where they will have a good life. They do not know what their children are coming to. We need to ensure that that does not continue. We have an international responsibility, and I hope that the Minister will take a lead in co-ordinating our response.

11.56 am

**Mrs. Caroline Spelman** (Meriden): This is a grave subject and it is good that we should debate it in Westminster Hall. All who have listened are grateful that my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) has managed to secure the debate, although horrified by what we have heard. The subject is clearly cross-departmental. As I was preparing for the debate, I was all too aware, as the Minister must be, that a range of departmental Ministers should be here because, if the problem is to be tackled effectively, they need to work together. There is no room for party politics in dealing with it. It is an appalling situation, and our country is on the butt of it. It is an iniquitous trade, unacceptable in this day and age, and we need to act effectively together to stop it.

It is important to place it in the context of social services because the authorities in certain counties, purely because of their location, are particularly affected. It is a problem for Kent, which bears a particular burden, and for West Sussex. Perhaps it is not such a problem for the Minister's constituency or for mine, but that could change. With an airport in one's constituency one might well find that one has the gateway to this kind of trade.

**Dr. Tonge:** It is a problem for my constituency, although not on the scale suffered by West Sussex. We are close to Heathrow and our social services budget has had to stretch to cater for an enormous number of unaccompanied children.

**Mrs. Spelman:** I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. She demonstrates the point of having the debate. Circumstances are placing a burden on certain local authorities and the Government should respond for the sake of everyone—for the unfortunate women and children who are being brought in illegally and for those suffering the knock-on effect, whose services may be adversely affected, particularly the elderly of whom there are so many in West Sussex and in Kent. The logic is irrefutable. We are not dealing with hearsay. There is a clear pattern of trade. I invite the Minister to consider why Britain has been chosen as the gateway for a clearly established route of illegal trade that leads to Italy.

The shocking fact is that 2,500 young Nigerians are estimated to be working in prostitution in Turin. Sadly, Italy has turned into a capital destination for this trade.

**Sandra Gidley:** Will the hon. Lady give way?

**Mrs. Spelman:** I should like to proceed. We want to hear from the Minister, and the hon. Lady has had the opportunity to make her intervention. Our borders are not contiguous with Italy. If I were a criminal involved in this trade, why would I choose to come through Britain? It would make a great deal more sense, geographically, to go for a country whose border is contiguous with Italy.

It is difficult to get away from the common sense that tells us all that Britain is chosen because it is easier to enter.

**Sandra Gidley** rose—

**Mrs. Spelman:** No, I will not give way. Such a fact needs to be addressed urgently and internationally. The route for the girls is through the gateway at Gatwick, through Belgium—for some reason, which needs to be established—and on to Italy. There is a clear case to work together and to shut down that route. The problem starts through a gateway in this country and the Government cannot ignore that fact.

The television documentary, "Lost Girls", which I urge the Minister to watch if he has not already had the opportunity to do so, shows clearly the intense frustration of West Sussex social services. Its officers work in the rapid response team at Gatwick with immigration officials, but find repeatedly that no effective legal instrument exists to tackle the problem. An example is shown of the rapid response team being alerted to a woman entering Gatwick with an 11-year-old child, who she claims is her daughter. Social services knew that the woman had entered the country months earlier with other children of similar age. However, the law is so weak on that point that, unless the 11-year-old denied that the woman was her mother, there was nothing that the immigration official could do. It is obvious to all of us that there needs urgently to be a change in the law. I accept that such a change applies to the Home Office, but perhaps the Minister can bring his influence to bear on a Department that so far seems not to be listening clearly to the voice of real concern that has been raised by my colleagues in West Sussex.

*[Mrs. Spelman]*

The Minister should not underestimate the spiritual aspects of such cases. The girls really believe that they will die if they break their promises to the traffickers. As the documentary showed, it takes specialist counselling resources to help to tackle the beliefs of such young women, rather than the everyday resources of social services departments. I invite him to consider the cost of protecting the women in foster care and the patent failure to do that effectively. As far as we know, 40 young women have disappeared. The resources currently put into the protection process could be used more effectively if the Government were prepared to consider more secure accommodation for them.

Will the Minister think of the foster parents, for example? The documentary highlighted a case of a foster family who have twice had a young woman abducted from their home. It is clear that there is inadequate protection. If 40 young British women were abducted from foster homes in a local authority area, it would be a scandal and the problem would be tackled. Why are such vulnerable young African women offered such inadequate protection?

I know that the Minister has been to West Sussex. I commend him for that. He has heard evidence at first hand from those who are under pressure in social services. However, the assistance that has been offered to West Sussex social services is inadequate. That is why I support the request of my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham. Kent and West Sussex are in a special position that requires particular attention because of the extra burden that they have to bear. If he or I had Gatwick airport in our constituency, with such clear evidence of such an iniquitous trade in young woman and such patent evidence of failure to protect them adequately, we would be asking no less of the Government. I urge him to respond specifically to the problems that face West Sussex social services.

12.4 pm

**The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton):** I congratulate the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton), not only on securing this debate but on many of his points, with which all hon. Members would find it difficult to disagree. I especially agree with him that such exploitation of young people is a loathsome trade—it exploits the innocence and vulnerability of young people, which is deplorable, but it also strips them of their childhood, which is unforgivable. We need to tackle that evil trade, and I shall try to set out as clearly as possible the ways in which we are trying to do so.

I agree strongly with much of what the hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) said about the need to address the problem not just as a social services responsibility—although, clearly, social services departments are in the front line—but as part of a co-ordinated programme of work across Governments and between Governments, which is an important element of tackling the problem. Unfortunately, it is not a new trade, and we are aware of certain patterns of development in the trade that we need to tackle. I hope to reassure her and other hon. Members about some of the measures that are being taken to tackle the problems that have been mentioned.

Hon. Members who contributed to the debate also commented on the financing of social services departments. I want to correct some inaccuracies, which were especially apparent in the contributions of the hon. Members for East Worthing and Shoreham and for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), about the Government's record on social services funding. I am afraid that some of their statements in that regard were simply not true.

I was surprised by what the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) said about enhancing the security and well-being of children who come to this country as asylum seekers by detaining them in secure accommodation. I was taken aback that she was asking us to do that—but perhaps that was not what she was saying. I am aware that the Conservative party's policy is that asylum seekers should be detained in detention centres, but I did not realise that that applied to children, too. Will she clarify that position?

**Mrs. Spelman:** I should be happy to do so. It is clear that 40 young women have disappeared from foster homes. If they had been in secure reception centres, which might have the specialist skills to counsel them on spiritual aspects, they would have been safer.

**Mr. Hutton:** It seems that the hon. Lady is saying that young children who come as asylum seekers should all be detained in detention centres, which is not what I understood the Conservative position to be. That is an interesting issue, to which I am sure we shall return. If she is concerned about English children who might be vulnerable to such risks, presumably the same logic would apply to English children in care. Does she also want to clarify that position?

**Mrs. Spelman:** I think that the Minister would accept that, currently, there is a clear trade from Nigeria, through Britain, to Italy. Given the number of abductions, there is a special case for providing secure accommodation and appropriate counselling support to those young women, who are clearly not safe enough at present. There is a specific trade from west Africa to the continent of Europe.

**Mr. Hutton:** Yes, that is certainly the case. I want to say something about how West Sussex is dealing with those problems, which the hon. Lady and other hon. Members have identified. I take it that she is saying that young children who come here seeking asylum should be detained in detention centres—

**Mr. Loughton:** If there were secure reception centres, in which those children could be securely accommodated and helped with the various problems identified by my hon. Friend, does the Minister think that the trade would still be happening in this country, and if it were still happening, would those children be more at risk of being abducted? Surely he would agree that if such reception centres were introduced, the trade would disappear overnight.

**Mr. Hutton:** I agree that there is a strong case for looking at the security and well-being of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in this country. However, I am not sure that the solution, on

which the hon. Members have apparently agreed, is to build secure detention centres and keep young people, indefinitely, in those types of environments. If he is not saying that young children should be kept indefinitely in detention centres, he and I can probably agree that the best way to deal with those problems is to consider the security arrangements that apply to young people coming into care. I do not agree that the right way forward is to build new detention centres—

**Mrs. Spelman:** That is not what we said.

**Mr. Hutton:** It is what the hon. Members have been saying. It is the wrong thing to do.

**Mr. Loughton** *rose—*

**Mr. Hutton:** I will not give way again because I want to make further progress on the other issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

We must always keep in mind the children's welfare and well-being. The solutions that the hon. Gentleman and others have proposed would require changes in primary legislation, and I do not think that that is the best way to proceed. However, I accept that he has raised genuine concerns and I will try to address some of them.

The hon. Gentleman correctly made the link between child trafficking and young people in the care of West Sussex county council. West Sussex social services became aware of the pattern of young people going missing in 1997, and it was the first local authority to draw attention to the issue. It has long been a receiving authority for a significant number of asylum seekers, because of Gatwick airport. However, his statement that West Sussex is second only to Kent in terms of the number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children for whom it cares is incorrect: about 10 other local authorities in the country care for more such children.

At present, West Sussex social services department is caring for 141 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Since 1990, 479 such children have been referred to it. As the hon. Gentleman said, in recent years, some children have gone missing. The first such disappearance was in 1995, and the second in 1996. Seven young people went missing in 1997, and 11 in 1998. The figure peaked at 23 in 1999, and last year there were 21 disappearances. He correctly stated that no unaccompanied asylum-seeking children have gone missing from West Sussex social services department this year.

The majority of young people who go missing are aged 16 or 17, although the two youngest were aged 12 years and five months and 13 years and nine months. There is no discernable pattern with regard to the length of time that they are resident in the United Kingdom before they go missing: their lengths of stay vary from one day to 145 days, although 65 per cent. arrived less than a month before they disappeared. There has also been an increasing trend for such young people to arrive and disappear in pairs or groups.

There appears to be a discrepancy between the children's country of origin and their reported country of origin. Until July 1999, the great majority of them reported their nationality as Nigerian. Since then, a similar majority is claiming to originate from Sierra Leone, but it has become evident that most of them are also Nigerian.

All of the children have been girls, except for a group of four Ghanaian boys who arrived and left between March and July 2000, and three Chinese who arrived and left between September and December 2000. It is believed that those groups of young people are the victims of organised crime, but there is no connection with the west African criminal network that appears to control the movements of the Nigerian girls.

Since 1990, 64 young people have gone missing out of a total of 479 who were referred to West Sussex social services as unaccompanied young asylum seekers. These disappearances are a cause of great concern. However, in West Sussex, no such young people have disappeared since December last year, and no west African young person has gone missing since October 2000.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware that social services can also face difficulties in determining the identity and age of such young people. It is probable that some of them had been given false identities to help them evade detection. It is also suspected that some of them had falsely claimed to be younger than 18 years of age so that they could receive care and assistance directly from local authorities. I also understand that there is hard and anecdotal evidence that some of the young people who go missing are being trafficked to mainland Europe to be sexually exploited. Some of them know that this is their intended destiny when they arrive in the UK, but tragically others believe that they are coming to the UK to work or receive training.

My concerns about the matter have led me to seek further information about the circumstances in which such young people go missing. I understand that they tend to be in their later teens, so it is inevitable that, once they are placed with foster carers, they have ample opportunity to disappear. Some of them might have been given contact numbers for people who will assist them in leaving. Others choose to go missing because they have made contact with members of their extended family who are already resident in the UK.

The suggestion that some of the young people go missing in suspicious circumstances is particularly worrying. West Sussex social services has, rightly, worked closely from the outset with Sussex police to try to prevent them from leaving care, and to ascertain their whereabouts when they have gone missing. It is because of the excellent work of West Sussex social services with the police and other agencies that the risks to the young people have become more apparent. The police have worked closely with Interpol, with other police forces in the United Kingdom and abroad and with the immigration services.

West Sussex social services, the police and the immigration services have built a profile of the characteristics of young people who are deemed to be at risk of going missing and who therefore require enhanced protection. In turn, the profile has helped the local authority to develop a safer system of care for asylum-seeking children—I think that was the point to which the hon. Member for Meriden referred.

Young people who are deemed to be at risk of disappearing are housed with foster families or in designated safe houses that are staffed 24 hours a day,

*[Mr. Hutton]*

and they receive added supervision and support from properly trained staff. Some foster families are specially recruited through an independent agency. The action to prevent young people from going missing begins by using profiling to identify those who are most at risk. It continues by using people with similar cultural backgrounds to assist in the reception of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, by using safe houses that are staffed 24 hours a day for those who are thought to be most at risk and by avoiding isolated rural placements. That is a far cry from building new secure training centres.

**Mr. Loughton:** In the Minister's 11 minutes, he has quoted facts that have already been stated and that he could have gleaned from various briefs from the Home Office or West Sussex social services. Does he believe that the majority of the 40 girls from Nigeria who disappeared ended up in prostitution in north Italy? His comments make it sound like he does not believe that.

**Mr. Hutton:** I think that it is probable that a large number of the girls have ended up in the deplorable trade that the hon. Gentleman and others have described, although I would not like to say how many because I have no evidence—nor does he. He said that I was quoting facts that I could have gleaned from other sources, or that he has given. That is not so. I am trying to explain sensibly how West Sussex social services are trying to respond to the concerns. There is a way of targeting resources and protection measures towards the children who are most at risk. That is a sensible approach. Detaining all the young people in new, purpose-built secure detention centres, as the hon. Member for Meriden suggested, is not the correct way to deal with the matter.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will agree that, although every effort is made to ensure the safety and security of the young people, none of the foster care placements is secure, in that the young people do not have their freedom of movement substantially impaired. They are not prisoners or young offenders, and it would not be possible to place the young people in secure accommodation without the approval of the courts. In practice, if a young person decides to abscond and has an outside contact who is prepared to help to remove that person from the area, or the control and care of the local authority, it is difficult for the social services to prevent that.

We must understand the reasons why young people go missing, and we should do all we can to ensure that sex traffickers do not coerce them. Social services therefore work closely with Sussex police, immigration, the Refugee Council and the national missing persons helpline to establish protocols, to investigate the wider picture and to try to track down missing young people. Efforts to identify and to find younger people are hampered by poor or missing paperwork and the restricted ability of the country of origin to assist with inquiries. The hon. Member for Romsey is correct to say that the matter must be addressed internationally in order to make substantial progress.

I am impressed by the work of West Sussex social services to recognise the vulnerability of the young people and to ensure that those who are at risk of coercion by sex traffickers are given additional protection to ensure their safety as far as possible. My officials will take forward work to share learning and good practice and to ensure that the work that has been done by West Sussex social services is shared nationally with other authorities who look after asylum-seeking children in the same manner.

Although no west African young person has disappeared in recent months, West Sussex social services continue to provide additional care for children who fit the profile. The fact that there have been no further disappearances this year provides concrete evidence that the action taken by West Sussex social services and other agencies may have been effective in preventing young people from going missing. I am sure that the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham will welcome that.

The hon. Members for East Worthing and Shoreham and for Arundel and South Downs advanced a substantial argument about funding and how central Government fund local authorities that accommodate many unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham mentioned the costs faced by local authorities. I must point out to him and to other Conservative Members that the previous Administration provided no additional resources for West Sussex county council to meet the extra costs associated with looking after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children—no additional support whatsoever.

**Mr. Loughton** rose—

**Mr. Hutton:** No, I will not give way. The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs had the good grace to recognise that the problem did not start on 1 April 1997. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham fell into the trap of assuming that all the funding problems started from that date—he was wrong.

**Mr. Loughton:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Hutton:** No, I will not.

The situation has now substantially improved, thanks to the changes that the Government have made to the local government special grant system. West Sussex's 1998-99 claim for £587,000 for associated costs was met in full. In 1999-2000, central Government provided more than £1.1 million funding to West Sussex to meet in full—I stress that point—the claim that the county council submitted to the Department of Health. Awards for the financial year 2000-01 are being assessed, and I understand that the council has submitted a claim for more than £2 million. As West Sussex social services is one of the authorities that supports on average more than 100 unaccompanied asylum-seeking children per week, it qualifies for the higher rate of central Government-funded financial support. This year, a total of £85 million has been made available to local authorities to help them meet the costs of looking after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. So the hon. Gentleman's argument that the Government are

somehow sitting on our hands and not responding to the financial pressure felt by West Sussex is completely and utterly false.

**Mr. Loughton:** Does not the Minister agree with the figure cited by West Sussex of at least £1 million for the additional cost of the problem? Will he therefore guarantee that that £1 million cost will be met in full, especially given his comments about the extra security features that are now, I am glad to hear, being added to social services department care homes for such children? There is an on-going and increasing cost. Will he guarantee that that amount will be met in full? If not, he is not even remotely funding the cost to social services of the problem, the existence of which he has admitted.

**Mr. Hutton:** Let us be clear. In the past two years, we have met West Sussex social services' claim for the cost of looking after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in full. It claimed an amount; we paid it in full. I am not aware of the extra £1 million to which the hon. Gentleman refers, because West Sussex social services department has not sent me any request for £1 million in unspecified additional costs. There is a procedure for claiming under the unaccompanied asylum-seeking children's grant; the county council has gone through that process and submitted a claim for about £2 million. That grant is administered by the Home Office, so my colleagues in the Home Office will decide the appropriate level of payment. As I said, because of the large number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children that the county council looks after, it qualifies for the enhanced level of grant.

Painful though it is for the hon. Gentleman, who has been going on about funding, he must confront the fact that when his party was in government, no additional resources at all were made available to West Sussex county council for the additional costs that it was then incurring looking after unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. With the greatest respect, the hon. Gentleman's point—that the Government are not doing as much as we can to support local authorities such as West Sussex—is completely and utterly fatuous.

**Mr. Loughton:** Will the Minister give way on that point?

**Mr. Hutton:** No. We are doing more than the Conservative Government did during their term of office.

I must also deal with the point about funding raised by the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs. West Sussex personal social services' standard spending assessment has increased by more than 25 per cent. since we took office. The hon. Gentleman made the fair point that that may not be enough. We are getting extra resources into social services as quickly as we possibly can. Of course, that must be dependent on the general state of public finances and the health and well-being of the economy. The hon. Gentleman must understand that—I understand that he speaks for his party on finance matters. He and the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham spoke for half an hour about the need to spend more on social services. That is good. In that case, he should have a conversation with the hon. Member for Meriden. As he will know, his party has consistently refused to say that it will match the level of spending on social services that the Government are making available.

**Mr. Loughton** *rose—*

**Mr. Hutton:** No, I will not give way. It is time that the hon. Gentleman addressed the reality. I know that Conservative Members do not like it up them. [*Interruption.*] Everyone heard the hon. Gentleman's contribution. The hon. Member for Romsey, who did a very good job, would probably back me up if I asked her to. The hon. Gentleman said that the real problem was that we were not funding social services adequately. When Conservatives are confronted with their record on the issue, and their conspicuous failure even to match the present level of spending that this Government have committed to social services—

**Mr. Loughton:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Hutton:** No.

Most people of good will would regard that as party political posturing, which devalues the other important issues that have been raised.

It is probably irrelevant to try to restore an element of consensus in this debate, because, having dispensed with the hon. Gentleman's false arguments about funding, we must now examine criminal law. He and the hon. Member for Romsey were right to say that trafficking is currently not a specific criminal offence under British law. Although he did not mention it, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that last year the Home Office issued a consultation paper examining ways in which to reform the range of offences that cover sex crimes—I am glad to see that he has it. One of the proposals was to establish a new criminal offence of trafficking. The consultation period on those proposals ended in March. The Home Office and my colleagues throughout Government are reviewing the responses, and we will introduce proposals in due course.

Is the hon. Gentleman aware that it is an offence under section 2 of the Child Abduction Act 1984 to remove a child under 16 from someone who has lawful control of that child? That provision would clearly extend to West Sussex social services as the corporate parent of the children in their care. The offence carries a maximum penalty of seven years, so, with respect, it is not the case that there are currently no criminal offences that might be committed in the circumstances that we have discussed.

I accept the hon. Gentleman's point that in all the cases that have been mentioned, a successful criminal prosecution would depend on the availability of credible and reliable evidence to sustain that prosecution and make it worthwhile to proceed, which may be a problem. There is a loophole. I accept his argument about trafficking, and we are consulting on proposals to deal with that problem. However, it is wrong to suggest—as he may have done inadvertently—that criminal law as it is currently constituted is completely powerless to deal with any of the dimensions of the problem that he has identified.

**Mr. Loughton:** The Minister knows that the Sexual Offences Act 1956 and the Child Abduction Act 1984

*[Mr. Loughton]*

are wholly inadequate. If they were not, why has not a single prosecution been brought to deal with the problem? Why do Sussex police and other police forces that deal with the problem believe that the law is woefully inadequate and incapable of bringing criminal charges against the traffickers?

**Mr. Hutton:** I acknowledge that point, and my colleagues in the Home Office have made it clear that we must revisit the area of law that covers sex offences. That is why there is a consultation proposal to establish the type of offence for which the hon. Gentleman and others are calling. We must weigh up the responses. Whether a particular prosecution is launched in any given set of circumstances is not a matter for Ministers to comment on, nor is it proper to speculate as to why prosecutions have not been brought. Those are matters for the prosecuting authorities. The hon. Gentleman is a mature individual—although he did not always show that today—and he knows that it is sometimes difficult for a prosecuting authority to pull together the substantial evidence necessary to support a prosecution. That is why we are consulting on how we can strengthen and improve criminal law in such cases.

We can have either a serious or a silly debate about this issue. I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is repeating some rather silly points that have been acknowledged as being a problem and which we are trying to solve. He cannot have it both ways. I have acknowledged that there is a problem; we are trying to find ways to plug the loopholes that he and others have identified, and that is the sensible way to proceed. However, to suggest—as he did—that the Home Office is doing nothing to deal with the problems is wrong, and does not to advance our understanding of the arguments.

This is a serious issue. We are trying to deal with the problem. We are working closely with West Sussex social services to find a sensible way of enhancing the children's security. We are providing significant additional resources for social services, especially to deal with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. A new grant of £85 million is being disbursed across local authorities this year. We are also trying to strengthen criminal law and work across international boundaries to enhance the safety and well being of the young people. They are at risk, and it is our responsibility to provide better levels of security. We are determined to do that.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. John McWilliam):** I invite hon. Members who do not want to stay for the next debate to leave quickly and quietly.

## Armed Service Pilots

12.29 pm

**Dr. Gavin Strang** (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): I am grateful for the opportunity to initiate this short debate on the recruitment, training and retention of pilots in our armed services. I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is present to reply.

Our armed forces have a tremendous history of achievement. Members of Parliament from all parties are anxious that the standards of our forces are high and maintained. The people in the forces are vital in achieving that, as the Government acknowledged in their strategic defence review in 1998, which contained an entire chapter on policy for people. The Select Committee on Defence followed that up with an important report in February.

I shall discuss the people involved; military personnel, civil servants at the Ministry of Defence and civilian back-up people. They are the crucial element in our armed forces. In all our modern forces, people are extremely important. The Army requires many helicopter pilots, as does the Navy, which also requires fast jet pilots. The Royal Air Force, in particular, requires helicopter pilots, multi-engine aircraft pilots and fast jet pilots. I shall concentrate my remarks on the need to sustain an adequate supply of highly trained fast jet pilots. I shall rely a great deal on information published by the National Audit Office last September in a useful report entitled "Ministry of Defence: Training New Pilots".

The first point in the report was that the Government inherited a problem. There is no question that there was a shortage, but I shall not spend a lot of time on statistics. The NAO report contains many interesting statistics and graphs. The report covers the five years from 1994 to 1999, and makes the point that, over that period, the services required about 250 pilots. In fact, the number achieved on average fell short by 45 each year, or about 18 per cent. There was a significant shortfall in the availability of trained pilots over that period. The report refers to "an acute shortage" of fast jet pilots on the front line. I hope that we shall constructively deal with that matter in the short time available to us this morning.

The number of pilots available for operational service depends on recruitment, training and retention, and I shall say something about all three of those aspects. On recruitment, almost half the RAF trainee pilots come from university air squadrons. Others gained flying experience through the Air Training Corps. Most of us have probably had some contact with one or other of those organisations in our constituencies.

I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) in his place. It is common ground that those organisations need to be supported, nourished and encouraged. They are important in attracting new recruits to the RAF. The NAO report pointed out that about 20 per cent. of trainee pilots had no previous flying experience.

Of the three aspects of recruitment, training and retention, recruitment has not been the major problem. I wish to toss a factor into the debate to give the

Secretary of State a chance to comment on it if he wishes. Should more women be recruited to be trained as pilots? The Select Committee report published in February homed in on the whole matter of such a policy as set out in the strategic defence review, but I do not believe that recruitment is the main area where most action is needed.

The National Audit Office report went into training in some depth. It is obvious that the success rate must be an important factor. Being a fast jet pilot is a demanding profession. The report points out that, for every 100 new trainees, 48 will be expected to complete fast jet training. Some trainees who do not succeed in becoming operational fast jet pilots become pilots of helicopters and other aircraft. However, given such high and exacting standards—which no one would want to lower—it is inevitable that there will be a high wastage rate. I do not believe that a lot can be done in that area, although we should keep examining the training procedures and ensuring that they are as good as possible.

An interesting point came out of the National Audit Office report. It concluded that a major factor in the shortfall of pilots over the period that they studied was the time that it took to train them. The time usually allocated for training was about three years, but in practice it took five. That had the effect of reducing the number of operational pilots who became available each year. The report said that that also had the effect of reducing the time for which pilots were available for service. The time taken to train a pilot was an important factor in the shortfall.

To its credit, the Royal Air Force has been considering the matter. In his evidence to the Select Committee in November, Air Vice Marshal Ian Corbitt, the chief executive of the Royal Air Force Training Group Defence Agency, said that some of the difficulties with training courses that had resulted in the pilots taking five years rather than three were being dealt with. That is certainly good news.

My next point is slightly tangential, but like many hon. Members, over the years I have taken considerable interest in the development of the Eurofighter, not least because of the important industrial interest that Edinburgh has in it. We are on the threshold of a major historic change in respect of fast jet pilots. The Eurofighter will come into service next year, and over the next decade or probably longer, we shall see a transition to heavy dependence on it. I should welcome the Secretary of State commenting on the training for the Eurofighter.

Evidence, both from the report and from our experience of talking to people in the services, suggests that we should direct our attention towards retention. The major factor is the attraction of the growing civil aviation sector. That is a problem of success—the economy has been growing well, so people's living standards have been rising. Not only is the economy growing but air traffic of all kinds—commercial, passenger and holiday traffic—has been growing even faster. Commercial airlines therefore have a huge need for trained personnel.

**Mr. Quentin Davies** (Grantham and Stamford): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on raising that urgent and important issue. Is he aware that, two weeks ago, I asked the Secretary of State four questions? I asked him to set out the anticipated shortfalls in fast jet pilots and single seat fast jet pilots for each of the next five years. I asked him how many fast jet pilots in the RAF and the Royal Navy are combat ready. I asked what the current shortages are of trained pilots for the Sea Harrier, Harrier GR7, Tornado F3, Tornado GR1, Tornado GR4 and the Jaguar. I also asked what is the maximum output of fast jet pilots from RAF Valley. To each of those questions, I received, yesterday, the answer, "I will answer shortly."

Surely it would be a terrible indictment of the Government's fundamental competence if they did not know the answer to those questions and could not acquire them in two weeks. Therefore, should there not be much more than a suspicion that the present situation is a good deal more alarming than the right hon. Gentleman and I suspect? The Government may be trying to cover up the issue, without answering such vital questions, until after the election.

**Dr. Strang:** I cannot accept that, but we are fortunate that the Secretary of State is present in this Chamber, and I am sure that he will try to throw light on this matter.

However, all hon. Members agree that this is an important issue that needs to be addressed. One cannot wave a magic wand; whatever is done to address the matter will take time. I do not believe that there is any question of a cover-up; indeed, the National Audit Office report was useful. A great deal of evidence was presented to the Select Committee, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman has studied. That evidence relates to recruitment as whole, not just that of pilots, in depth.

Clearly, the pressure from commercial airlines will not go away. It will probably be there indefinitely. It is a challenge that must be addressed. Indeed, someone in the RAF said to me the other day that there is evidence that the exodus from the RAF, including that of pilots, mirrored recruitment by civil airlines and their policies at the time.

My other point on retention, which is an obvious and basic one, is that a trained fast jet pilot is a hugely valuable resource. I do not want to go into details on the figures, but it costs more than £3 million—perhaps as much as £4 million—to train a fast jet pilot to the point at which he is capable of operational service. On that ground alone, it is vital that we secure the maximum service from the individuals concerned as pilots.

To their credit, the Government have already started to address the issue. The announcement on pay a few months ago included a further two financial incentives. Some people say that, in terms of salary, the Government cannot compete with the commercial airlines, and that they should not try to do so. I do not accept that. Of course the commercial airlines will always be able to pay high salaries, but financial incentives have a part to play. I put it no stronger than that. I am not saying that the Government can pay the same money as the commercial airlines, and I congratulate the Government on having introduced several measures to address the problem. If one reads the Select Committee report, it suggests that the Government's response has been radical. Certainly, it is

*[Dr. Strang]*

a start; it is too early to say what effect the incentives will have. If the Secretary of State has information on the matter, that would be helpful. The important point is that, to his credit, the Secretary of State has ensured that action is beginning to be taken to tackle the problem.

The Government's strategic defence review made it clear that our forces were more likely to be taking part in overseas deployments. Peacekeeping and humanitarian activities are facts of our modern world. Since the general election in 1997, we have seen such deployments in Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone, East Timor and northern and southern Iraq. There has been no shortage of challenges facing the Government in relation to the use and role of our armed services. It is clear that the shortage of pilots has not inhibited the Government from meeting such challenges. We are all proud of the role that our forces have played.

It is important to clarify that there is no evidence that the shortage of pilots has had an adverse effect on the quality of the contribution of our forces in such deployments. That is not to say, however, that there is not a problem. There has been a danger of overstretch. There is a worry that excessive demands could be made on our pilots. We must avoid that. The quality of life and the time between deployments are important factors to bear in mind. A shortage of pilots means that the time that they can spend with their families between deployments is much shorter. Let us face it: by definition, a fast jet pilot is at the peak of his productive ability. He would often have a young family, so it is important that we face the matter in the round and follow through the changes and initiatives that the Government have already taken. I congratulate them on that. We must create a climate in which we can retain the fast jet pilots for longer than we are doing at present. I suggest that securing a full complement of highly trained pilots is a challenge that has not only been faced by the present Government but will face the next Government after the election.

12.47 pm

**The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon):** I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) for the opportunity to debate such an important issue. It is one in which I have taken a close personal interest.

The challenge of manning operational squadrons and the services' flying training organisations with sufficient pilots against the pool from the civilian airlines is not new. It goes back even before the constructive National Audit Office report to which my right hon. Friend referred. As long ago as 1988, the Armed Forces Pay Review Body drew attention to the issue. It is a problem that is facing most NATO air forces and many other air forces throughout the world. The situation has been deteriorating slowly for some time.

The current position is that on 1 March 2001 we had about 196 fewer pilots in the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy than we would ideally like. That translates into about 79 empty cockpits at the front line in relation to 42 RAF fast jets, 22 support helicopters, five Sea Harriers and 10 Royal Navy helicopters. The Army had a surplus of 38 junior officer pilots and a small deficit of non-commissioned officer pilots. The figures change all the time and depend on the definitions that are used, which is why I can assure the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) that there has been no cover-up. His questions will be answered at 3.30 this afternoon.

The deficit is forecast to continue for several years, mainly because of the pressures of a global shortage of pilots arising from the sustained growth in the civilian airline sector. However, we are not complacent about the matter and have taken steps to address the problem across the complete spectrum of requirement, training and retention. Yet more work is in hand, and as recently as 13 March, as my right hon. Friend mentioned, the Minister for the Armed Forces informed the House that a comprehensive review of aircrew retention had been commissioned to report in the autumn. Three main factors must be in harmony if the services are to be manned with sufficient pilots with the right balance of experience. I will deal with each in turn. I begin with the requirement—that is, how many pilots do the services need?

The requirement for pilots is generated largely by the number of aircraft on the front line. It also reflects how those aircraft are expected to be employed to meet their operational task. Obviously, the more intensively we plan to fly the aircraft, the greater the pilot-aircraft ratio will need to be. Those factors were scrutinised carefully during the strategic defence review, and I am satisfied that we have the balance right.

Another factor that drives the requirement for pilots is the need to fill certain ground appointments with personnel who have had first-hand experience of flying aircraft and of air operations. Such posts include those in headquarters concerned with aspects of planning or commanding air operations, some flight safety appointments, and equipment capability appointments for procurement of new systems. Additionally, some personnel are required for training posts. Appointments which fall into that category have been rigorously scrutinised, and as a consequence about 500 RAF posts have been disestablished or will in future be filled by members of the operations support or other ground branches. We are therefore making the most effective use of our pilots' skills and training.

The next factor to be considered is the provision of an adequate flow of newly qualified pilots from the training organisations. I am delighted to say that recruitment is buoyant and that for the year ending 30 March 2001, the RAF met 100 per cent. of its pilot recruitment target. The Royal Navy and the Army achieved similar success rates. Military flying is especially challenging and the services rightly demand the highest standards of their pilots. To ensure that those standards can be met, careful selection is undertaken and appropriate training given. That is a lengthy and expensive process—as my right hon. Friend mentioned—but a vital one if our aircrew are to continue to operate successfully in demanding operational theatres.

The flying training pipeline is both long and complex. It varies depending on the background of the trainee—those who enter via university air squadrons, for example, will already have some basic flying experience: those who enter directly from school are likely to have none. I will describe the route followed by trainees

destined to fly fast jets, because that is the most lengthy and demanding training profile, and the one on which my right hon. Friend concentrated.

All RAF student pilots start the training process at the RAF college at Cranwell. There they undertake a 24-week initial officer training course. The Navy undertakes similar training at the Britannia Royal Naval college at Dartmouth and the Army at Sandhurst for their officers—NCO pilots are recruited only from within the service. After successful completion of that course, flying training commences and all direct entrants undertake elementary flying training, except for recruits who have already completed that stage as members of a university air squadron. Elementary training involves 62 hours of flying and ground instruction, and gives the student the skills needed to fly safely.

Those students selected for training for fast jets then undertake basic fast jet training at RAF Linton-on-Ouse on the turbo-prop Tucano aircraft. The basic training includes 131 hours of flying and is a lead-in to the 107-hour advanced tactical training course. Following conversion flying on Hawk aircraft, students master advanced flying techniques, such as high-speed low-level flying, which is vital to the effective performance of operational tasks. Students are also trained in air tactics and undertake weapons training for the first time. That training is undertaken at RAF Valley in Anglesey but 20 students each year go to the NATO flying training school in Canada. During the advanced training phase, the successful students are awarded their wings.

Before the new fast jet pilot can be assessed as suitable for operations he—or, increasingly she, to respond directly to my right hon. Friend—needs to undertake a further period of training at one of the strike command operational conversion units or, in the case of Royal Navy pilots, the 899 Naval Air Squadron Sea Harrier conversion unit. There is an OCU for each fast jet type and at the OCU the pilot learns to fly and operate the specific aircraft type—not just the different flying characteristics of the aircraft and its unique equipment but the tactics particular to the type.

For example, a Tornado GR1 pilot will learn advanced evasion skills, automatic terrain following, electronic counter-measures and advanced air-to-ground weaponry techniques. The training for the more demanding and capable aircraft types, such as the Tornado GR1, typically takes just over four years and in their report last year on flying training, the National Audit Commission assessed the cost as about £6 million.

There is a limit on the number of newly qualified pilots who can be absorbed by the front line without impairing operational efficiency, and it is critical that the planned training output should be met, because it is almost impossible to increase output sharply in subsequent years to compensate for any shortfall. Even if output were to be increased, there would be the danger of swamping front-line squadrons with too many inexperienced pilots.

Additional resources have been provided to ensure that training targets are met, and that includes fully staffing the training systems by making additional flying instructors available at RAF Valley. Innovative means have also been adopted to maintain output and cope with the unexpected. For example, students are currently undertaking basic flying training with the Royal Australian Air Force, to cover the gap caused by the temporary grounding of the Tucano fleet last year.

My right hon. Friend asked about Eurofighter. We must get manning right so that the new aircraft can be brought into service in the planned numbers and within the planned time scales. That is a top priority. It is planned that the first conversion course for RAF pilots will begin in August 2004, which will be for experienced pilots. Training for novice pilots will begin in November 2004. Overall, Eurofighter will not generate substantial demand for pilots until 2006-07, whereas we expect the pilot shortage to ease from 2003 onwards.

For the future, we are conducting a study that is known as the United Kingdom military flying training system. That will lead to the development of a strategy to ensure that appropriate flying training, from start to finish, is in place for the latter part of the decade.

I shall deal with the third factor that I mentioned at the outset—retention. That is the most important factor, because it can be influenced relatively quickly. I have explained the considerable amount of training and the substantial associated cost that is necessary to produce combat-ready pilots. That makes it important that such pilots stay in substantial numbers and for long periods. That makes financial and operational sense.

Of course, such an argument applies equally to all our service personnel, which is why we have introduced a comprehensive programme to make service life more attractive with the aim of improving retention. I shall not discuss those measures, but I can let my right hon. Friend have the details.

Many general factors must be addressed but additional measures to improve air crew retention have been introduced, some very recently. The rate of flying pay has been improved substantially for more experienced pilots and, where particular shortages were identified, targeted financial incentives have been introduced. Such incentives are £50,000 for Royal Navy Sea Harrier pilots and £10,000 per annum for two years for pilots aged over 38. LINKUP, a scheme that helps air crew obtain civilian pilot's licences in exchange for a commitment to longer military service, has been introduced, and eligibility has subsequently been extended. Many pilots are taking advantage of the scheme, and it has been judged to be a success.

Service secretaries are offering extensions of service to pilots who wish to continue beyond normal retirement age, and that is helping to reduce pilot deficits. Attempts are underway to recruit younger pilots with the aim of increasing the return of service that is linked to the in-service degree. Additionally, amortisation periods are being reviewed, with the possibility of increasing the return of service following training.

The pull from civilian airlines is unlikely to diminish, and we must face that long-term problem. For that reason, we have set up a working group specifically to make recommendations on how we may improve air crew retention. The working group has been given wide-ranging terms of reference to examine all factors that influence the subject, and it has been directed to report by the autumn so that, where a financial response is appropriate, the Armed Forces Pay Review Body may take our reviews into account for its 2002 report. The working group, assisted by a specialist consultant and

*[Mr. Geoffrey Hoon]*

with Treasury representation, is collating the views of about 1,000 air crew to pinpoint what factors must be addressed.

In conclusion, I make no attempt to disguise that we have fewer pilots than we would ideally like for the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force. The main cause of that shortfall is a disappointing retention figure. However, such a situation is faced by virtually every air force in the world. I hope that I have made it clear that the Government are not complacent about the matter, and that we have taken, and will continue to take, vigorous steps to address the problem.

## Sex Education

12.59 pm

**Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak about sex education in schools. Sadly, our country suffers from among the highest levels of under-age pregnancy and divorce in the developed world. The breakdown of our families has created a rising tide of misery for many young people. It has been rising, under all Governments, for a generation, and it laps at the doorsteps of most hon. Members' constituency surgeries. We see increases in drug-taking, alcoholism and youth homelessness and, sadly, the youngsters of our country have developed a Europe-wide reputation for yobbery, as so many of them have not experienced the disciplines of traditional structures. With regard to such matters, sex education in schools is an important factor—although by no means the most important—and I am therefore very pleased to have the opportunity to speak on the subject.

Sex education can help to develop moral attitudes about sexual activity among young people, and it could play an important role in re-establishing the crucial link between sexual activity and child rearing. Sex should not be portrayed to our young people simply as a form of recreation, and should certainly not be so portrayed to those of primary school age.

Since they were elected, the Government's position has been that sex education should not be covered by statute, but merely by guidelines in circulars. In July 2000, the Department for Education and Employment's promised guidance on sex and relationship education was finally published, and it will play a pivotal role in my presentation.

My party has highlighted two statutory areas where force of law was important. First, with regard to the Learning and Skills Act 2000, many of my colleagues and I sought to press amendments to place a higher priority on marriage in sex education. Secondly, our debates on section 28 and the potential promotion of homosexuality in schools were widely publicised.

With regard to those issues, I will illustrate how badly things can go wrong by examining two groups of bureaucrats. The Minister does not have immediate responsibility for either of them: indeed, one of them is now outside the responsibilities of this Parliament. Most teachers take a sensible approach towards sex education, but certain sections of the education bureaucracy do not.

The two groups of bureaucrats to whom I am referring are the English health authorities and their sexual health promotion units, and the Scottish Executive. Scotland's recent experiences offer a terrible warning of what would happen south of the border if the Government's plan to repeal section 28 were successful.

In the debates on the Learning and Skills Act 2000, the House was given repeated assurances that marriage would play an important role. Those pledges were also made in the negotiations with the churches. That led most of the churches south of the border to sign up to the package. There are a number of positive features to the guidance published last July. There are references to the importance of love and care—not just recreation—in sex, and to the importance of linking sex

with the responsibilities of parenthood, which I applaud. It also stresses the importance of sex education for boys as well as girls. However, overall, the document is lamentably and pathetically weak in restraining certain activities. Only three short, passing references are made to marriage, in each case closely linked to so-called stable relationships, one of the myths of the new era. An acquaintance of mine who is a general practitioner in the east end of London once told me that most of the young girls who come in to see him tell him that they are in something that they call a common law marriage. Most young men who go to see him tell him that they are in a short-term sexual relationship.

Statistics show that a child has almost six times as good a chance of its parents staying together for 10 years or more if they are married than if they are in an allegedly stable relationship—Government statistics from 1997, provided by the Library. None of that makes any mark in what is being taught to our children in schools if Government guidelines are being followed.

I cite two examples from English health authorities of the sort of material that is reaching schools. One that has been extensively discussed before is the video provided by Avon health authority, which invited 14-year-olds to act out roles such as a married man caught cottaging—having gay sex in a public lavatory. The same video featured a 13-year-old advising pupils to try both boys and girls until they found which they preferred.

In my own patch, East Kent health authority provided a presentation—we have one of the highest levels of under-age illegitimacy in the country—and the health promotion team made it abundantly clear that the word "marriage" would not figure in presentations provided in schools. Members of Parliament were not told that it was, incredibly, simultaneously issuing instructions that under-age children were to be furnished with morning after pills without even necessarily telling the parents, a decision that raises considerable clinical as well as moral issues. That circular had been issued without Kent county council, the education authority, being told about it. In an open letter, the leader of the council, Sandy Bruce-Lockhart, wrote to the chairman of the health authority, making it clear that he was disgusted that that liaison had not taken place. The document has failed miserably to put over to the bureaucracies with which we are dealing the importance of the pivotal role of marriage in sex education.

All that pales compared with the warnings from north of the border of what could happen here in England. I hope that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will not feel that I am getting at you personally, as a Scot who represents an English constituency, with the following examples. I am sorry that one or two of the examples may seem lurid beyond belief, but as they are being given to children in our schools in part of the United Kingdom, it is right to touch on them briefly.

On 19 January 2000, the Prime Minister made it clear, in answer to a question that was, ironically, asked by a Scottish Member of Parliament, that on both sides of the border, although he was referring to south of the border:

"That is not because we believe it right to promote homosexuality but because we believe it is right for school teachers and others to be able to explain to children properly the facts of life."—[*Official Report*, 19 January 2000; Vol. 342, c. 840.]

I was so incredulous on reading material from the Christian Institute that I had to ask it to fax me copies of the documents involved. In the primary school document, the sex and relationships education pack, oral sex and masturbation are given the most graphic descriptions. In the same pack, primary school children are told at considerable length just how much fun is to be had out of sex. It is presented as a recreational activity, rather than something that has a role in a wider relationship, let alone marriage. In another package, which is aimed at 11 to 14-year-olds, there is a role-playing exercise in which children are expected to represent homosexuals coming out. That is despite the fact that, on 10 March, the Prime Minister pledged in a widely reported speech that

"no child is going to be forced to take part in homosexual role playing."

Technically, I suppose that children are not being forced to take part, but if their teacher tells them that it is a good idea, it is quite likely that they will do so.

In another pack for 11 to 14-year-olds, groups are to discuss sexual activities that two people can do together, including the

"use of sexual toys e.g. Vibrators or other items...sadism/or masochism—the use of pain...partner swapping".

That is for 11 to 14-year-olds. So much for even the alleged stable relationships.

Finally—you will be relieved to hear that this is the last example that I shall give, Mr. Deputy Speaker—there are activity cards for 15-year-olds. These are not from the Scottish Executive, but from one of the Scottish local authorities. I can show them to the Minister afterwards. They give the most lucid details on a variety of sexual practices, including very detailed material on how to maximise pleasure from anal intercourse.

In a remarkable text, the great Christian writer C. S. Lewis said that practising Christians should avoid at all costs running about sounding as if they spend all their time trying to prevent people from having fun. However, we surely must have a better vision for the rising generation of children than the things that I have described. Surely, there are other activities that should grasp the imagination of young children—of primary school children—before those. Of course, children should be taught the facts of life. My parents taught me them very early, and sex lectures were provided at school when I was about 13. We should guide children in such activities through the difficulty period of puberty. We should teach them about the virtue—that is an old-fashioned word—of self-restraint. They should be taught that in a proper context. I unashamedly believe that marriage is the right context for sex. Children should at least be told the facts about how much more successful marriage is for child rearing than anything else that has been tried.

I have one last statistic. The largest ever survey on the issue was carried out by the United States Department of Health—not some right-wing think tank—in 1988. It showed that children from the poorest backgrounds in

*[Mr. Julian Brazier]*

America, who were struggling to exist on less than $10,000 a year, had a lower rate of juvenile delinquency when their parents were married than children from the most prosperous families in America under every other marital arrangement that was considered.

I do not want to condemn anyone. The family of every one of us is touched in some way by family breakdown. All I ask is that in providing guidance to children in schools, we should aspire to give them something better and to achieve more than our generation did for our children.

1.13 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Jacqui Smith):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) on gaining the opportunity to talk about what I think we both agree is an important issue.

I wholeheartedly agree with the hon. Gentleman that a successful sex and relationship education programme will help young people to respect themselves and others. It will enable them to make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives and it will help them to move with confidence from childhood, through adolescence to adulthood. It will also help to achieve the Government's objective of As the hon. Gentleman said, we published our sex and relationships education guidance last July. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I believe that it was a significant step forward. I will also talk about the legal background and the statutory nature of that guidance, because the hon. Gentleman was mistaken in suggesting that there is no legal force to what we proposed in our guidance or what we set out in the Learning and Skills Act 2000.

The guidance was a significant step forward. It is helping teachers to make a difference in the classroom; it is helping parents to have confidence in the education that their children are receiving; and it is helping our drive to tackle teenage pregnancies. It underlines our commitment to ensuring that our young people receive a good education in sex and relationships. We held broad consultations on the draft guidance and we received broad support—even though it was not from the hon. Gentleman. We had productive discussions with the Catholic Education Service and with the Church of England during the passage of the Bill that became the Learning and Skills Act 2000 through Parliament and during the compilation of our guidance. Many of those organisations' comments were taken on board.

There were positive comments from other church and faith groups on our guidance. For example, the Methodist Church said:

"In general, the Methodist Church welcomes this document as a valuable tool for governors, head teachers and parents as they develop policies on sex and relationship education, and for teachers as they put such policies into practice."

The Jewish Marriage Council said:

"Faith communities will all welcome the greater emphasis on relationship education, particularly the recognition of marriage and thereby couple relationships as being key building blocks of community and society."

We have also had very positive feedback from teachers. They have told us that the new guidance is supporting them and helping them to deliver high-quality education in sex and relationships. People are telling us that they want to get on with their jobs and our guidance will enable them to do just that, in the sort of context that I believe is important for our children.

There are concerns, however, and we responded to them in our guidance and in our legislative framework. First, there is the issue of inappropriate teaching and materials. As often happens in these debates, the hon. Gentleman has reeled off a list of materials that he claims may be being used in schools. I have to say that our guidance makes it very clear, as does the Learning and Skills Act 2000, that children and young people should be protected from inappropriate teaching and materials. This is the first time that that has been set out in legislation.

Head teachers now have a legal responsibility to protect children from inappropriate teaching and materials in the classroom. Health authorities have to have regard to that guidance, and colleagues in the Department of Health have produced guidance and written to health authorities to make them aware of the fact that legally they must take our guidance into account.

**Mr. Brazier:** Will the Minister tell me when that guidance went out? The presentation that I referred to by East Kent health authority took place only at the end of last year. The guidance does not seem to have reached my health authority yet.

**Jacqui Smith:** I understand that the Department of Health sent out guidance at the end of last year alerting health authorities to the requirement to have regard to our guidance. Under the guidance, schools also have a legal responsibility—for the first time ever—to ensure that children are taught the importance of marriage. That provision was notably absent from the guidance issued by the previous Government and absent from the national curriculum before it was reviewed under this Government.

In the personal, social and health education framework that was first included in the national curriculum in September 2000, we made it clear that marriage had an important part to play and that children should be taught about it from seven to 16. That is now part of the framework of the national curriculum and that is reflected in our guidance. The guidance also recognises the central role that parents should play in developing a school's sex and relationship education policy, including their right to withdraw children from lessons should they wish so to do.

It is also worth reflecting on what the guidance replaced and on the improvements in the new guidance compared with the old circular 594. First—here, I agree with the hon. Gentleman—it is important that sex and relationship education is framed in such a way that it links into personal, social and health education, and into education on citizenship. For the first time, we have

linked sex and relationship education into that framework, which helps pupils to develop the skills to tackle moral and social questions.

Secondly, our guidance emphasises the importance of the relationship aspect of sex and relationship education. The hon. Gentleman focused on, as he described them, lurid explanations of some of the more mechanical and biological aspects of sex. The Government and young people believe that we must place sex education in the context of relationships, which the Government's guidance does.

Thirdly, the guidance aims to ensure that sex and relationship education gives pupils the confidence to negotiate relationships and to delay sexual intercourse. Some people have argued that sex and relationship education should focus solely on avoiding sexual activity. Our view is that good sex and relationship education will encourage pupils to make well-informed decisions, and our guidance aims to achieve that. For example, we recommend that all pupils in secondary schools should have a clear understanding of the reasons for delaying sexual activity and resisting pressure. Research demonstrates that good comprehensive sex and relationship education, set in the context that I have outlined, does not make young people more likely to engage in sexual activity. Indeed, it can help them to learn the reasons for, and benefits to be gained from, delaying sex.

**Mr. Brazier:** The Minister referred to my objection to some of the more mechanical descriptions. I appreciate that she is not answerable for what happens north of the border, but from what is happening in my health authority, we can see that the Government's guidelines are simply not being followed. Following the removal of section 28 in Scotland, the following is a quotation from guidance for primary schools. Oral sex is defined as

"using the mouth and tongue to lick, kiss or suck a partner's genitals. Oral sex on a man involves his penis. Oral sex on a woman involves her clitoris."

Would the Minister welcome that being distributed in primary schools south of the border?

**Jacqui Smith:** I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman hoped to achieve by that intervention, apart from giving him another opportunity to read from materials that he may or may not consider to be inappropriate.

The hon. Gentleman says that he believes that teachers are responsible and professional people. So do the Government. That is why, within the guidance that we have given and the statutory framework that we have laid down for the first time, we trust teachers, governors and parents to develop the sort of education that is important for our young people. Given the guidance that we have provided, I believe that the professionals in our schools can recognise what is appropriate and inappropriate. I have more faith in our schools, governors and parents than he appears to have.

There has been some success, and I am pleased that recent figures show—

**Mr. Brazier:** Will the Minister give way?

**Jacqui Smith:** No, I will not take another intervention from the hon. Gentleman.

**Mr. Brazier:** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Minister refers to my attitude to teachers. I have made no attack on teachers. In fact, I defended them.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. John McWilliam):** That is not a point of order.

**Jacqui Smith:** Thank you, Mr. McWilliam.

We are seeing some success in terms of a fall in teenage conception rates for both under-16s and under-18s. The conception rate for under-16s in England fell from 8.8 per 1,000 in 1998 to 8.2 per 1,000 in 1999—a 7 per cent. fall and the lowest rate in any year bar one since 1983. The conception rate for under-18s in England fell from 46.5 per 1,000 to 44.7 per 1,000 in 1999; a 4 per cent. fall. That is excellent news, but we cannot be complacent. We must continue to tackle sensitive issues and help young people to wait until they are ready before they have sex, and to protect themselves when they do.

I am pleased that the guidance has helped schools, but we need to do more to support teachers effectively if they are to provide good sex and relationship education. That is why I want to concentrate on two aspects of the Government's support for schools, the first of which is funding. For 2001-02, we shall make £15 million available to schools for support of personal, social, health and citizenship education. Schools will be able to decide how to spend that. It could include training for teachers, materials and resources, or paying the costs of an external speaker to support the relevant teaching.

I am also strongly aware of the need to provide other, more direct, training for teachers. That is why I am pleased that teachers are receiving training to support our guidance. Regional seminars have taken place for the key people involved in providing sex and relationship education. We also recognise that teachers need particular skills for that type of education, and we want to recognise those skills through a new system to accredit sex and relationship teaching.

The Government have, through the Learning and Skills Act 2000, provided for the first time a firm legal foundation for effective sex and relationship education. The new guidance provides a robust framework for use by heads, teachers and governors. We have tackled some of the issues that were raised today by the hon. Gentleman and during consultation. They include protecting young people from inappropriate materials while recognising the importance of depending on teachers' and governors' professionalism, as well as parents' roles in sex and relationship education in schools.

With our support through the standards fund and the extra training that we are providing, we are helping schools to provide high quality education in which teachers, governors, young people and parents can have confidence.

## Igroup plc

1.27 pm

**Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): Shortly after the general election in 1997, I was contacted by my constituents, David and Pauline Spencer. In 1992, they had run into financial difficulties and were put in touch with Wilmslow Financial Services. They had intended to borrow £5,000 to pay off mortgage arrears, associated county court judgments and a sum of money to a friend who had helped them with previous mortgage arrears.

Mr. and Mrs. Spencer were visited by Mr. Phillip Jones, who persuaded them to borrow £10,000 on the grounds that they needed to renew some of the windows in their property, and to allow them a flexible sum of money to make it easier for them to pay off the loan at the beginning of the repayment scheme. In my view, the Spencers were not made aware of the detailed conditions of the contract that they eventually signed.

Because Mr. Spencer was self-employed, Mr. Jones, the agent, proposed that he also pay a double protected payment premium. That was unnecessary, since Mrs. Spencer was not working at the time. The cost was an additional £3,526 and brought the total borrowed to £13,526. Mr. Spencer is a market trader and had combined earnings then of far less than £1,500 per month, although he had achieved that total once in the preceding months. Mr. Jones put that highest figure on the mortgage application form. A contract was signed with J & J Securities on 1 April 1992 and repayments began.

The Spencers feel that the agent did not adequately consider their monthly expenditure or income, or its sustainability. They were never asked to provide documentation to prove the figures that Mr. Jones put on the application certificate. Mr. Spencer was asked to provide evidence that he was self-employed, but production of a business card was all that Mr. Jones required. Mr. and Mrs. Spencer felt pressurised throughout their contacts with that agent. They had asked whether he could secure a loan for them from a high street building society or another reputable mortgage provider, but he informed them that their poor credit history made that highly unlikely. Mr. Jones pointed out that their credit rating could be improved sufficiently to secure another loan by entering into the J & J Securities contract and keeping up the repayments. Since they wanted to secure a second mortgage from a high street provider, that proposition began to sound attractive. In the event, they were precluded from going down their preferred avenue, as I shall explain.

There was no mention of the excessive commission that brokers are normally paid for securing that type of loan. I do not know how much commission Mr. Jones secured, but I have been made aware of a similar loan, worth £23,000. The commission on that was a very high £4,300. Unfortunately, Mr. Spencer became ill shortly after the loan was granted, and was unable to work. The protected payment premium scheme should have protected the Spencers during his period of illness. Mr. Spencer duly wrote to Wilmslow Financial Services in May 1993 but received no response. While loans were usually made for 15 years, the premiums covered only the first five years. Hence, clients paid for a loan to cover the premium for three times as long as the premium was operative.

Many of the mortgage deals negotiated by the companies seem to have been with the most financially vulnerable clients, with a view to repossession and resale of the properties. For example, one was with a pensioner couple living on state benefits who wanted to buy their council house under the Government's right to buy scheme. The Spencers were told that it would cost them about £1,000 if they wished to settle the balance early. At that time the companies were applying the rule of 78—a complicated formula used to calculate redemption figures—for settlement of loans. Redemption figures are usually a considerable percentage of the loan and make it virtually impossible for clients to switch mortgages to high street lenders.

In June 1993, J & J Securities attempted to repossess the Spencers' house. The protected payment premium scheme, which had cost them £3,256 before interest, proved worthless. Fortunately, an agreement was reached in court between the Spencers and the company, which meant that they were not forced out of their home. They are still living there under duress. They have suffered a lot of stress as a result of having entered into the agreement and have had to endure numerous court proceedings. They are still under constant threat of losing the house.

The Spencers had been told by the agent that the interest rate would be 13.5 per cent. and that they would risk repossession of their property if they failed to make repayments. However, in the particulars of claim relating to the court case the Spencers found out the truth about the interest rates applied. Paragraph 2 of that claim states:

"The loan agreement provided that the loan was to be repaid, together with interest, at the monthly rate of 2.31 per cent. flat rate with an Annual Percentage Rate of 31.5 per cent. by monthly instalments of £317.66".

To show how financially punishing the agreement has been, I should like to put on record the most recent redemption statement that the Spencers have received, through their present solicitor, from CMR Loans Servicing Ltd., dated 15 March 2001. Before I quote the figures, I should explain that the loan has been rewritten since the court proceedings, but the APR, which is now 21.5 per cent., is still punishingly high. In March, the total charge for credit had reached a massive £44,579.40, including the original loan of £13,526. At that date, the Spencers had parted with £27,776.88 and the sum required to redeem the loan after all those charges was another £16,978.77. Some companies that have been operating such loans have used dual interest rates in their contracts. While regular payments are kept up, a concessionary interest rate operates. However, if even one payment is missed, a much higher interest rate kicks in. Fortunately, that does not apply in the Spencers' case.

While the original loan was secured with J & J Securities Ltd., the Spencers have dealt with a string of companies as their business has been handed down a chain: from J & J Securities Ltd. to City Mortgage Corporation—CMC—then, more recently, Ocwen Asset Investment UK LLC—OAI—and, now, igroup plc, which claims that it manages the Ocwen loans in the UK, of which there are approximately 10,000 in total. It is interesting to note that the Royal Bank of Scotland has a 49 per cent. share in igroup.

Successive solicitors employed by the Spencers have found it difficult to keep track of the changing companies, which has also made legal actions complicated. Several solicitors are attempting court proceedings on behalf of thousands of clients, with little success to date. The National Association of Mortgage Victims has also tracked proceedings and offered advice to its members.

Since 1997, I have written to several Ministers in different Departments of State and approached different agencies in an attempt to help the Spencers, so far without success. Hence the need for this debate. The activities of these companies have been well documented in the press. On 8 April 2000, *The Guardian* published an article entitled "Turning screw on poor", which detailed the case of Trevor and Susan Reeves of Suffolk. They took out a loan with Homestead Financing, which was subsequently taken over by City Mortgage Corporation. They were treated in an unsatisfactory manner and faced the prospect of having their home repossessed. Articles in other newspapers, such as the *News of the World*, *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph*, have also highlighted the unscrupulous nature of these dealings. However, despite such widespread uncomplimentary media coverage, companies are still trading in the market, largely unregulated.

In July 1997, the Director General of Fair Trading issued guidelines for lenders and brokers in the non-status lending market, which is also referred to as the sub-prime or impaired credit market. Those guidelines, which were revised in November 1997, highlighted some of the main practices in the market, which the Director General found to be

"deceitful or oppressive, or otherwise unfair or improper, within the meaning of Section 25(2)(d) of the Consumer Credit Act, and which would be likely to lead me to take regulatory action against those involved."

The report on the revised guidelines correctly indicates that the mortgage lending market is not subject to regulation under the Financial Services Act 1986. However, I have received indications that mortgages may become subject to regulation under that Act, and perhaps the Minister will say whether that is the case.

Nevertheless, a licence is required under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 from the Director General of Fair Trading to engage in a credit business or ancillary credit business. The fitness of licence holders can be brought into question by evidence of unfair business practices. City Mortgage Corporation gave undertakings to the Director General of Fair Trading in December 1997—as, subsequently, did Ocwen when it acquired the CMC business—in response to concerns arising under the Act and under the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999. Ocwen was then the subject of a management buy-out— by igroup, I believe.

I quote from a letter of 3 March 1998, which I received from the Minister who was then responsible for competitiveness and consumer affairs at the Department of Trade and Industry. The letter states:

"CMC agreed to stop imposing the unfair penalties in all"—

and I underline all—

"its loan agreements, old and new."

Apparently, igroup has agreed to investigate any borrower's complaint referred to it by the Office of Fair Trading, a trading standards department or a citizens advice bureau, and to report on the outcome of its investigation. After the title of this debate was published, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux contacted me to say that it receives a high proportion of complaints about this market. I received a letter from it this morning. It states:

"NACAB is receiving an increasing amount of evidence from citizens advice bureaux all over the country about the practices of Igroup, both concerning the loans they manage on behalf of Ocwen US and their own loans."

There are 50,000 such loans at present, and igroup continues to make them. The letter goes on to state:

"Our main concerns are as follows: interest rates on loans managed on behalf of Ocwen US... the actions and behaviour of some brokers selling Igroup loans";

and the way that arrears and possession cases are dealt with before court, in court and following court proceedings. I do not have the time to read the full list of complaints that has been forwarded to me by NACAB, but there is clearly still a lot of concern about the mortgage lending market, indeed about igroup as well as all the precursor companies that I have mentioned.

Ocwen and igroup are aware of the thousands of borrowers who, like the Spencers, borrowed money from the constituent companies that became City Mortgage Corporation prior to the Director General of Fair Trading becoming involved in these businesses in 1997. I would like to pose a question to igroup, the Royal Bank of Scotland, and to the Director General of Fair Trading. Why cannot people like the Spencers—at least 10,000 and possibly 50,000 people—be transferred to contracts and interest rates like those issued since 1 August 1997? Can we please have some of the unfair conditions attached to those contracts removed?

I look forward to a response to that important question. I challenge Ocwen, igroup and the Royal Bank of Scotland to end the misery of the Spencers and countless other borrowers like them. It should not be necessary for each of the individual borrowers to take separate legal action, when these companies know exactly who their customers are.

I hope that this debate has highlighted the desperate situation still faced by thousands of people in the mortgage market. Other right hon. and hon. Members have raised similar concerns in the past, both in correspondence with Ministers and on the Floor of the House. It is my strong opinion that Government action on the residual poor practices of these companies is long overdue, and I ask my hon. Friend to consider that. I look forward to his response.

1.43 pm

**The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Dr. Kim Howells):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on securing this debate. I know, from previous conversations with him, that he has researched this issue with tremendous thoroughness on behalf of his constituents, and done an extremely good job of it. In doing so, he has contributed greatly to our thinking on how best we should move forward on issues such as this.

My hon. Friend has raised an issue that is of great concern to many consumers including those outside his constituency, and probably concerns consumers in the

*[Dr. Kim Howells]*

constituencies of all hon. Members. The Government recognise that the relative lack of choice available to borrowers who have a low credit rating or who have had credit problems in the past makes them potentially vulnerable to unscrupulous lenders and unfair lending practices. In the past, some non-status lenders have been associated with exploitative lending practices and it is vital that these people are protected effectively by our consumer legislation.

Mortgages and other loans, both secured on the home and unsecured, are already subject to regulation. Since taking office, as my hon. Friend has described to us, the Government have introduced legislation to increase the protection for borrowers. We plan further changes to increase that protection in the near future, and in response to some of the questions posed, I will try to describe some of them. I shall deal first with the consumer credit licensing system and the non-status guidelines of the Director General of Fair Trading.

The Consumer Credit Act 1974 already applies to many non-status loans and, under the Act, traders require consumer credit licences to lend to consumers. The Director General of Fair Trading administers the licensing system and must satisfy himself that traders are fit and proper persons to hold licences. He has powers to vary, suspend or revoke licences where he considers that that is justified. The Director General has also used his powers to introduce guidelines for lenders and brokers involved in the non-status sector.

The guidelines set out practices that the Director General of Fair Trading regards as deceitful or oppressive, or otherwise unfair or improper, whether unlawful or not, and which would be likely to lead him to take regulatory action against licence holders or to consider using his powers under the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999. They also set out examples of good practice that the director general considers both lenders and brokers should adopt, and we have heard about some of them today.

The guidelines emphasise the need above all for transparency in lenders' and brokers' dealings with their customers. They state that there should be no high-pressure selling and that borrowers should be given ample opportunity to read and understand the loan conditions, and to seek independent advice, if necessary, before they commit themselves. Lenders should not cold call and their advertising and promotional material should be clear and not misleading.

The guidelines require that non-status lenders, like other lenders, should lend responsibly and that their underwriting decisions should be subject to a proper assessment of the borrower's ability to repay, taking full account of relevant factors. I noted from my hon. Friend's speech that information about his constituents' earning power and potential was completely distorted in the calculations about the loan—in favour of the lender, of course.

I believe that the guidelines have significantly improved practices in the non-status sector. Some of the worst practices of a few years back, such as penal increases in the interest rate, which could be triggered if a borrower's monthly repayment was a few days late, are no longer a problem for consumers. Nevertheless, the guidelines are almost four years old, and I am glad that the Office of Fair Trading intends to review them this year to ensure that they are comprehensive and adequately cover any changes in the market.

The Government are determined that lenders should not take advantage of mortgage borrowers when they may be vulnerable because they are focusing on a home purchase. We have decided that the Financial Services Authority should be given responsibility for regulating virtually all retail mortgages, regardless of who the lender is or why the loan is taken out. The mortgage loans to be regulated by the FSA will be loans of any size that are first legal charges on UK properties, where at least 40 per cent. of the property is for residential accommodation.

Mortgage lenders, like all other authorised firms, will need to meet the FSA's high standards on fitness and propriety to carry out the business in question. That will not be simply a requirement for obtaining authorisation. The lenders will need to maintain the standards if they are to continue to retain authorised status. I am very glad about that, because all too often in the past, lenders were not judged or monitored as closely as they should have been after obtaining licences. The FSA has recently consulted on its high-level approach to mortgage regulation, including the information that will have to be disclosed to borrowers. That will ensure that borrowers will be aware about both the mortgage product and their responsibilities. The FSA's recent consultation also suggested that it is minded to introduce rules on the treatment of those in arrears or facing repossession—for example, setting minimum standards as to the type and frequency of information supplied to consumers. The FSA's consultation paper explained that the OFT's guidelines on non-status lending, together with the Council of Mortgage Lenders' statement on handling arrears and possessions, will be taken into account when its detailed approach to mortgage regulation is formulated.

The FSA will shortly consult on detailed rules for mortgage regulation. My hon. Friend asked when mortgage regulation is likely to happen. We expect that it will come into force no later than August 2002, just over a year away. I am glad to see that the process will be that rapid.

My hon. Friend also referred to unfair contract terms. Under the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999, consumers cannot be bound by contractual terms that are weighted unfairly in favour of the lender, such as terms that purport to give the lender the right to charge excessive early redemption penalties. However, as my hon. Friend has pointed out, it is one thing to be able to say that and another to get a court to agree with it. It is very difficult to provide the cast iron evidence needed to prove that such distortions have taken place, especially in cases that took place nine years ago.

The DGFT and every local authority trading standards department have the power to prevent the use of unfair contract terms, if necessary by seeking a court injunction. The Financial Services Authority will gain those powers on 1 May 2001. The regulations also give individuals the right to challenge unfair terms in contracts into which they have entered with lenders.

There have been instances in which the courts have determined that the terms in non-status loan contracts are unfair and, therefore, unenforceable.

I recently made the "stop now" regulations, as we have named the injunctions directive that came from Europe. These regulations will come into force on 1 June 2001. They will give the Director General of Fair Trading and other consumer protection bodies the power to apply to the courts for "stop now" orders to stop traders in their tracks, so that they do not infringe a wide range of consumer protection legislation, including that on consumer credit. The powers can be used, for example, to stop lenders from failing to inform consumers of the total cost of credit. The regulations implement a European Union directive that will, for the first time, give UK consumer bodies the right to apply directly to the courts of other member states for injunctions to stop illegal practices that originate elsewhere in the community and that harm the collective interests of UK consumers.

We also plan to look at whether we should make changes to consumer credit legislation to complement the FSA's regulation of mortgages. The FSA will regulate those mortgages that are secured by a first legal charge. Often, that is not the critical issue, as my hon. Friend has said. It will not regulate those secured loans where the charge is not a first charge—for example, loans for double glazing. Because consumer credit legislation regulates only loans of up to £25,000, a significant rump of consumer loans will remain potentially unregulated. We need to consider whether to increase the upper financial limit for loans regulated by the legislation so that the majority of such loans will be protected.

The consumer credit legislation contains provisions that allow the courts to reopen extortionate credit bargains, so that justice can be done between the parties. Credit bargains are extortionate if they require the borrower to make payments that are grossly exorbitant or otherwise contravene ordinary principles of fair dealing. When the court is considering whether a credit bargain is extortionate, it can take account of such factors as interest rates, whether the borrower was under financial pressure and his age and experience. If the court decides that the credit bargain is extortionate, its options include altering the terms of the agreement, requiring the lender to make repayments to the borrower and setting aside the whole or part of the borrower's obligations under the agreement.

The provisions have been used to re-open non-status credit agreements, but the Government recognise that they have not been used often, and they should be used more often. The Department of Trade and Industry commissioned research to examine the effectiveness of the provisions and make recommendations about how they could be changed to ensure that they provide the protection that was originally intended. We intend to introduce proposals for improving protection against extortionate credit and unfair lending practices in the near future.

Regulations under the Consumer Credit Act currently allow lenders to use the so-called rule of 78 when they work out the terms on which loans can be redeemed early. That method has been criticised as unfair and biased in favour of lenders, especially when it is applied to high-value, long-term loans such as those typically offered by non-status lenders. The Government intend to bring forward proposals to use a different method to calculate early settlement terms that would give a more balanced outcome. We also want to improve loan information, so that borrowers are aware of early settlement terms before they commit themselves to a particular loan offer. We believe that that will help those consumers who expect to redeem loans early to be able to identify the loan that offers the best overall deal.

I understand that igroup plc services loans that were previously owned by a company called Ocwen UK plc. Ocwen, in turn, had acquired the business and assets of the City Mortgage Corporation. The OFT obtained undertakings from the City Mortgage Corporation in 1997 that related to non-status loans that the company had. When Ocwen acquired its business and assets, it also gave undertakings to the OFT. As part of those undertakings, Ocwen agreed to investigate any borrower complaint referred to it by the OFT, a trading standards department or a citizens advice bureau and to report back to the OFT on the outcome of its investigation. When Ocwen found a complaint that was justified, it would consider in its undertaking providing an appropriate remedy for the borrower.

When Ocwen became igroup, igroup took on those undertakings. The OFT continues to monitor both the undertakings and igroup's compliance with them, especially in respect of borrower complaints. If my hon. Friend has information—which he clearly has—that is relevant to the undertakings or igroup's fitness to hold a consumer credit licence, I am sure that he will be willing to pass it to the OFT. That should be done as quickly as possible.

I do not want to condemn all non-status lending. Like my hon. Friends in the Chamber, all of us have constituents who need such lending from time to time. The higher interest rates charged by lenders in the sector are to some extent justified by the higher risks they take on. For some borrowers, obtaining a non-status loan is an important step towards re-establishing their credit worthiness. I am aware of borrowers who have taken out mortgages with non-status lenders and who, when they have shown that they are able to manage their debts, have been able to remortgage with lenders at more favourable rates.

It is important that as many of our citizens as possible have access to credit. Of that, I am convinced. However, non-status loans may be the only option for some of them. However, that lending must be on a responsible basis and the Government are determined to make sure that consumers are protected against the exploitative lending practices that my hon. Friend described. The changes that we have already made and those that we will introduce in the future will help to ensure that non-status borrowers, like other borrowers, get a fair deal. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East. He has made a significant contribution towards strengthening our determination as a Government to do whatever is required to bring fairness and protection for borrowers in the sort of situation that he has described and which has been experienced by his constituents. For that, we should all be grateful.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.*

# Westminster Hall

*Thursday 26 April 2001*

[MRS. SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

## Conflict Diamonds

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Clelland.*]

2.30 pm

**The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Brian Wilson):** I welcome this opportunity to set out the international response to the problem of conflict diamonds and the role that the United Kingdom has played in tackling it. This is an important international problem, and this country has worked with others to find new solutions. I want to say at the start that, although the problem of conflict diamonds has arisen primarily in the context of conflicts in Africa, it is not only an African issue. Solutions will require a concerted approach that involves many key players, Governments and industry throughout the world.

Two key aspects have guided our approach to the problems of conflict diamonds. First, rebel movements in countries such as Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone are undoubtedly being funded and fuelled by the proceeds of illegal diamond mining. Diamonds mined in rebel-held areas are often sold for weapons and thereby help to perpetuate violence. More fundamentally, access to diamond areas can often be an end in itself for rebel groups and their backers. Civil war thus becomes a cloak for the ruthless exploitation of a nation's diamond wealth, and that must not be allowed to continue.

Secondly, however, it is sometimes forgotten and it is important to emphasise that the legitimate trade in diamonds is enormously important to the economies of countries such as Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Diamond revenue is vital to their economic development. Again, that is not only an African issue. In India, which is a major processor of rough diamonds, 800,000 people depend on the industry for their livelihood. We therefore need to protect that industry from the taint of conflict diamonds. They can have no place in the legitimate trade, on which the livelihoods of so many depend.

Some have said that, if nothing is done, a consumer backlash against diamonds could lead to them going the way of fur, and we must work to avoid that. I want to make it clear that I totally oppose any talk of boycotts of diamonds. Such initiatives would be counter-productive and irresponsible because of the economic implications for countries that depend on the legitimate production of diamonds.

In that context, it is important to keep a sense of perspective. Estimates vary slightly, but conflict diamonds probably account for less than 4 per cent. of worldwide production. Apart from economic damage, it causes understandable offence to the Governments of legitimate diamond-producing countries when it is suggested in a vague, offhand way that the whole diamond trade, or a high proportion of it, is tainted. That suggestion is not true, and I welcome this opportunity to re-emphasise the fact, which is now widely accepted, that conflict diamonds account for 4 per cent. or less of worldwide production. The problem is that the illegally traded minority can turn up wherever diamonds are bought or sold—from London to Tel Aviv and from Antwerp to Bombay. That is why we are working with the international community to try to keep conflict diamonds out of legitimate diamond markets.

We can do that, first by working through the United Nations Security Council to address the problem of conflict diamonds in specific situations. The UK, as a permanent member of the Security Council, was instrumental in pushing through Security Council resolutions to impose sanctions on Sierra Leone and Liberia. The Security Council also acted to halt the trade in conflict diamonds in Angola in 1998 by imposing a ban on the import from Angola of diamonds that were not controlled by the Angolan Government's certification regime. In 1998, the Security Council adopted a resolution banning the import of diamonds from UNITA. That was a groundbreaking step, as it was the first time that the Security Council had targeted the trade in conflict diamonds. Since then, the Security Council has worked hard with the Government of Angola and others to tighten the grip of the ban. In 1999, in another important initiative supported by the UK, the Security Council commissioned a detailed report on UNITA sanctions busting. That has led to further efforts to tighten implementation of the diamond ban.

Sierra Leone is another nation that has been accursed by its own diamond wealth. For years, the Revolutionary United Front rebel movement has financed itself from the illegal plunder of the diamond fields of Sierra Leone. Last July, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1306, drafted by the UK, which bans the import of diamonds from Sierra Leone except those certified as legitimate by the Government of Sierra Leone. We also proposed the first ever UN hearing to assess the role of conflict diamonds in the Sierra Leone conflict and the link between diamonds and arms trafficking. That was held in New York on 31 July 2000. It gave representatives of Governments, industry and civil society an opportunity to brief members of the Security Council's sanctions committee and the media on the dreadful trade and what should be done to end it.

Since the adoption of the ban on uncertificated rough diamonds from Sierra Leone, the RUF has found it harder to make money from diamonds, and official Sierra Leone exports have increased substantially. In 1999, the value of those legitimate diamond exports was $1.5 million. By 2000, that had risen to $10 million. From October 2000 to January 2001, since the certification scheme came into effect, exports rose to $6.4 million. In addition to this, the exit routes for illegitimate diamonds had become more tortuous.

A dreadful aspect of the tragedy of Sierra Leone, which I remember discussing in this Chamber with a Labour and a Conservative Member who had been to Sierra Leone recently, is that although its people are among the poorest in the world, their diamond wealth goes to the rebels and to neighbouring countries such as Liberia.

*[Mr. Brian Wilson]*

Liberia must bear direct responsibility for the perpetuation of the Sierra Leone conflict. Resolution 1306 also established an expert panel to collect information on violation of Sierra Leone's arms embargo and the link between the diamond and arms trades. The panel's report provided unequivocal evidence that Liberian support has provided rebels with arms and safe havens in return for conflict diamonds, so international pressure has been stepped up on Liberia to close down its links with the rebels. In March 2001, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1343, which calls on Liberia to end its support for the RUF rebels before 7 May 2001. If it does not, there will be a ban on the import of all rough diamonds originating in or exported from Liberia. So far, there has been no evidence of a clear commitment by the Liberian Government to break its link with the rebels, so the ban is expected to be introduced, as foreseen in the resolution.

However, UN Security Council resolutions are not the only weapons needed to tackle the illicit trade. Diamonds are, by their nature, easily smuggled; their origin is easily concealed. It is a sad fact that one of the lessons of the resolutions that I have mentioned is that if one stamps out the trade in one country it tends to crop up elsewhere. That is why we need a global approach. It can only be done by agreement within the global community, including the diamond industry. A good start has been made. Members of the industry, from mining companies all the way through the processing chain to jewellery retailers, have already taken important steps to reassure consumers that their diamonds are conflict free. They have also created their own representative group, the World Diamond Council, to ensure that they co-ordinate their efforts to safeguard the legitimate industry. The World Diamond Council has played an active part in formulating proposals to that end, and has given the industry an important voice in the international campaign to tackle conflict diamonds.

There is also a role for Governments. About a year ago, the South African producer states formed the so-called Kimberley group as a fairly informal brainstorming group involving some key countries, industry and civil society. This was an imaginative approach to tackling a new problem. It brought together key producer countries, key importers such as ourselves, representatives of industry and concerned non-governmental organisations.

The Kimberley process, under South Africa's dynamic leadership, together with that of Botswana and Namibia, has generated tremendous international support and commitment. The United Kingdom has played a prominent part in it. We hosted an important meeting of the group in London in October to try to expand the number of countries participating, and we asked for the issue to be placed on the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly. That resulted in a milestone event on 1 December 2000, when the entire membership of the assembly, all 189 countries, adopted a resolution supporting the creation of an international certification scheme for rough diamonds. That was a landmark in this affair.

What would an international certification scheme for rough diamonds mean in practice? We want an international agreement on a scheme under which Governments would permit the export and import only of rough diamonds certified to come from mines under the jurisdiction of a legitimate Government. That is a simple, straightforward definition. Producer country Governments would have to ensure that all legitimate exports had a proper certificate of authenticity, and importing Governments—the key diamond trading centres, including this country—would have to undertake not to allow imports unless they were accompanied by such a certificate. That would make it much harder for diamonds from rebel-held areas to gain access to respectable international markets.

We want a regime that is relatively simple and not administratively burdensome. We do not want to make life impossible for the legitimate industry, and have therefore resisted calls for a chain of certificates to accompany diamonds all the way from the mine to the jeweller's shop. That would impose a huge burden on countries such as India, where numerous small firms cut and polish diamonds. We believe that a certificate for the import and export of rough diamonds can make a significant contribution to curbing the trade in conflict diamonds. We also believe that some form of monitoring would be desirable, but, again, have no wish to create a huge international bureaucracy.

The UN General Assembly decision gave the Kimberley process the political mandate to press on with the technical negotiations to draw up a global certification scheme. Thirty-eight countries are now members of the group and they include all the key producers and traders. At a meeting in Windhoek in February we agreed on a series of targets to be achieved during the year, so that by September, when another Kimberley process meeting is due in London, an international certification scheme will be close to agreement.

The United Kingdom has worked hard, alongside its partners in the process, to keep up momentum. We realise that the schedule that we set ourselves in Windhoek is a tight one, and that much work remains to be done. While everyone agrees on the desirability of action, there are many details still to be thrashed out. However, we remain optimistic and hope to achieve the next step of securing UN General Assembly blessing for the agreement. We should like a further resolution to be adopted unanimously before the end of the 56th General Assembly.

We could not have succeeded in keeping up the momentum on this issue without the driving force provided by NGOs in the field. We have worked closely with Global Witness, which, with funding from the Government, produced an excellent and highly detailed report outlining recommendations for a global certification scheme.

**Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): My hon. Friend will be aware of a recent report by Global Witness about diamonds from Sierra Leone. On the matter of certification, it reported that at present only the Belgians have adequate computer links for monitoring the processes of certification from Sierra Leone. Will my hon. Friend say whether we intend to

acquire similar capacity? Will we in Britain be able to establish computer links that increase the likelihood that conflict diamonds will not get through?

**Mr. Wilson:** I did not realise that my hon. Friend had joined us. I acknowledge his role in setting up the present process. I assure him that the matter that he raises, and the concerns expressed by Global Witness, are taken seriously. As I was about to mention, this subject was among those discussed at meetings in Brussels this week, and I hope that we shall soon be able to provide the assurance that my hon. Friend seeks.

In conclusion, we have come a long way in the few years since the process in question began. We have worked closely with the industry and others to tackle a difficult and important subject, which has many connotations and which gives rise to many side effects, often involving immense human suffering. We acknowledge the progress that has been made, but we also recognise that many problems remain to be resolved, and that intergovernmental and inter-agency consultations must be painstaking, and can be difficult to conduct speedily.

However, the Kimberley process is making headway. As I speak, UK representatives are involved in the latest meeting of the Kimberley process in Brussels, and progress is being made. Our aim at that meeting is to negotiate the specific content of an international certification scheme, looking towards agreement on minimum standards for such a scheme, and that must take account of the kind of concerns that my hon. Friend has mentioned. A successful meeting in Brussels this week will take us one step closer to breaking the link between conflict and the illicit trade in diamonds.

I am grateful for this opportunity to set out the progress that has been made and to be open and frank about the difficulties that remain in tackling an issue that I do not think will divide us in any way. If a clear separation could be made between the 96 per cent. plus of diamonds that are legitimate and the 4 per cent. or less that are illegitimate, that would be good for the legitimate diamond trade, for countries that produce diamonds and depend on them economically, and for the well-being of the people of those countries. That 4 per cent. or less can be and are being used to fund a great deal of suffering in the world.

2.46 pm

**Mr. Richard Spring** (West Suffolk): I thank the Minister for setting out the matter under discussion so openly and comprehensively. Conflict diamonds are an important issue, which certainly transcends any political differences. Hon. Members will be aware that the illegal trade in rough diamonds, however small in the overall context, too often forms an intrinsic part of rebellion and violence, particularly in Africa. The trade has been responsible for destroying the lives of innocent men, women and children.

Like all Conservatives, I welcome wholeheartedly any move that will help those people to resurrect their lives and reunite the families that have been divided by conflict. We must break the link between diamonds and war. It is unacceptable that brutal wars are being funded from the profits of this illegal trade, and it is unacceptable that higher up the chain, rogue traders and middlemen are cashing in on it. I should like to join other hon. Members in offering support to all those who have already contributed so much time and energy to a process that we all hope will lead to the regulation of the illegal diamond trade and bring an end to its unhappy consequences.

It was entirely correct and proper for Britain to co-sponsor the resolution on conflict diamonds adopted at the UN General Assembly on 1 December 2000. That resolution should go a long way towards helping to rid the world of the illegal diamond trade. It is important that the recommendations made by the assembly form an integral part of any international strategy. Any such strategy must comply with internationally agreed minimum standards, secure the widest possible participation, include mechanisms to ensure compliance with respect to the sovereignty of states, and be transparent.

The diamond industry united in the creation of the World Diamond Council. That shows us that the industry is concerned about the issue of conflict diamonds, and that it is determined to pull together to tackle it head on. It is particularly pleasing that the industry is putting its own house in order in that respect and that it is committed to identifying and ostracising those who operate on the margins of the legitimate trade and seek to profit from the misery and suffering caused by the trade in conflict diamonds.

De Beers has been highlighted for special praise, not least by the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Earlier this year he said:

> "De Beers has set an example, with its response to criticism of the diamond trade in Africa and its efforts to ensure that traders and consumers of diamonds will no longer unwittingly help to finance warlords."

The Conservatives welcome wholeheartedly the decision by De Beers to offer its assistance to the United Nations in developing rough diamond supplies for identification purposes in importing and exporting centres. The universal acceptance of an international certification scheme for rough diamonds represents a significant step.

We are pleased that the 36 countries that met in London in October realised a common interest in protecting the legitimate trade and that all joined the Kimberley consensus. We are even more pleased that the entire membership of the United Nations General Assembly—all 189 countries—saw fit to accept the need for an international certification scheme and approved a resolution calling for one to be developed in due course. We wish the Kimberley task force well. We all hope that it will be successful in the continuing process of identifying an accountable certification scheme and making it work. We are at the beginning of a long path. However, I am sure that all hon. Members would agree that it is certainly a worthy path.

I come now to the problems caused by conflict diamonds in particular countries. In respect of Angola, hon. Members will be aware that, on 25 January 2001, the United Nations Security Council extended for a further three months the mandate of the monitoring mechanism established to investigate violations of sanctions imposed against the rebel movement UNITA. The recently published final report of the monitoring mechanism assessed the effectiveness of the Security

*[Mr. Richard Spring]*

Council resolution on the issue. It is a revealing report, which suggests that while much has been done, there is still much progress to be made.

The report said that, even where Governments have both enacted laws and strengthened diamond-trading controls, illicit diamonds are still reaching the market. Gems will find a market as long as illicit diamonds can be traded and until those who are involved in the trade are exposed and penalised, thus making UNITA diamonds a less attractive proposition.

UN sanctions have driven UNITA diamond trading deeper underground and have led to new routes for diamond trading. They have provided the impetus for worldwide controls on diamonds—the certificate of origin scheme. However, the scheme is unlikely to be implemented before the end of this year. We must build on the efforts of those who have already contributed so much, and ensure that an international certification scheme for diamonds becomes a reality. The British Government have a duty to humanity to be an integral part of that process.

The examples of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa show how diamonds have the potential to play a prominent role in development. That role must not be underestimated; nor, therefore, must confidence in diamonds be undermined. I am grateful to the Minister for emphasising that this is not only an issue for Africa.

In Botswana, diamonds account for one third of GDP, more than half of Government revenues and about 80 per cent. of export earnings. They are the reason for the country's tremendous growth. Twenty-five years ago, it was one of the 20 poorest countries in the world. Today, it is considered to be the richest non-oil-producing country in Africa. As its President, Festus Mogae, has said:

"Diamonds mean development in Botswana, the revenues from which have been used to build schools and hospitals, roads and bridges, offices and houses."

So let us never forget the important role that diamonds have played in the considerable success story that is Botswana.

However, to the dismay of people like President Mogae, even in Botswana, the legitimate trade is in danger of suffering great damage because of illegal diamond trafficking, which, although it should be noted accounts for less than 3 or 4 per cent. of the world's total production of diamonds, has the potential to taint the entire industry. Image, especially for diamonds, is crucial.

The most publicised effect of conflict diamonds has been in Sierra Leone. We welcome the United Nations Security Council's unanimous vote to block diamond exports from Liberia in punishment for its guns-for-gems trade in support of the rebel RUF in Sierra Leone. We are, however, disappointed that the ban on diamonds, along with the travel embargo on President Charles Taylor and several Liberian officials and business men, will not come into force until 7 May. It was right to leave President Taylor and his associates in no doubt that the international community will no longer tolerate his destabilising activities in the region.

A recent Global Witness report states that Sierra Leone may be exporting conflict diamonds through official channels, despite a United Nations embargo. That is deeply worrying and serves to confirm the conclusions of the UN Security Council monitoring mechanism for Angola.

In the light of that report, the role of the international peacekeeping forces in Sierra Leone appears to be yet more significant in the fight against the illegal diamond trade. Focus has also been cast on the May 1999 Lomé agreement. Under that agreement, the RUF was recognised as a legal political party and was given seats in the Sierra Leone Government. The rebels were also given a guarantee that they would not be prosecuted for the atrocities that they had committed against the civilian population. The RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, was given a key Government post as chairman of the strategic minerals commission, which oversees the exploitation of the country's diamond wealth.

This debate provides a good opportunity to consider objectively how the illegal diamond trade affects countries specifically and generally. It is clear that the ordinary people of Africa, the true victims of the illegal diamond trade, will be best served if our Government, rather than accusing the UN of failure, continue to operate in unison with, and in support of, the UN's mission to end the illegal diamond trade. I urge the Minister to work to secure, under a UN mandate, an international certification scheme to cover all rough diamonds. Moreover, I urge him to ensure that the scheme is workable, with minimum standards and compliance, and that it will protect legitimate trade but curtail illicit trafficking in diamonds. That would represent an important step in stamping out illegal diamond trading, with all its unfortunate consequences.

In conclusion, we must put this reprehensible activity into context. Illegal diamond trading amounts to a tiny fraction of the overall legitimate trade in diamonds. Diamonds are beautiful and enduring objects, which have given pleasure to their owners for many hundreds of years, and will continue to do so. Africa has benefited enormously from the trade in diamonds. The diamond mining and selling business should be seen in a holistic context. The difficulties that we have been talking about this afternoon should not stigmatise Africa or encourage any view that the diamond business is somehow tainted. There is no justification whatever for such a view. If the diamond business were perceived to be anything other than a wholly legitimate activity, it would have negative consequences for several African countries, and would neither serve their interests nor those of people in other countries who work in the business, particularly in India. Diamonds have played a crucial part in the development of Africa and must be allowed to continue to do so, supported by consumers all over the world who enjoy, trust and value the product itself.

2.57 pm

**Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): I begin by picking up the theme of the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) that undoubtedly, diamonds are a power for good—the example of Botswana is well made. The benign scenario would be for the whole diamond trade to become something practical and useful, especially for producing countries. It is also a fact that diamonds have altered the course of African history and

history more generally. At least three conflicts raging in Africa—in Angola, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo—would have been different had diamonds not formed part of the motive for conflict.

There is no doubt that one of the motives for the involvement of many external powers in the conflict in the DRC has been the ability to exploit illegally that country's mineral wealth. In that country, rather than diamonds being employed productively, as in Botswana, diamonds have been stolen and used illegitimately as a mechanism of the conflict. The diamond trade in all three countries can be measured in broken bones and lives lost.

There is no doubt that the biggest mechanism for keeping Mr. Savimbi at the head of UNITA in Angola has been his own ability to control those parts of Angola from which the diamonds come. It might be little recognised in this country that that has been one of the most outrageous conflicts raging on this planet for a long time. Its origins are back in the days of the cold war. That was a long time ago, but, sadly, Mr Savimbi regarded it as a commercial exploitation and an aggrandisement of his own position rather than being about the betterment of the people of Angola.

It is legitimate to question how we handle the diamond trade, and to couple that by saying that we recognise that diamonds are a beneficial commodity that can produce consumer satisfaction in Britain. However, at every part of the chain, those involved must examine their ability to have an impact on those diamonds that have caused such conflicts. I remember when the United Nations first involved itself in the embargo in respect of Angola. At the time, many voices said that it was impossible to control the trade. Those voices came from important Governments that were involved in the diamond trade. They resisted the idea that we should control conflict diamonds because they feared that such action would impact on their own national economies within Europe.

There was resistance within the industry from those who said that it was not possible to control such a trade. Yet, little by little, both the intellectual and the practical arguments, if not being won, are at least moving the margins. It is now possible to say that the control of conflict diamonds is a reality. It is worth examining the report by Global Witness. It recently visited Sierra Leone, a country where the civil administration is extremely weak. I say that as someone with great emotional sympathy for the Government and the people of Sierra Leone.

The institutions are weak, so if Sierra Leone were able, as Global Witness has said, to achieve significant results by the process of certification, it is clear that there is enormous potential benefit for that country and the world. It is not without problems, however, and Global Witness referred to some of the problems that arose in the Sierra Leonean context. It pointed out the capacity for the diamond industry to induce corruption at the most extraordinary levels. Diamonds, by their nature being small and easily transportable, but of enormous value, are an extremely tempting part of the process that leads to the corruption of individual officials.

**Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): If the Sierra Leone Government can certify some of the diamonds, presumably that is a small proportion of the diamonds produced in Sierra Leone. The main diamond fields are still being controlled by the RUF, so presumably diamonds can leave the country without being certified.

**Mr. Lloyd:** The hon. Lady makes an important point. The problem for Sierra Leone is that, while it can control the diamonds from Government-held areas, as Global Witness said, the process of certification recognises the fact that some diamonds from rebel-held areas come through the legitimate system. It is conceded openly that there are not so many. In general, the system is working, but there is a need to ensure that it works more efficiently. When diamonds are not under the control of the authorities in Sierra Leone, but disappear across the border to Liberia, we must look for the mechanics to which the Minister referred.

There is no doubt that President Taylor of Liberia has been the single most influential person in guaranteeing that the conflict in Sierra Leone continues. Mr. Taylor deserves not only criticism, but the tough action that is long overdue. I know from personal experience that the ability of that regime to claim innocence in such matters is extraordinary, even in the face of the most blatant evidence of abuse. Those diamonds pour across the Sierra Leonean border into Liberia, neighbouring African countries and Europe, and the mechanics are that when diamonds come one way, arms from European countries and others are transferred back to Africa and keep the conflict fuelled. We must do what we can to seal those diamonds, to prevent them from disappearing from Sierra Leone. Let us say it plainly: the people of Sierra Leone are being robbed by the rebels, by President Taylor and by that part of the world community that is prepared to deal in illegal diamonds and the arms trade that fuels the conflict.

However, even in Sierra Leone, where the diamonds are under the control of the Sierra Leonean authorities, the certification process has been successful. We should applaud that, because if it can be done there, there is no argument that we cannot reproduce such certification elsewhere. That is the hopeful message. There are extraordinary difficulties with the diamond trade—diamonds are by nature easily transported and smuggled. No one is under any illusions that even with the most efficient certification process we can guarantee that no diamonds will hit the cutting shops in India or western Europe and that none of them will appear on our high streets. However, we can do a lot to reduce the 4 per cent. of diamonds that have historically come from areas of conflict, and remove the profit element.

I should like to raise a practical issue with the Minister. Global Witness recognised in its report that a limited number of illegitimate diamonds are coming through the legitimate system. One reason given was that if diamond dealers are penalised for including an occasional stone of a questionable but not profitable nature, they will simply continue to smuggle and will not use the new system—or so dealers and their apologists would claim. Global Witness made the point that, in the end, the only way to tackle the problem is by confiscation of illegal diamonds. There must be a tough and robust approach to that: we must examine confiscation as a means of discouragement. Smuggling will take place; I acknowledge that with no joy but enormous regret. However, the way to combat it is not

*[Mr. Lloyd]*

to allow the official system to be corrupted at the margin by conflict diamonds. I plead with my hon. Friend to examine that matter.

I welcome the Minister's comments about the steps that the British Government have taken. We have helped to move the issue forward. I also welcome what he said about the possibility of introducing new technology computer links to ensure that the certification process is better managed globally. In the end, countries such as Britain must acknowledge that we are the consumers of diamonds. It is entirely legitimate and acceptable that we consume diamonds from Botswana and South Africa—as the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) said, no stigma should be attached to that trade. However, equally, we have as much responsibility as anyone else to ensure that we bear down on conflict diamonds. If we ignore that we ignore our moral responsibility and practical capacity to bear down on conflict diamonds in countries such as Congo, Sierra Leone and Angola.

I conclude, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by congratulating the Minister on his remarks, and I encourage him to continue the process, which is not simply worthy but can achieve practical results. I congratulate him on his efforts.

**Mr. Peter L. Pike (in the Chair):** Before I call Dr. Tonge, I should say that I am not Mr. Deputy Speaker.

3.9 pm

**Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): That is modest of you, Mr. Pike. Some of your colleagues are not so modest. We have had a lot of fun in the past few weeks discussing what people should be called and, despite the ruling, some people are getting away with "Mr. Deputy Speaker", which is rather fun.

I am pleased to speak in the debate, because the subject is close to my heart. After four years of considering international development issues, I have realised how important an issue it is. As the Minister said, the great tragedy of Sierra Leone is that some of the poorest people in the world have such great wealth in their country. It goes to the rebels, to Liberia and other countries, and it fuels war, as we have heard, in Angola, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo, for example.

I am delighted that the Cabinet sub-committee on conflict prevention in Africa, an all-departmental sub-committee, is now producing material on conflict prevention. Its interesting report contains a table that lists 35 countries that have experienced civil war since 1948. That is an extraordinary number. Of those wars, six or seven continue.

Diamonds are a big factor in many of the wars that are still running in Africa. I emphasise what a destabilising factor diamonds are and how much suffering they cause. They enable arms to be purchased to pursue such wars. To our great shame, we do not know how many UK citizens are involved in selling arms to such countries, and benefit from the proceeds of illegal trafficking in diamonds, but fortunately we may know soon. If the draft arms control Bill is introduced after the general election, as I am sure that it will be, we may subsequently have some control over such people.

In case I do not have the opportunity to say so after the general election, I should say that two aspects of the draft arms control Bill worry me. No mention is made of prior scrutiny, which I thought would be one of the key elements in the Bill, as the Quadripartite Committee so strongly favoured it.

UK passport holders living anywhere in the world who deal in arms should come under the aegis of the Bill, not merely UK passport holders living in Britain. Most of the arms brokers about whom I hear have mobile phones and do not have enormous offices and establishments. They need merely to take their mobile phones abroad to deal in arms paid for out of the proceeds of the diamond industry. I am sorry to digress, Mr. Pike, but I felt that I must put in my oar.

I read a most astonishing document from the United Nations global policy forum, which I hope and expect is being considered by civil servants in the Foreign Office. It was produced on 21 December 2000, and it is the final report of the monitoring mechanism on Angola sanctions. It made staggering reading. I did not read it all, but dipped into it. It contains details of smuggling routes. People know exactly where the diamonds are going and how they are being smuggled. It contains the names of arms brokers, diamond dealers and cutters, and details of where diamonds are cut.

It is common knowledge that, as the report points out, Rwanda and Uganda are big exporters of diamonds. However, they have no diamonds within their country boundaries. A diamond cutting centre in Kigali is planned. I do not know whether it will cut conflict diamonds.

**Mr. Tony Lloyd:** The crude reality is that no one in Rwanda or Uganda can deny that those diamonds are stolen from the Congo.

**Dr. Tonge:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention. I thought as much, because Rwanda and Uganda are always looking for the means by which to buy arms to pursue wars. It could be argued that Rwanda and Uganda have a legitimate interest in defending their territory following the genocide in Rwanda. Nevertheless, conflict diamonds are fuelling wars. I hope that the next time members of the Select Committee visit the Great Lakes region—the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) and I were in Rwanda a few years ago—they will investigate the problem in detail.

The other fascinating person in the report is Victor Bout. I am sure that hon. Members know his name. He is all over the place. He is a tremendous chap who has loads of passports and identities. He operates all over the show and is a very successful man when it comes to conflict diamonds. A brief biography of the man tells us that he is married, and that his wife, Alla, resides in the United Arab Emirates. I bet she has some pretty hefty diamonds. I feel like trying to discover the address of the couple. I would love to write to Mrs. Bout and ask her—as a woman, looking at the diamonds that she no doubt wears—how many hundreds of thousands of women and children have been tortured, slaughtered and killed so that she can wear her beautiful diamonds on her finger.

It is comforting to hear that only 4 per cent. of the diamonds circulating in the world are conflict diamonds, but I have not worn my two very modest diamonds recently. I was given them a long time ago, and I hope that they are not conflict diamonds. Women need to know whether their diamonds are conflict diamonds. It would be nice to find out whether Mrs. Bout knows the suffering that her diamonds probably caused.

I congratulate the authors of the report. It is astonishingly explicit, and I assume that it will form the basis of an awful lot of the certification and monitoring of the subject in the future. I also congratulate the Government on the work that they have done. Dramatic progress has been made, and we thank those responsible for it. I wondered why we were having this debate this afternoon, but it is presumably so that we can record that a lot of progress has been made.

The Kimberley process has resulted in the establishment of the World Diamond Council, which has made huge progress. The need for global certification has been accepted by 189 countries. The only doubts that I have relate to the way in which the council will operate. No doubt we shall find out over the next few years. How will the certification be implemented? Who will check? I feel that faster progress would be made if the United Nations were more effective. It has produced a wonderful report, but how effective will it be at monitoring? For example, in Sierra Leone, as we know, the RUF still controls the diamond fields and until that control is wrested from the rebels—the UN must have a part to play in that—there is little hope of ending the trade in the near future. It would be useful to know whether the Minister shares the view of the Secretary of State for International Development on the role of the UN in Sierra Leone.

A sanctions regime operates against Liberia and Sierra Leone and, according to the Fowler report, there is a lot of sanction busting. Charles Taylor cocks a snook at everyone and carries on regardless, undaunted by sanctions. Where is the monitoring of that? Where are the penalties for breaking sanctions? If we know that sanctions are being broken and who is breaking them, why are there no penalties, and why is the international community so hopeless at penalising people who break the regimes? That is what I find so frustrating.

Conflict in Africa, and all over the world, is not due just to diamonds. I note that the new Cabinet sub-committee on conflict prevention has said that a reduction in the exploitation of mineral wealth is one of the most pressing needs in cutting down the amount of conflict in the world. This morning, I spoke to somebody from Colombia, a country about which the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) knows a great deal. Wars in Colombia are fuelled by the coca trade, and by gold and oil. In Sudan—which I have visited and about which I feel passionately—the extraction of the mineral wealth of oil is causing untold abuse of human rights and damage to the country. It is also making the civil war in Sudan, which has been raging for 20 years, even worse, because people are being driven from their homelands, taken into slavery and murdered. All that occurs in the name of extracting mineral wealth.

British companies are involved in extracting mineral wealth from southern Sudan, just as British people are involved in conflict diamonds and extracting Colombian mineral wealth. I call on the Government to take stronger action against the companies that are prepared to see such suffering for the sake of mineral wealth. Such wealth never benefits the poor people of the country from which it is extracted, but always goes into the hands of the rich of the country, or abroad. More than anything, I hope that we can strive to ensure that British hands are clean.

3.22 pm

**Mr. Ian Davidson** (Glasgow, Pollok): I congratulate the Minister and the Government on the action that they have taken on the matter. I missed the first couple of minutes of the Minister's speech, but I am sure that it was in line with everything else that he said, which seemed to be first class and worthy of our support. I also congratulate and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) for his contribution, and for the contribution that he made to the matter as a Minister.

I want to consider how conflict diamonds may affect legitimate trade. I recently had the opportunity to lead the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation to Botswana, and I saw the tremendous impact that diamond mining and diamond money has had on the country's development. Like the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), I also received a briefing from the Botswanan high commissioner, so I shall not quote the same words as he did. However, we should not do anything to damage the tremendous impact and difference being made to that country by diamonds and diamond mining. Botswana and other responsible diamond-mining countries welcome the action being taken. However, they are understandably worried that it may spill over and lead to steps that undermine the trade in general, and the source of revenue on which they depend for their development.

I shall touch on, but not go into great detail about, issues relating to Botswana. I have visited its diamond mines and appreciated the way in which the diamonds are produced—they occur in kimberlite pipes. I have seen the mining processes and, from the explanations that we received, I recognise that those diamonds may be physically protected from theft as alluvial diamonds, which are spread over wide geographical areas, cannot. Much to the disappointment of my wife, the diamond production process in Botswana is secure and safe. Even if one looks at the soles of one's shoes after walking through the area, one sees that nothing sticks to them that might be of future use. However, that is not always the case.

I appreciate that it is almost impossible, in Botswana, for illicit diamonds to be smuggled into the trail from the mine to the point of export, but that is not necessarily the case elsewhere. It was difficult to disagree with anything that the Minister said earlier, but not impossible. I want to pick up the point about the security of the trail from mine to shop. I recognise the Minister's point about not wanting to place undue burdens on business, and not wishing to create too much of a bureaucratic nightmare. However, issues of credibility remain. Although the Botswanan process, from mine to the point of export, is secure, that is not the case everywhere else. While there are large numbers of small polishers in India, the opportunity for illicit diamonds to be leaked in to the process and

*[Mr. Ian Davidson]*

contaminate the flow is considerable. I am worried that, in those circumstances, the proposed monitoring process will be insufficiently stringent. The danger is that if the system is deemed to be unsafe or insecure, it will be discredited. If there is failure to convince people that the system is secure, there is a danger of a consumer boycott of diamonds in general—an indiscriminate boycott, which would have tremendous adverse consequences on countries such as Botswana.

While I was in Botswana, I was struck by the impact of HIV-AIDS there. When the group visited a particular mine, we were told that new machinery was to be introduced which would require a work force that was one-third smaller. In our naivety, we asked whether there would have to be redundancies. We were told that that would not be necessary, so we asked whether a lot of people would be retiring. It was explained that that was not the case. Eventually, the penny dropped—a third of the work force would die of AIDS over the period during which the new technology was being introduced. Effectively, the work force that was needed would be achieved by a process of attrition through AIDS. The workers in the Botswana diamond mines were, as I understood it, the highest paid and the best educated in the country, and 20 to 25 per cent. of them had tested positive for HIV. Such an impact on a country such as Botswana means that the need for the money flowing from legitimate diamond sales is absolutely essential. Will the Minister provide further assurances about the way in which the trail from mine to shop can be tightened up, secured and made credible, in order to avoid the prospect of an overall consumer boycott, which could significantly damage legitimate producers, such as Botswana, which depend on mining for their future?

3.28 pm

**Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): The debate highlights a considerable and welcome shift in the world perception of what is acceptable behaviour. Our democracy is old enough for us to have been enriched by piracy against Spanish ships that were engaged in carrying gold that they had stolen from south America. We are old enough to have been enriched by the slave trade for a couple of centuries, and we have benefited hugely over the years, whether through the inclusion of the Kohinoor diamond in the Queen's jewels or taking mineral deposits from countries that were not strong enough to stop us. We must therefore approach the subject with humility.

Importantly, the world is at last beginning to understand the clear gain to the global community of having higher and enforceable standards. That is a huge improvement. Yesterday, I sat through a large part of the Quadripartite Committee's proceedings on arms control, and I was encouraged to discover that the arms industry is generally in favour of proper controls on arms dealing. Its sole and understandable anxiety is that it might be left so far ahead of the pack that less scrupulous countries could benefit at its expense. That is the reason why international agreements, such as the Kimberley agreement, are indispensible for serious progress.

With regard to the matter under discussion, we should carefully examine our foreign and development policies. I am disheartened by events in Uganda. It has made a serious attempt to deal with HIV and AIDS, and to improve the living conditions of its people, but it also takes too readily to armed conflict to achieve its ends. Some of Uganda's armed conflicts are as historically difficult to unravel as the Northern Ireland situation, but others are almost gratuitous. Uganda is illegally plundering the Democratic Republic of Congo's mineral wealth, and yet it remains the darling of the development community. For instance, it was one of the first countries to receive heavily indebted poor countries relief. We must support countries in sub-Saharan Africa that have Governments that are strong and committed enough to make a positive difference, but we should also use our position to put pressure on nations such as Uganda to behave better.

The policy of certifying the origins of diamonds should be developed as far as possible, because it is clear that legitimate producers, such as Botswana, have everything to gain and nothing to lose from such a transparent international system. I was encouraged by the Minister's comments about the roles of Great Britain and the international community with regard to the issue, and I hope that a system of transparent certification and of monitoring the routes by which diamonds get into the shops, and on to the bosoms of arms dealers' wives, can be properly put in place. I trust that, as the international community develops and globalisation advances, we will be better able to differentiate between regimes whose behaviour is unacceptable to the international community, and those that are making a serious effort to match up to international standards.

The narrow issue that we are debating has wider implications, but I do not wish the discussion to be broadened to such an extent that effective action is not taken.

3.34 pm

**Mr. Wilson:** With the leave of the Chamber, Mr. Pike, I shall reply to the debate. The opening remarks of the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Mr. Rowe) were important. It is a great advance that we are discussing the source of a commodity and the conditions under which it is produced, and the implications of those matters. Such scrutiny should be applied to many other commodities. We are entitled to ask those who benefit from the production of such commodities to offer some assurances about their source and its ethical quality.

To digress slightly, I have been involved a little in the past week or 10 days with the question of how cocoa is produced. I did not know that child slaves were used to anything like the extent that they appear to be in the production of cocoa and other basic commodities in parts of Africa. However, now that I do, I have no doubt that it should be possible to walk into a supermarket in this country to buy chocolate or cocoa and to have an assurance from the people who have made it and profited from it for generations that each of the ingredients was produced under circumstances that consumers find acceptable. That is not too high a standard to set, and there is nothing technically impossible about giving such an assurance. If there are

difficulties, it is up to the people who profit from the supply chain to address them and thereby put themselves in a position to give an assurance.

The implications of what we are talking about go beyond diamonds, although there is a special consideration in the case of diamonds because there is a straight correlation in practice between illegal production and the illegal acquisition of weapons of death. That makes the imperatives behind the action in which we are participating so urgent and the moral arguments so unanswerable. The diamond industry has therefore been put in the forefront when it comes to facing demands for a response to ethical questions and for the assurances that we all want. The industry has been obliged to lead the way today, but many other producers of basic commodities, in line with the philosophical change that has been identified, will be asked to act tomorrow. It will be a great step forward for humanity when they are.

**Dr. Tonge:** What assurances will the Minister seek from the chocolate manufacturers? I understand that the Government have had some contact with them. What assurances will we get that their products do not involve child slave labour? Will those assurances be on the product?

**Mr. Wilson:** I seek your further indulgence, Mr. Pike, to answer that point briefly. We are in discussion with the chocolate manufacturers and cocoa producers, and there will be further meetings in the near future. In fact, I signed a written reply to the hon. Lady to that effect today.

Nobody wants to generalise or sensationalise or to suggest that every bar of chocolate or cup of cocoa has the blood of slave children in it. It is tempting to leap from the particular to the general in that way, but we do not want to over-dramatise. I want to be able to give the assurances that the hon. Lady suggested. It should be possible to secure the involvement of the producers in the industry in the same way as it has been possible to engage the producers in the diamond industry.

As I said in my opening remarks, the story so far is a positive one of Governments, industry and civil society working together to achieve the same ends. However, I still do not underestimate the difficulties of reaching agreement on a global certification scheme for rough diamonds. The concept might be reasonably simple, but delegates who attended the Kimberley process meetings have a lot of technical details to agree between now and the autumn. Those include the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan about how national and international customs procedures for the import and export of diamonds can be adapted in such a way as to give the assurance of legitimacy that we seek. It is obviously necessary to find mechanisms that do not give rise to the fantastic paper trail that could come into existence if every stage of the chain required certification, but which do not reduce the system to something that is meaningless because it is too vague. That is something that Governments alone cannot enforce—we must have the co-operation of the industry, which is why the Kimberley dialogue is taking place in Brussels this week.

**Mr. Davidson:** I would like to point out that the Minister's hon. Friend from Govan is actually his hon. Friend from Pollok.

However, I seek an assurance that any system that is developed will be open to modification and that the Government intend to press the industry to agree in principle that where any difficulties or discrepancies arise there will be some way of amending the procedure. We would not want to establish a system that could not be amended even if it was discovered to be fallible.

**Mr. Wilson:** That is self-evidently true, and I note what my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) says. I must remember in future that when we are talking shipbuilding he is from Govan, but when we are talking diamonds he is from Pollok. That is now established beyond doubt.

The issues under discussion as part of the Kimberley process include whether we can agree on simple but effective monitoring mechanisms that do not breach commercial confidentiality. Many producer countries are naturally sensitive about data relating to their diamond trade and possible stockpiles. They also want to preserve their own systems of certification and authenticating diamonds without undue interference from outside.

As part of the Kimberley process, we also need to consider whether any scheme will be voluntary or mandatory, whether it will apply globally or regionally, and whether it will be compatible with other international legal agreements governing trade, such as those imposed by the World Trade Organisation. These issues and others have to be discussed, but I am confident that with sufficient political will they can be satisfactorily resolved. I hope that no nation will want to frustrate agreement on an issue so important to the welfare of so many people throughout the world.

I will now try to deal with some of the points raised this afternoon. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) wondered aloud how many British citizens were involved in selling arms to rebel groups such as UNITA and the RUF in Sierra Leone, which is very much part and parcel of today's debate. By definition, I cannot answer that question. However, I can say that anyone who is involved in that activity is acting illegally. Both of those organisations are the subject of United Nations embargoes. Anyone who is involved in that trade is liable to arrest and prosecution. Any available information about any British citizen who is involved in that trade, whether in Britain or abroad, should be brought to the attention of the authorities. I can assure the hon. Lady that such information will be diligently followed up.

I would also like to endorse the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Pollok about the negative effects of any boycott initiative in allowing the legitimate trade to become tainted by the illegitimate trade. There are probably lots of people in the western world who do not like the concept of diamonds in general because they do not have any, and if they can dress up that dislike in an ethical argument, so much the better for them. We should not subscribe to a boycott in any way, for exactly the reason given by my hon. Friend.

Diamonds are an extremely valuable and important commodity for many countries the economic activities of which we generally endorse and support. For the UK to be in any way party to a boycott or a discrediting of those countries' basic raw material, which contributes to

*[Mr. Wilson]*

their wealth, would be irresponsible. That point must be clearly made, because the argument in favour of a boycott arises from time to time. Although it is glib and partial, it is a solution in the eyes of some, but it is not one that we support, because it would have consequences for the people who produce the 96 per cent. and more of diamonds that are legally mined and refined. My hon. Friend the Member for Pollok is right; Botswana and the other diamond-producing countries are entitled to receive that message clearly from this debate. I would even suggest that the hon. Member for Richmond Park uncover the stock of diamonds in her bijou residence in Richmond and wear them with pride, safe in the knowledge that it is 96 per cent. certain that they were legitimately produced. [*Interruption.*] She is now trying to tell the Chamber that they are very small diamonds. We shall wait and see.

In cash terms, there are few objects on earth more valuable than a diamond. However, the nub of the problem is that the value of each diamond that is smuggled out of a conflict zone is great enough for thousands of bullets to be smuggled in. Nothing can be easier than carrying a diamond over a border, but cutting out the scourge of conflict diamonds from the world diamond trade is a much greater challenge. To achieve that, it is essential that all Governments with a direct stake in the diamond business buy into any agreed international solution. It is vital that the industry—the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) rightly mentioned de Beers—as well as civil society, representatives of trades unions and NGOs, have all been involved at every stage of the Kimberley process.

We have on our side the good will of all the major stakeholders. While that makes it easier to devise a solution, we still need imagination and determination on the part of everybody. Many details remain to be resolved and there are many interests at stake. The next stages of the process may well be painstaking. However, I can say with certainty that we shall gain nothing by going ahead without having the industry on board. Equally, there is no point if we do not involve civil society. We are aware that any final scheme must strike a delicate balance between practicality and bureaucracy. We shall work hard to find that balance, while trying to maintain the momentum built up over the past year. I hope that in future months, as the Kimberley process develops, I will be able to report on the progress that we have made in ensuring that the legitimate diamond industry is untainted by conflict.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Adjourned accordingly at thirteen minutes to Four o'clock.*

# Westminster Hall

*Tuesday 1 May 2001*

[MR. MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

## Rail Investment

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Jamieson*]

9.30 am

**Mr. George Stevenson** (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I am extremely grateful to have the opportunity to debate rail investment. It is probably one of the most crucial issues that face the country and the Government. Given recent changes—what some may call developments—particularly in the Government's relations with the Strategic Rail Authority and Railtrack, it is a timely debate.

The Government are to be congratulated on having the courage and determination to publish their 10-year transport plan. Massive investment is planned for the railways; about £60 billion of public and private money will be invested during that period. The Government's main objective since the establishment of the SRA is to bring cohesion to the industry following the disastrous privatisation embarked on by the previous Government. It is in the public interest for the Government to oversee and direct that investment, if for no other reason than that enormous amounts of public money are involved. The public have an interest in the future of the railway network, and the investment that the Government are committed to making needs to be high on the agenda of the SRA.

Privatisation was a disaster, as it led to the fragmentation of the industry. It is beyond peradventure that that is the core of the problem that the industry now faces. It is not only I who say that; Railtrack and the SRA say so. Indeed, in its recently published document on strategy, the SRA unequivocally says that fragmentation was a disaster and that Railtrack has failed.

The other element that the Government need in order to develop the rail network over the next 10 years—and longer; we need always to think in the long term with the railways—is partnership. Partnership with the private sector, with the industry itself and with all the players is crucial. I shall return to that element of the Government's approach in a few moments. Partnership will deliver the necessary investment; it will enhance our railways, promote them and make them more efficient and effective. Crucially, it will increase passenger numbers and develop freight transport on the railways.

The Government's vision is shared widely in the House and throughout the country. Their courage and determination to put in place the necessary resources have been well received by the country. If we compare that with the previous Government's record, we can see how vital this Government's initiatives are. Some hon. Members in the Chamber know more about the industry than I ever will, and I have never quite understood how one can argue that we can have economic growth without the transport system to back it. The Government's approach is, therefore, critical.

The available resources and the Government's determination must be matched by confidence in the partners that the Government seek to bring into the 10-year plan and in their ability to deliver. It is crucial that the industry's structure is clear and cohesive; it must be simplified. In particular, the blight of the fragmentation that followed privatisation must be tackled. As a result of their policy initiatives, the Government have a golden opportunity to set a positive framework for the industry.

The SRA is a critical factor in that process, and progress has been made. More stability is being brought into the franchises, which now last longer. That means that the partners—the train operating companies—can see their way more clearly to embarking on vital investment. They can see that greater stability is emerging. The SRA is also involved in a determined and strong effort to develop the critical partnership to which I referred. That is the plus side, and the Government are rightly to be congratulated on their courage. Despite the carping criticism that one hears from time to time from different quarters both in the House and outside, I believe that the Government's initiative is welcome.

However, I fear that there is a downside. The crucial objectives that are set out in the 10-year plan can be fatally damaged by one of the partners in particular—Railtrack. I have read as much as I can put my hands on and have informed myself as best I can. It is difficult not to come to the conclusion that there is no confidence in Railtrack. That is true throughout the industry and the country, among many hon. Members and, I am sure, in the Government. It is equally true within the SRA, the train operating companies and even Railtrack itself. That is the bottom line. I fear that prospects are unlikely to get any better. The critical partnership that the Government must develop could therefore be fatally flawed.

The problems that we face as a result of the lack of confidence in Railtrack are starkly illustrated by the west coast main line. Railtrack's network licence sets the tone. It states that Railtrack is charged with

"(a) the maintenance of the network;

(b) the renewal and replacement of the network; and

(c) the improvement, enhancement and development of the network".

Railtrack looked at the west coast main line and said, "We'll do it, but it will cost £2.3 billion." That did not last long. Quite unilaterally—without consulting anyone, in particular the Government—Railtrack changed the specification of the signalling on the west coast main line, and the cost went up to £5.8 billion. Recent announcements suggest that it has gone up to £6.3 billion.

What has been Railtrack's attitude in the light of that situation? Pretty clear, going by evidence that it has given to the Transport Committee, of which I have the privilege of being a member. In questioning on 22 November 2000, Mr. Marshall, formerly finance director and now chief executive of Railtrack, said that the modernisation of the west coast main line would not go ahead if the Government, through the regulator, did not provide a grant of £4 billion. Railtrack will simply turn its back on a vital rail artery of the country, for which it is responsible under its licence, unless the Government and the public purse fund it all. It is not just

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a matter of £4 billion. In further questioning, Railtrack admitted that if it did not receive that grant, not only would the scheme not go ahead, but it would have to raise the money on the capital market, and embark on a £1 billion rights issue. In effect, it was saying to the Government, "We want £5 billion from you, or you will not get the scheme."

Some people may think that that is a good illustration of partnership, but it is not one that I recognise. It gets worse. It is interesting, when we consider the Government's decision to hand over enormous amounts of public money to Railtrack, to look at the stock market valuation of Railtrack. The latest figure that I have—I think that the share price has gone down since, then staggered up a little—is about £5 billion. For one scheme, the public purse has to give a private monopoly company approximately the total value of that company. The net proceeds of privatisation, according to the House of Commons Library, were £4.6 billion. So we are giving this private monopoly company more money than the public purse received for the entire privatisation of the industry.

What do we ask in return? We ask—some might say demand—a number of things. The first is that Railtrack be better managed. We all subscribe to that. Railtrack has said that it is in danger of losing its A credit rating, which would compromise its ability to raise money. The Government have therefore decided to bring forward the first instalment of the £4 billion and to cough up £1.5 billion to prop Railtrack up. As a quid pro quo, they want to appoint someone to Railtrack's board to look after the public interest.

Mr. Marshall's response, as reported in *The Times* of 3 April 2001, was that such a

"non-executive director, to be appointed in a few months' time, was largely a symbolic gesture."

He went on to say that the company would not accept other people telling it whom to have on its board. What does Sir Alastair Morton, who chairs the SRA, think about that grant to Railtrack? In evidence to the Select Committee, Sir Alastair said that it was a gift and that Christmas had come early. It was not a Member of this House saying that; it was the chair of the Strategic Rail Authority.

So, the conditions are better management and a public interest non-executive director, which Railtrack sees as symbolic and wants to appoint anyway. Interestingly, and quite critically, the Government and the Strategic Rail Authority have said that one of the problems with Railtrack is that the company has too much to do. They think that, in future, Railtrack should manage and maintain the existing rail network, and the Strategic Rail Authority, in partnership with the private sector, should take on the development of new rail links—after the development of the west coast main line, if that ever happens.

To that end, the Government have unceremoniously dumped Railtrack from the second phase of the channel tunnel high-speed link. That is not a ringing endorsement by the Government or the SRA of Railtrack's ability to deliver.

Now the Government and the SRA are looking for another development plan for the east coast main line. However, the Government have not left matters there, and I understand the difficulties facing them. The issues are so critical to the 10-year plan that they must be tackled, and I hope that, in the short time left to me, I can convince my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), at least to commit the Government to tackling them.

Lord Macdonald was worried because the share price of Railtrack was going down further. The shares had been sold at £3.90 and had gone up to £17, but they were back crawling along the bottom again. That was not good enough. Something had to be done to boost the price, so the £1.5 billion prop-up, bail-out grant was made, and Lord Macdonald made a speech at the Birmingham chamber of commerce, in which he said that the Government supported Railtrack and saw it as an important partner for the future. What happened? The shares blipped up in price.

It is an unedifying prospect. Every time a member of the senior management of Railtrack makes a speech, the share price goes down, and every time a Government Minister makes a speech, the share price goes up. That is a new experience for many of us in the Chamber. How can such a relationship be a basis for the crucial delivery and the partnership that are required for the Government's 10-year plan? It is not a partnership and it cannot form a basis for future action.

The evidence on fragmentation is overwhelming. With the greatest respect to the Minister, this is not an old Labour versus new Labour argument; it is about what is right and what is wrong. The argument is about public interest, delivery, confidence, public and private money and partnership. It is a matter of our ability to deliver and our confidence in doing so. The debate is essential to the Government's having any chance of success.

However, the SRA's new role is not very encouraging. The new development of rail is being transferred from Railtrack to the SRA and other partners—I presume with Government approval. That means another fragmentation of the industry. Railtrack will maintain the current rail network and the SRA's private partners will develop the new network. The industry needs further fragmentation like it needs a hole in the head. I am very concerned about the prospect of further fragmentation.

Nevertheless, if the SRA, with its partners, is to be responsible for development of new rail infrastructure, that responsibility should be significantly extended. As a start, the SRA should take shares in Railtrack on behalf of the public. Am I saying that, or is it someone else? In the evidence to the Select Committee to which I referred, the then chief executive of Railtrack and its current director, who was then the finance director, said:

"We have proposed that the SRA invest in preference shares in Railtrack"

as, effectively, a quid pro quo measure for the public money coming in. Railtrack said that, not me. Its representatives said that the mechanism would be

"the most efficient way to lever public money into the railway."

Railtrack's opinion has changed of late. I think that that is because its shareholders are upset about it. In any case, the Government are bailing Railtrack out. What

sort of message does that give? How much confidence can we have in a company that has to rely on ministerial speeches and the odd massive bail-out from the Government?

I was enormously encouraged on reading an article in *The Guardian*. It was not always correct, but was nevertheless interesting. According to it, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions is considering a British National Oil Corporation solution. That would be to take a 51 per cent. majority share in Railtrack, which would protect the public interest and mean a new direction for Railtrack. I think that the solution has much to commend it, with reference not only to my arguments today but to answers that my hon. Friend the Minister gave about the sum of public money put into Railtrack. He said:

"Some 85 per cent."—

I understand that the figure is nearer 90 per cent.—

"of Railtrack's income is paid to the company by TOCs in access charges, a substantial proportion of which are supported by Government subsidies."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 2000; Vol. 360, c. 7W.]

For the one scheme in which Railtrack is now involved, the west coast main line, 100 per cent. of the capital comes from the Government. A large proportion of the 90 per cent. of its operating revenue also comes from the public purse. As things stand, we intend to allow that situation to continue. That is a private monopoly that is publicly funded.

The majority of shares should be acquired by the Government, quid pro quo for public money. That is the only way to get out of this mess. The shares should be invested in the SRA, as a step in the direction of restructuring the industry so that the SRA is responsible for the infrastructure while the private sector operates the trains. That should be done as soon as possible. We are witnessing the dismemberment of Railtrack, so my suggestion is the logical next step.

Railtrack represents the dead hand of privatisation. It is a luxury that we can no longer afford. Some in the industry legitimately and sincerely claim that they do not want any more upheaval. I understand that, but can we afford to stagger from crisis to crisis as we are doing now, and as many believe that we shall do in future? The majority of the public know that something dramatic must be done. They are fed up. When they begin to understand how much public money is at stake, they will become even more concerned. It is not always the case but, in this instance, public instinct is right. I hope that the Government will recognise that and act accordingly, as they have a historic opportunity to do.

9.54 am

**Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody** (Crewe and Nantwich): I wholeheartedly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) on his customary trenchant and careful demonstration of his knowledge of this thorny problem. For many months, he has consistently obtained from members of the railway industry the information that is essential to understanding the tortuous and complex problems of that badly bedevilled form of transport. His success in doing that is a tribute to his sagacity and his complete understanding of how essential the railway industry is to the development of the United Kingdom.

The Government now face real difficulty. It is a long time since anyone seriously set about considering the connections between transport and the economy. The Government took a major step in preparing a 10-year plan for transport. Not only that, but because they were happy to pass primary legislation and commit large sums of public money, they were beginning to tackle a 20-year pattern of neglect. However, consideration of the implications of those plans reveals an immediate dilemma. Because of the fragmented nature of the industry following privatisation, there is little to suggest where the industry thinks that it is going.

As we have been told this morning, the responsibility of the Strategic Rail Authority and of Railtrack is set down in transport legislation and involves not only promoting but developing the industry. Those are essential and fundamental tasks, but confusion and lack of clarity are now creating a dangerous situation. The impact of the rail accidents on industry confidence has been great—some would say almost disproportionate—but that has not been taken on board fully by all the major players. Railtrack's responses were set out in considerable detail before the Transport Sub-Committee. The previous chief executive seemed to understand that the company had not done sufficient in the past and that it would be required to do much more. The incoming chief executive, who was previously finance director, appeared better to grasp some of the immediate problems.

Nevertheless, time is passing and Railtrack has still not begun to come to terms with some of the difficulties that it needs to confront. First and most important is the public perception of Railtrack. Railtrack is the core of the rail industry. If it gets things wrong, whether in the maintenance of facilities or the development of the railway system, everyone else will suffer. Its representatives appeared to understand that one difficulty was that the steady state system had not been maintained as it had been previously.

We hear a great deal about 20 years of under-investment, but one thing that British Rail did was to maintain the system. Sometimes it did so with love and bits of string, but railway men and women maintained that system so as to enable it to continue in existence. When Railtrack officials came before the Committee we pointed out to them that their failure in that regard had endangered the system. We said that it was clear that the problems were not only affecting old-style rails; often they concerned parts of the system that appeared to have been renewed. It should have been possible to be confident that those parts of the system could take the new pressures.

I am concerned about the lack of evidence that Railtrack officials, who appeared at the time to understand that it was their failure to confront matters that had led to complications, have taken major decisions essential to its future security. A new director with engineering experience was appointed to the board, but it is extraordinary that for so many years engineers were not on the board, and that there were 13 directors without such practical experience. After appointing the new director, Railtrack appeared to feel that it had dealt sufficiently with the practical problems of development. It is essential, however, that Railtrack admits some straightforward, important things. It must understand that it failed to deal with basic questions about its

*[Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody]*

contractors, about its acceptance of the fact that responsibility was passed down the line without sufficient monitoring, and about its inability to know whether the standard of maintenance that was required was being delivered by those who were paid to do that job. If it continues to get such questions wrong, it will simply go out of business, because there will be no way of maintaining its share price or the confidence of anyone in the City and in the general public in its ability to do the job.

So what has Railtrack done? Has it created an in-house engineering system, sought a new training system, asked the contractors to come up with a different way of working, or changed its way of awarding contracts? No. What it appears to have done is to decide that having one engineering director on the board will begin to confront its problems. As we demonstrated in our report, because it did not know how to handle contractors or have sufficient people to monitor what was happening, and because, from its commercial point of view, it was prepared to drive down the overhead cost of contracting by continually moving work from one firm to another—even moving it from one region to another—Railtrack contributed to the factors that led to the problems immediately after the bad accident at Hatfield.

I am very disappointed, because I believe that Railtrack was under an obligation to say, "Fine, we are under considerable pressure, but we are now prepared to take a number of basic, important steps." It must agree to look at training and at why it was not able to provide inspection without relying on someone else, and accept greater supervision from Her Majesty's railway inspectorate—an essential recommendation. It must also talk seriously to the train operating companies about how it can become more accountable to its customers. It is extraordinary that so many people can be required to work together in an industry with no obvious means by which they are accountable to one another for the quality of services delivered. That situation is reprehensible and dangerous.

**Mr. David Drew** (Stroud): Will my hon. Friend comment on the Wessex franchise? The ridiculous situation arose a year ago when Wales and West announced that it was not interested in continuing the franchise. Confusion has now followed about who will take over the franchise and invest in that network.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** I sympathise with the people affected in that franchise area. They must have considerable worries about the future of the service. This afternoon my Committee will question Sir Alastair Morton on the long-term plans of the Strategic Rail Authority in relation to franchises. Some time after the franchise process was supposed to have begun, considerable confusion still exists about who will get which franchise, under what conditions, and what will be delivered in return. If the SRA is not able to demonstrate a clear plan, it is difficult to see how it will award franchises. If it does not know what it wants of the railway industry, how can it say what it wants individual franchises to deliver?

When Stagecoach was re-awarded the franchise in the south-west, some of us felt that if that was the answer, it must have been a strange question. In many instances there is considerable confusion about the development of franchises. Railway companies and passengers are unclear about where we are going and what is required before a franchise can be awarded. I sympathise with my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew).

Many passengers will be worried that those companies that have not acquired new rolling stock, improved their services or delivered good facilities will nevertheless be considered for franchises on the basis of arrangements that will be unclear to those of us who use the service. Such arrangements may leave the travelling public dissatisfied.

If I may digress for a moment, it is extraordinary that those of us who suffer on the west coast main line, where one is unable to catch a train that arrives anywhere near to timetable, will be asked to pay a 10 per cent. fare increase. There are few industries in the United Kingdom in which one could get away with cheerfully saying to one's customers, "I don't bring you the goods you want at the time you want in the way you want or in the place you want, but I shall now charge you 10 per cent. more for the privilege of using them." Virgin ought to bear that in mind. Some train companies have confronted that issue, but the west coast main line is still suffering.

So what are we suggesting? When the Committee examined the question of rail investment, it became clear that we have an extraordinary dichotomy at the centre of the system. Under the privatisation legislation, Railtrack was clearly never meant to be put into private ownership. It was meant to be the core of the system. All the private companies around it were supposed to operate on a different basis that allowed them to raise capital on the open market, which should have allowed them to deliver much higher standards than British Rail. However, the last-moment decision to throw the whole system open to private ownership caused enormous difficulty.

The only way in which Railtrack can obtain money is from the taxpayer. Although that money comes through the train operating companies, it is still our money. That is not a barrier to efficient working, but it does mean that train operating companies have special responsibilities, which they are not fulfilling. Following recent traumatic incidents, they have not shown sufficient vigour, clarity of vision or commitment to change to restore confidence in their ability to provide high-quality services. There has been no clear plan for training and no obvious confrontation of the fact that many of the plans that they put into operation did not provide the quality of service that was needed. There does not seem to have been clear monitoring of the management systems of their contractors or the people employed by their contractors. All those are essential if Railtrack is to operate effectively.

When the Committee pointed out that the Government must ensure that there is a genuine transfer of risk to the private sector in contracts reached with private sector partners, it was underlining something about which many people feel strongly. There is no logic in transferring assets to private companies on the assumption that they will shoulder the risk in the market and raise large sums of capital to provide better-quality

services if, when it comes to the point at which they need to do such a thing, it is found that they must return to the Government and say, "We are terribly sorry. We are unable to do what we promised to do in the first instance and we want you to underwrite all our losses."

Many of us believe that Railtrack would not be where it is today in the City if it did not receive such Government support. It is because City firms believe that it is the taxpayer who coughs up for basic services when real difficulties arise that Railtrack enjoys its current share price. Frankly, that leads to the worst of all worlds. Railtrack is not being supported by the private sector, but nor is it receiving input from the state sector. With such input, there would be no need for a large return on assets before money is put into the system. Railtrack is being reduced to an enormous, muddled compact between Government and private industry that is not working and seems incapable of providing the future that we demand of a truly modern rail system.

Wherever one goes in the European Community, and whether one considers high-speed trains or freight, one finds that large amounts are spent on transport. It is clear that most highly industrialised countries accept that an efficient railway system is fundamental to their economies. Without it, people and goods are not moved efficiently, profits are not made and countries do not develop as nations, yet many years after the creation of a railway system that is essential to our future, it remains unclear what the situation in this country will be in, say, 10 years' time. Although the Government have provided the opportunity and support necessary to produce a modern railway system, confusion reigns among companies, the Government and passengers. Frankly, that is not acceptable in the new century.

The general public are not prepared to continue to accept such chaos. They were told that, after a period of discomfort, there would be new rolling stock, new facilities and new and better railways. They will demand that those facilities be delivered, but the point is that Railtrack is not delivering. It has not carried out even the elementary maintenance work for which it was created. It cannot expect to continue to enjoy the support of passengers and the Government unless fundamental changes are made. Perhaps the appointment of a particular director will have an effect, but in my view we have reached a rather more basic stage. The taxpayer is spending a fortune on a company that is manifestly not doing its job.

If Railtrack were forced to answer for its actions on the open market, in the manner of most private companies, it would be bankrupt. We must seriously consider alternative plans. If taxpayers are to pay, there should be delivery of goods and services at the level that they expect. If they continue to pay and pay and yet receive inferior service, their anger will increasingly be a matter for their elected representatives, rather than for the individual companies concerned.

This Government are the first to have sufficient guts and ability to try to confront the problems of the railway industry. It is no use stopping halfway along the line and saying, "We'd like to get to Crewe but unfortunately we've finished up in Birmingham."

10.14 am

**Mr. Peter Snape** (West Bromwich, East): Hon. Members will be grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) for the opportunity to debate this important subject, although the debate has not proved particularly enlightening, in that we seemed to have gone round and round in circles. Bashing Railtrack is dead easy. It is true that it is not undeserving of a good bashing, but a discussion that is long on problems and short on solutions will not take us much further forward. The only solution of which I have heard apparently involves the renationalisation of Railtrack.

I must declare an interest in that I worked in the railway industry for some years before being elected to Parliament, and I am still a member of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. Until 31 December last year, I was chairman of a major National Express subsidiary. I therefore have some experience of the nationalised railways. Although I did not work on the railway side of National Express, my colleagues left me in no doubt about what life had been like trying to operate in a privatised—perhaps, having listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, it would be more accurate to say semi-privatised—environment since the Railways Act 1993 was passed under the previous Government.

The flaw that I find in the debates that we have on the Floor of the House and in Westminster Hall is that we are bereft of any solutions other than demanding that the Government, having put money in, should assume control of Railtrack. I have bored the House on many occasions with stories of what life was like when the Treasury ran the railway industry. Whether under Conservative or Labour Governments, Treasury control did not lead to happy bunnies in the industry, and certainly did not create an industry of which the nation at large was massively proud. We are in danger of creating a myth that the publicly owned railway industry was part of a golden age in which all the staff walked round with smart uniforms giving cheery responses to members of the public, and all the trains ran on time. That was not my experience when I worked on the railways. Year after year, and decade after decade, the amount of investment that the Treasury decided to make available to the railway industry was always inadequate for the job that needed to be done, certainly in so far as modernisation was concerned.

There was one exception to that rule. In 1955, the Government—a Conservative Government, funnily enough—accepted a modernisation plan that was subsequently implemented by both Conservative and Labour Governments. We were rather distracted during the period of its implementation by the plans of Dr. Beeching, some of which came to fruition and some of which fortunately did not. Many of us who worked on the railways at that time were frankly incredulous at some of the decisions that were made when the investment tap was, for the first and only time, turned fully on. I remind hon. Members that with cash that is provided by the Government via the Treasury comes a certain degree of control as to how it must be spent. During the implementation of the 1955 modernisation plan—which was not completed until the late 1960s and early 1970s—a great deal of public money went into the industry, and the Treasury saw to it that everyone got to

*[Mr. Peter Snape]*

dip in the gravy. Consequently—I speak from memory but, I think, fairly accurately—there were no less than 33 different types of diesel locomotives, none of which were compatible with each other and many of which ended up in the knacker's yard within a decade because they were no good. Conservative and Labour Governments were equally guilty. As a result of their desire to see the money spread properly around the country, many of the decisions that were made, apparently with good reason at the time, turned out to be disastrous—certainly from the taxpayer's point of view.

I cannot honestly think that renationalising Railtrack—as my hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for Stoke-on-Trent, South apparently want to do—would lead to the kind of rail industry that they and I want to see. The one advantage of Railtrack being a private company is that it has access to money that is not from the Treasury. I realise that much of the money that it obtains, and plans to obtain in the near future, comes from the Treasury. Perhaps my hon. Friends believe that £1.5 billion will be sufficient to modernise the rail industry, but I very much doubt that. It remains to be seen whether Railtrack, given its new remit and new chief executive, will be able to accomplish the tasks before it. Continual attack on the present structure of the industry is not helpful. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South said, the last thing that many of the industry's workers want now is yet another reorganisation.

A prominent railway manager, who was fired for writing a book on the difficulties of railway operation in the 1960s, Gerry Fiennes, made the immortal comment that every time we reorganise, we bleed. The railway industry has been reorganising and bleeding for far too long. Concentration on reorganisation at the expense of passenger and freight services is one cause of low morale, although the barmy privatisation rushed through by the previous Government did not help.

**Mr. Stevenson:** My suggestion that the Government, through the SRA, should be the majority shareholder in Railtrack, was first proposed by Railtrack itself.

**Mr. Snape:** I do not want to be rude to my hon. Friend, but he cannot have it both ways. He spent most of his speech, understandably, attacking Railtrack and its managers. Now, he has isolated one statement that those managers made and said that they were right on that occasion. I think that they were wrong, because they made that statement for all the wrong reasons. They handled the company extremely badly, and made that suggestion as an escape route from their mishandling.

I am not sure whether any Minister as talented as my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham—albeit, if I may say so, a little unfortunate in the past few days—wants to accept responsibility for everything that goes wrong within Railtrack. Inevitably, things sometimes go wrong in a large organisation. If we are to get enough money into the industry to enable it to be successful, which we all want, a mixture of private and public cash is, in my opinion, the only way forward.

The debate is about railway investment, but I will spend a couple of minutes touching on other aspects of the industry that also give cause for concern. Many TOCs have arranged to lease new trains. We should not fall for the propaganda of some of them about how much they are spending on those trains because the vast majority of the trains are leased. Although that is relatively expensive, the cost of the trains is borne by companies such as Angel and other leasing organisations.

There is a problem in getting many of the trains into service. It is disgraceful that so many new trains are lying in sidings up and down the country waiting for safety cases while passengers struggle on old, in some cases, slam-door rolling stock. Others that have had safety cases have been so poorly put together that they do not work. We have heard understandable screams of anguish from TOCs throughout the country that have had to take such trains out of service a very short time after introducing them, because the trains were not up to the job for which they were designed.

I am tempted to say that that never happened when British Rail Engineering built the trains. It certainly did not happen as often. The total collapse of investment in the railway industry in the run-up to privatisation is now reflected in the infrastructure and in the quality of new trains being introduced. In the last five or six years of British Rail, nothing but emergency routine maintenance was done to the tracks and no new rolling stock was ordered. That resulted in the virtual collapse of our indigenous railway manufacturing industry and a dependence on rolling stock manufacturers based abroad. The fact that manufacturers are based abroad does not necessarily mean that they are not up to the job, but that hiatus in the supply of rolling stock led to many of our current problems.

Those of us who take part in these debates are a fairly restricted group, and those who listen to them either on the Floor of the House or here must be thoroughly depressed and sick of the sight of us. However, we have one thing in common: we all want to see a better railway industry in the future. How best to make that happen is a matter that only the Government, Railtrack and the train operating companies can decide.

The last anecdote that I shall probably relate during my undistinguished parliamentary career will be one that my hon. Friend the Minister has heard many times before. I tell it only because on Friday I shall be going back to the signal box where I started my railway career in 1957 with a TV crew who want to show how I have fallen badly from grace from being a railway signalman to being a Member of Parliament. When I went to work as a 15-year-old train recorder in 1957, I was told that the signal box was about to be swept away in the west coast main line modernisation programme. The fact that it will still be there on Friday will, I hope, do something to undermine the case of my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, notwithstanding the respect that I have for him. If the Treasury could never find the money in 50 years to shift Edgely junction No. 2 signal box, which was built by the London and North Western railway in 1888, I cannot see it happening at any time in the future. The job of all of us who care about the railways is to get the best deal possible for the industry. Flawed and fragmented though the present structure may be, we should try to make it work properly.

10.26 am

**Mr. Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) on securing the debate. He set out the challenges facing the industry and suggested possible solutions to the problem. The past decade or so has been relatively good for the railways, in spite of one former Prime Minister's fixation with the motor car. Passenger journeys have risen from 738 million in 1986-87 to 892 million in 1998-99, which is the last period for which figures are available. Investment has involved big sums of money—a total of £34.3 billion in the period 1991 to 2001 and, it is promised, £54.5 billion in 2001-11. That all sounds very impressive, but it is worth looking at some historical background.

I shall not go back as far as 1955 because I have no recollection of what happened then, but let us consider what the Labour party said in opposition. In 1993, the current Deputy Prime Minister said that the Tory rail privatisation Bill was driven by ideological dogma and that it commanded no support from experts or the public. I imagine that that comment is still quite fresh in the minds of hon. Members. *The Guardian* reported the right hon. Gentleman saying that the proposed privatisation would

"make the railway system less safe...reduce services and investment, drive up fares and force freight traffic on the roads."

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** He was not wrong.

**Mr. Brake:** Indeed. The Labour party maintained that stance throughout the passage of the Railways Bill and during the first few years after privatisation, and the now Deputy Prime Minister pledged to take Railtrack back into public hands. The 1997 Labour manifesto admitted that rail privatisation

"made fortunes for a few, but has been a poor deal for the taxpayer".

Despite that recognition, there was a policy U-turn, and the commitment to renationalisation was removed in favour of setting up the Strategic Rail Authority. The manifesto had nothing to say on the subject of safety, which was Labour's prime concern back in 1993.

I shall comment briefly on the Tories' position. I thought that the absence of any Tory Members at the beginning of the debate had to do with the shame that Conservatives felt about the state in which they had left the railways. Tom Winsor commented:

"Railtrack was privatised with a fantastically weak licence, weak contracts and a poor financial regime that did not give it an adequate regime for investment."

Hon. Members will know that Gerald Corbett, the former chief executive of Railtrack, said:

"The railway was ripped apart at privatisation and the structure that was put in place was a structure designed, if we are honest, to maximise the proceeds to the Treasury."

It is not exactly a good way of improving the railways to focus only on the proceeds to the Treasury. To give the Conservatives some little credit, it is true that they have now accepted that perhaps their railway privatisation has not been terribly successful. They have conceded that the

"system was made into too many different companies."

What Labour Members said in opposition is not nearly as interesting as what has happened since they came to power. We know that between 1997-98 and 1999-2000, there was a 25.6 per cent. reduction in the rail subsidy paid by the Government to the train operating companies. That is projected to continue to fall in the next couple of years. The subsidies were set up under the franchise agreements of the previous Tory Administration. The 10-year transport plan, which I say now that I welcome, to avoid criticism that I am carping, outlines the £60 billion that the Government will be spending on the railways.

The franchise replacement programme will be underpinned by extra Government funding, which is necessary as everyone accepts that the franchises were designed to deliver a basic service, to enable bidders to come forward. If the targets were too stringent, no bidders would have applied. Money has also been set aside for a rail modernisation fund.

The plan for the Strategic Rail Authority was originally to be published in May 2000, and it is now likely to appear later in the autumn, having been delayed in the aftermath of Hatfield. There are delays in the review of franchises and track access charges, with only two of the 18 new franchises having been decided so far. That is causing major delays in the investment plans of rail companies. The award of the franchise to GoVia, which is due to take over from Connex South Central is a subject that is close to my heart as well as to the Minister's, as we are commuters using the same service. The franchise process is complete and GoVia is supposed to be running that service, but it has not taken over yet. Perhaps the Minister can say when that will happen. I understand that negotiations are still taking place. The staff of Connex South Central believe that the company will run the service right to the end of its franchise, which will last another two or three years, but I hope not.

It is claimed that more will be spent on the railways in the next 10 years, but it is clear that no more public investment will be made. The amount of investment will be lower than in the final years of the Conservative Administration. The crucial issue is how much private money the Government can lever in. It is only through private money that the promised investment of £54.5 billion will flow to the railways. Is there any evidence so far of a railways renaissance? Very little, according to the latest edition of *Rail*, which I suspect some Labour Members read regularly. An article entitled "A new railway? Sometime ... we hope ... perhaps ... maybe ..." contains interesting quotes that reflect the views of key players in the railways industry. The EWS, for example, says that

"40 per cent. of current railfreight is at risk of returning to road haulage"

because of

"44-tonne lorries, reduced excise duty and a standstill on fuel duty."

The chairman of the Rail Freight Group says that

"the SRA's *Agenda for Growth*"

is

"an 'upside-down approach' because the final document will not be produced until after the main passenger franchises have been agreed."

Everything referred to in the article is running late, and I am not talking about the trains. Railtrack's network management statement has been delayed; the

*[Mr. Brake]*

SRA is apparently not committed to delivering a single project before 2005; and the strategic plan, which is due in October or November, is running a year late. If we analyse Railtrack's network management statements, we find that the deadlines for the completion of urgent projects have been missed wholesale.

What is the solution to the crisis that the industry faces? First, the regulatory system must be simplified. The SRA is pushing the case for rail, and we would like the other aspects of transport to be integrated under a sustainable transport authority. We would ensure that that authority took the lead in using public investment to secure partnerships with the private sector. That would not necessarily involve Railtrack, and that model is beginning to emerge.

We favour a demerger of Railtrack. In practical terms, that would mean that a not-for-profit company ran the infrastructure—the track, signalling and power supplies. We and some Labour Members have suggested such a model for other modes of transport. We could achieve that by negotiating with Railtrack. Given the position that it is in, it must recognise that it is unable to do the jobs that are being asked of it, whether on-going maintenance or more innovative projects. If necessary, we could ask the Competition Commission to review Railtrack's activities. We certainly approve of simplifying the structure of the railway system and reducing the number of franchises. There are good grounds for encouraging Railtrack to pass on responsibilities for infrastructure renewal to the train operating companies, some of which have expressed an interest.

There must be scope within the newly negotiated franchise for further control over fares if we are to prevent dramatic increases such as those made by Virgin, which have, unfortunately, not been matched by any improvement in service. We support the recommendations of Lord Cullen's inquiry and would favour setting up an independent accident investigation body of the kind that exists for air travel. There is also scope for significantly increasing the amount of freight that goes by rail.

We have heard solutions from different quarters. We clearly agree on one issue. The system is not working, and the Minister will have to respond to that concern. The Government are under siege over transport—whether it is rail, air or tube. The lessons that arose out of the privatisation of the railways do not seem to have been learned. The tube is due to be partially privatised, possibly within the next 24 hours, against the opposition of all Londoners—and, for all I know, even of the Minister. We all know what has happened to air traffic control. The Government have one more opportunity to make their mark on transport. Their success at levering in private money and improving reliability will determine whether the likes of the Minister will retain his ministerial limousine or have to swap it for a bicycle.

10.40 am

**Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) on securing this interesting debate. It has already revealed division among Government Back Benchers on the future management of our railways. The problems that we face today are partly the result of muddle and confusion having been translated into the Government's strategic thinking on how to run the railways.

**Mr. Snape:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I will happily give way to the hon. Gentleman, because his speech was one of the most sensible.

**Mr. Snape:** I am condemned now. Would the hon. Gentleman prefer us all to be obedient Blair babes, or should we speak our minds?

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman is here. He has huge experience of the railways and brings a great deal to the debate. I am not sure whether he is standing for re-election.

**Mr. Snape:** I am not.

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** He will be sadly missed by the House; we need people like him with a depth of knowledge. His anecdote about the signal box demonstrates the failure of Governments of all colours to bring our railways up to a satisfactory, modern standard. I am sure that he will have seen privatised railways throughout the world working satisfactorily—for example, in Hong Kong. Such companies can lever in private finance and go from strength to strength.

The Government's lack of strategic thinking has led to confusion and muddle for Railtrack, which has not been able to retain the confidence of its investors and has lost share value. We should get away, once and for all, from the continual, bickering call to bring it back into public ownership. The Government have had four years in which to do so. The Minister may tells us differently this morning, but the Government obviously do not want to bring Railtrack back into public ownership. They should state that clearly, and concentrate on their 10-year strategic plan, so that Railtrack and the other parts of the railway industry can bring in more private investment.

The Government inherited a railway system in which passenger numbers, freight traffic and investment were all increasing. Public investment has decreased from £1.8 billion in 1997-98 to £1.6 billion in 2001-02, yet private investment has gone up during that period from £1.2 billion to £3.7 billion. We have heard a lot of criticism of the railways this morning, but some excellent things are going on. For example, Angel Trains, in conjunction with Stagecoach and Siemens, announced in March a £640 million deal for new rolling stock for South West Trains, which could eventually be worth well over £1 billion. That is a significant sum of money, and it should be welcomed by everyone.

We have had one or two unfortunate incidents on our railways, which have highlighted the confusion and muddle. The Prime Minister visited the scene at Hatfield, and said that everything would be all right in the new year, and yet even after Easter, we are still suffering chaos and are not back to normal. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South said that Railtrack's

price was going up and down like a yo-yo. That points to what has been going on in our rail system. He said that we should take part of the shares in Railtrack back into public ownership, but did not really explain how that would be done. I do not think that it is a sensible way forward.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said that we could not carry on as at present. She criticised several aspects of Railtrack's running of our railways but, with great respect to her—she has huge knowledge of the railways—I must point out that she did not suggest a strategic way forward. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) clearly said that we should not bring the railways back into public ownership. That must be right. Let us try to give Railtrack some hope and a strategic way forward. The Government, working with Railtrack, should come up with some proper targets, and should encourage Railtrack to meet them, rather than penalise it to ensure that it does so. Our infrastructure should be improved and run more safely. Signals should not be passed at danger and rails should not crack, because they should be improved and maintained to some of the best standards in the world, rather than some of the worst.

Since privatisation, the New York underground is considerably better than our public underground in London. That is the way forward. I wholly accept the plea made by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) that we should simplify the running of our railways. Since the Government came to power, all sorts of different regulatory, safety and other bodies have tried to tell Railtrack what to do. We have ended up with greater confusion than we had when we started.

We ask for clear, strategic thinking from the Government and their regulatory and safety bodies. We want to go forward into the 21st century with a modern railway system that befits the world's fourth biggest economy, not one that befits a third world economy and would be more suited to the century in which railways were invented. It is high time that our sophisticated country was able, with proper investment and infrastructure, to produce a railway system that can cope with a modern economy, that transports many people swiftly around the country on time in reliable trains, and that carries an increasing amount of freight. We all want that, as it would befit a modern economy, and be good for the environment and our people. We look forward to the Government producing a plan to deliver those results, or giving way to a Government who can do so.

10.47 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill):** Let me begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) on securing the debate and on the informed and reasonable way in which he made his case. I am also grateful for the contributions of my hon. Friends the Members for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape), and those of the hon. Members for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) and for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake). They all provided insights on this important subject.

The debate has brought together great expertise, including that of both my mentors and gurus on transport as well as parliamentary matters. I pay an especially warm tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East, as this debate is likely to be his swansong in the House.

I want to talk about the positive developments in the railway industry, the new beginning that we have made with Railtrack, and the exciting employment prospects opening up in the industry. First, I shall deal with specific issues of ownership that several colleagues raised. Directly or by implication, my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent, South and for Crewe and Nantwich referred to the Select Committee's recommendation that the Government consider taking a majority equity stake in Railtrack, or taking Railtrack back wholly into public ownership. As they are well aware, my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Transport explained the Government's reservations about such proposals to the Committee.

Renationalisation would probably take a couple of years and involve complex and controversial primary legislation. During that time, the industry would effectively be paralysed. The initial costs to the taxpayer would comprise not only Railtrack's market capitalisation of around £2.5 billion at the current stock market valuation but £4 billion of debt liabilities. None of that money would buy additional rail investment. It would all go towards compensating shareholders and funding the company's debt. Renationalisation would also involve the public sector in directly funding Railtrack's investment. The additional debt through which the company currently plans to finance its activities would become public sector borrowing.

I share the conviction of Labour and Opposition Members that serious mistakes were made in the privatisation process. However, after years of fragmentation and instability, the answer is not yet more upheaval. What we now need is evolution rather than revolution, especially when the revolution would be at enormous cost to the public purse and deliver nothing directly in improved rail services.

It has been argued that the public money going to Railtrack should generate an equity stake. However, the money that the Government will be paying Railtrack, in renewal grants for the west coast main line, for example, is to meet the cost of improvements to the network. An equity stake would have to be paid for on top of that money, and it is not clear what the taxpayer would get in return for the extra cost beyond a right to dividends.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** Will the Minister tell us exactly what Railtrack has already received in moneys brought forward and under recent arrangements?

**Mr. Hill:** I think that my hon. Friend is alluding to the £1.5 billion in funding for Railtrack that was brought forward on 2 April. I hope to dwell further on that and the benefits that it will confer in terms of infrastructure renewal.

Let me continue by responding to the proposal made by the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington that Railtrack should be converted into a public not-for-profit stakeholder trust. There are serious drawbacks to that idea. The first is that the taxpayer would have to

*[Mr. Hill]*

foot the bill for buying Railtrack. The second is that a public trust's spending would be public expenditure. The trust would have to fund all its investment from public resources—potentially trebling the public expenditure cost of enhancements. We believe that the money would be better invested in education and health, where there are no alternative sources of funding.

The Government believe that renationalisation or the purchase of a large and costly public equity stake in Railtrack is not necessary to ensure that the company meets its public service obligations. We need an appropriate framework of incentives and regulation, within a coherent strategy of public-private partnership for the railways and our transport system as a whole. The 10-year plan provides the broad framework. The Strategic Rail Authority assumed its full powers in February under the Transport Act 2000. Within the framework of the plan the authority has published its strategic agenda and will publish its strategic plan later this year.

We have appointed a tough rail regulator to ensure that Railtrack delivers on its licence requirements and does not abuse its monopoly position. His periodic review, published last year, greatly increased not just the rewards to Railtrack for good performance but the penalties for poor performance. The regulator is rigorously enforcing Railtrack's network licence obligations. He has proposed seven new licence conditions. They include the key requirement on Railtrack—strongly endorsed in the Committee's report—to establish and maintain an asset register and make it available to other key industry players. A further proposal covers the establishment of a code of practice for Railtrack's dependent customers—also a recommendation made by the Select Committee. Railtrack has also made a commitment to appoint a new public interest director to its board. This strengthening of the Railtrack board demonstrates the company's recognition of its special public role.

This has been a most useful debate on rail investment, the subject of the recent very thorough and well-researched report of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee. The Government will give the report the careful consideration that it deserves and will respond in the usual way to its many important conclusions and recommendations.

Rail investment is an area of public policy of considerable complexity, but on the whole the picture is very encouraging. Passenger and freight use of the railway system has grown strongly. Passenger journeys are up 20 per cent. since 1997, and freight volumes have grown by 22 per cent. The 10-year plan for transport looks forward to further growth of 50 per cent. in passenger use and 80 per cent. in freight volumes. Huge investment is needed to accommodate that growth, to secure the improvements that we require in the safety and quality of rail services, and to make up for past under-investment.

Since 1997, rail investment has doubled. Nearly 2,000 stations have been improved and 17 new stations built. There are 50 new freight terminals, and more than 3,000 new vehicles have been introduced. The 10-year plan for transport set out the Government's view of the rail investment that will be needed to support our objectives for a rail renaissance. We also set out our view of the public funding that would be needed to support that investment and our intention to make that funding available. We estimated that £49 billion of investment would be required in total; £15 billion of public investment expenditure would lever in £34 billion of private investment. That is part of an overall plan for transport involving £180 billion of public spending and private investment.

**Mr. Brake:** The Minister will be aware that GoVia intends to increase services in south-west London by 30 per cent. It will achieve that by stopping direct services to Victoria or London Bridge. I am sure that it has similar proposals across the south of England. How will he ensure that the increased investment that he talks about will deliver the services that commuters want, as opposed to delivering what the rail companies want?

**Mr. Hill:** The hon. Gentleman is right. He and I share a common constituency concern about the efficacy of services to be delivered in due course by GoVia as a result of its acquisition of the Connex South Central franchise. It is precisely the role of the Strategic Rail Authority to supervise specific proposals that are being put in place. I have confidence that it will discharge that task. It is an open and accountable body, to which he and I, in our various capacities, can make representations.

In the brief time remaining, I want to speak about the human resources implications of the 10-year transport plan. I especially want to draw the Chamber's attention to the enormous employment implications of the Government's transport programme. The £180 billion plan is expected to create at least 60,000 new transport-related jobs, many of them in manufacturing and construction. The Government are determined to ensure that British companies can win that work by competing on expertise and price.

Recently, rail companies have had to import specialist welders and engineers from northern Europe, and signalling engineers from eastern Europe, to meet the demand for skilled labour. Shortages of train drivers are disrupting schedules in some areas. Action is now under way to recruit and train people to run the expanding rail system. The Department for Education and Employment, working with my Department, the SRA and other key stakeholders, has created a framework action plan to help push skills further up the agenda of the rail industry. The plan was unveiled by the DFEE last week. It is a balanced package that aims, among other things, to raise employer commitment to skills, to overcome obstacles to recruitment and labour supply, to improve training, and to improve skills and quality through externally validated qualifications. The plan focuses on several key occupations that the industry has identified as critical, including drivers, signalling and track maintenance engineers, middle management, graduates and professional staff.

For transport as a whole, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Department for Education and Employment, the Department of Trade and Industry and the devolved administrations, with Trades Union Congress involvement as appropriate, aim to meet in the near future to ensure that the 60,000 jobs created can be

filled. We shall involve the new job transition service, to link available opportunities in transport to those affected by redundancies. I know that that will be welcome news to the Select Committee, which drew special attention to its concerns about skills shortages in the railway industry.

I am grateful for the support that has been warmly expressed today for the 10-year plan. April was the first month of its operation. With the progress that is now being made on refranchising, on the channel tunnel rail link and on the relationship with Railtrack, it was a good new beginning for the railways.

## HIV-AIDS

11 am

**Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby): I am delighted to have the opportunity for this debate. It was prompted particularly by the third report of the Select Committee on International Development, entitled "HIV/AIDS: The Impact on Social and Economic Development". I commend that report to the House and to those outside the House. I had a part in it, and I congratulate the support staff involved and, in particular, the Clerk of the Committee, on writing it. It is an excellent report and deserves wider publicity than it has had so far.

What we are to discuss today is arguably the biggest disaster facing the human race. It is a crisis and a catastrophe and, to a large extent, it is not understood in the developed or the developing world. Last year the International Development Committee returned from South Africa and Mozambique having seen floods, among other things, and having witnessed the enormous AIDS problem confronting southern Africa. I asked my then research assistant, an extremely intelligent and well-informed person, what he knew about AIDS in Africa. He thought for a moment and said: "I think it is quite a problem, isn't it?"

I am afraid that that is typical of the reactions of people in this country, although that is changing to an extent, perhaps since the Durban conference last year. Yesterday I received an invitation from Christian Aid to a reception at the opening of Cold Heaven, an exhibition by Don McCullin on AIDS in Africa. Don McCullin, who is one of the world's leading photojournalists, said:

> "I wanted to photograph the AIDS situation because the western world in which I live seems to have no interest in it".

In this country HIV-AIDS is still largely thought of as a disease of drug addicts, homosexuals and haemophiliacs. That was true in Britain to begin with, but has been changing dramatically. Indeed, in 1999 for the first time heterosexually acquired cases of HIV exceeded gay HIV infection. That was quite a milestone in HIV-AIDS in this country. I see that the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), who chairs the all-party group on AIDS, is present; it was at a meeting of that group that I heard information from a document entitled "Informing Policy", by the African HIV steering group. The document stated that in the first quarter of 1999 Public Health Laboratory Service figures showed that heterosexually acquired HIV infections, of which Africans made up the majority of cases, outstripped transmissions among gay and bisexual men. Referring to African communities resident in Britain, the document stated that there was an infection rate of one in 28 for men and one in 18 for women born in Africa.

That is the crux of the matter. In the United Kingdom as a whole, HIV prevalence is about 0.11 per cent. and 450 people died from AIDS-related disease in 1999. In some countries in Africa the prevalence rate is more than 25 per cent., and in sub-Saharan Africa in 1999 more than 2.2 million people died from AIDS-related diseases. That is some 200 times the UK rate.

The disease is wreaking havoc in the developing world, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. In Zimbabwe and South Africa it is a catastrophe unlike anything

*[Mr. Andrew Robathan]*

since the second world war. In 1998 the International Development Committee was in Uganda. At dinner I sat next to a Minister who had just attended the funeral of the fifth of his wife's siblings to die of AIDS. Although it is an extraordinary thing to imagine, such circumstances are replicated in many, many families throughout Africa.

That man was obviously educated, and the problem can be disproportionately serious among educated people because it is related to travel. If one stays in the same place the whole time, without meeting many people from elsewhere, the virus is not spread. The infection is often contracted when one travels for education or work, as do many miners in South Africa. It can, therefore, have a disproportionate impact on the number of teachers or doctors in a county, although it could be said that such people should be better educated and aware, and therefore, perhaps, less prone to the infection.

There are already 13 million AIDS orphans in Africa, 95 per cent. of them in sub-Saharan Africa. That approximates to one quarter of the population of the United Kingdom; to put it another way, it is like finding that every person in Norway and Sweden had been orphaned by AIDS. Life expectancy in some countries of the developing world is dropping remarkably. In 1996, life expectancy in Zambia was 48.6 years. God knows, that is low enough. It fell, however, to 40.1 years by 1999. In the UK, life expectancy is more than 80 years.

Development, which was progressing in the second half of the 20th century, is starting to go backwards. There are more poor children. Many orphans are unable to go to school, perhaps because, as their parents are dead, they have to stay at home to look after siblings. Money is directed at the care of AIDS patients and away from other health areas. Diseases such as tuberculosis are very much on the increase because of AIDS. All that affects development. Poverty is greater. As we all know, the aim of DFID's policy is to reduce poverty in the developing world.

Such countries' economies are suffering. Our report examined that to a certain extent, but we are seeing only the beginning of it. Some work forces are literally dying and markets are getting poorer because there is less money in the market to buy goods. Investment that would have been channelled to some sub-Saharan African countries might now be channelled elsewhere, although that has yet to be determined. Agricultural production has also been reduced because of the number of deaths.

Some in the western, or developed, world might say, "That's all very sad, but it doesn't affect us directly", but political instability and possible social collapse and conflict are likely to arise. At a basic level, we could ask why people who are dying should obey the law. Also, in an earlier report that looked into the causes of conflict, we found that conflict and poverty are inextricably linked. It is self-evident that prosperous societies tend not to go to war in the same way that poor societies do. Greater instability in the world would be detrimental to us as well as to other countries. The United States has declared the epidemic a national security threat.

**Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): My hon. Friend paints an accurate picture of the appalling situation. As some infections, such as TB, get out of control in sub-Saharan Africa, they are mutating into forms that convey considerable risks to people in more prosperous parts of the world. Does he agree that that is a further repercussion for the developed world?

**Mr. Robathan:** I agree with my hon. Friend. That is why it is so important that the western, developed world appreciates the huge scale and pandemic nature of the crisis.

We found that HIV and AIDS are exacerbated by poverty—owing to health care problems—and, at the same time, exacerbate poverty. That can become a vicious circle leading to greater conflict. It is an awful problem.

**Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): Before the hon. Gentleman leaves the causes of conflict, was he as puzzled as I was that the cross-departmental report on the causes of conflict in Africa, which has just been published, makes no mention of the AIDS crisis?

**Mr. Robathan:** I confess that the hon. Lady has the advantage over me, as I have not read the report, but it is self-evident that the AIDS crisis plays a part. In Ethiopia and Sierra Leone, for example, there is evidence that AIDS is being spread rapidly by the conditions of conflict.

Botswana has the worst adult prevalence rate in Africa: 35.8 per cent., or more than one in three. Last month, I went to a meeting attended by the President of Botswana. His big plea to the UK and the developed world as a whole was for us to try to understand the impact of AIDS in his country and the effect that it is having in every nook and cranny of its national life.

The first purpose of this debate is to increase awareness and understanding. The need for that has recently been illustrated by coverage of the dispute in South Africa about anti-retroviral drugs and the patent case brought by pharmaceutical companies. However, although the issue of the production of generic drugs is important, it merely scratches the surface, because in most of sub-Saharan Africa there is no health service to distribute such drugs and there are insufficient doctors and nurses to educate people about how to take them. Moreover, even if the cost of the drugs is reduced by a factor of 10, they are still too expensive to distribute to the millions of people who have the disease. I am glad that the pharmaceutical companies have dropped the case, but that will not have an impact on the big picture that I shall describe.

Not only is the problem huge, but it may be getting worse. In some countries, good policies appear to have stopped the rise in prevalence rates, but in other countries there is no evidence of that. Although infection rates are uncertain, there is a real worry about countries such as India and China. Recent newspaper reports suggest that the prevalence rate in China—which was until last year the world's most populous

nation—is a great deal higher than the authorities would have us believe. We have little knowledge of what is happening in China, but awareness is as important there as it is anywhere else.

The prevalence rate is still rising in much of Africa, but in Uganda it has been reduced. Having been top of the incidence rate for AIDS in 1993, it is now 14th. That is the result of good public policy. Uganda stands out as a beacon of hope in that respect. Its achievement was based largely on increasing awareness and understanding, causing behavioural change, and political leadership and education. The average age of first sexual intercourse has been increased by two years. That may sound like a paltry figure, but it is extremely important: it means that teenage boys are not having intercourse at the early age that had been customary. At the same time, male condom use has increased from 15.4 per cent. in 1989 to 55.2 per cent. in 1995—the most recent date for which I have figures. AIDS is not beaten in Uganda, but people there have started to turn the awful tide.

What can we do? There is a tendency to view such an enormous problem as insuperable, throw one's hands up in horror and have nothing to say. That would be wrong. We can help through education, and DFID does so, as it should. We have seen various schemes that DFID has assisted around the world. Development aid can be used to educate people and alleviate effects.

I remember visiting Kisumu high school in March 1998 with the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) and other Committee members and watching a rather good drama—a role play— about the dangers of AIDS, performed by teenagers. It was a shock to discover that, by the age of 19—I think that I am correct—over one third of girls and 8 per cent. of boys at that school are infected with HIV. At least education has begun, even though it may be too late and perhaps insufficient. Girls are more vulnerable because in some developing countries they are coerced into having sex at an early age, often by older men, and they are often raped. They are coerced by money and pressures from their family, and for understandable biological reasons they may be more susceptible to picking up the virus.

Education must lead to behavioural change, which is much easier to say than to achieve. We have heard the argument that the habits of some developing countries are cultural habits, that it is important that people have always behaved in a certain way and that it is not for people in the west to tell others that being profligate in their sexual favours is dangerous. The truth is that such cultural behaviour is leading to the death of cultures and the death of a large number of people. Greater abstinence and fidelity would assist, but that, too, is easier to say than to achieve. We have also heard about the practice of dry sex—I shall not elaborate. We are told that that is something imbued in the culture of various African countries, but it is assisting in the transmission of the disease. That issue relates to health. Bad hygiene and poor health care, together with a large number of sexually transmitted diseases, contribute to the spread of this ghastly disease.

Women's rights, human rights, the impact of conflict, which we have dealt with briefly, and the response from DFID, which I look forward to hearing, will be discussed later. The first step towards changing the situation, in which we can assist today, is understanding. In future, history books will be written about this plague, just as they have been about the black death. It is too easy to say that the problem is too big for us and that we cannot do anything. Africa's schools have been emptied of teachers, its hospitals emptied of doctors, millions of children are without parents and societies are in a state of collapse. AIDS is the new black death stalking Africa and the human race. I hope that today's debate will push the issue up the public agenda.

11.18 am

**Mr. Neil Gerrard** (Walthamstow): I warmly welcome both this debate which has been initiated by the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) and the report by the Select Committee on International Development, which gave a balanced and thoughtful overview of the situation. The speech that we have just heard reflected the contents of that report. HIV is not just a medical problem; it reverses development gains in southern Africa, among other places. The spread of HIV in Asia and eastern Europe raises the prospect of development also being reversed in those regions. Without international action, the effects of the reverses will increase. I should like to focus my remarks on that issue.

I welcome the attention that the Department for International Development is giving to the issue and its promise of an HIV-AIDS strategy, which I look forward to seeing soon. However, there will be opportunities over the next few months for progress to be made and initiatives to be taken. There will be a special session of the United Nations General Assembly, in June, and a G8 summit, one month later, both of which will provide opportunities for the international community to start seriously to face up to the scale of the problem and to start to commit the necessary resources. An agreement in principle to set up an international fund was reached at the recent International Monetary Fund meeting. Whether that international fund will be of the required scale is debateable, but at least there are signs of progress.

I am concerned by how that fund might work and about whether there will be an appropriate international response to it. The hon. Member for Blaby referred to the court case in South Africa involving pharmaceutical companies. Concerns have been expressed in southern Africa about the approach taken by countries such as the UK and the US to that court case. Perhaps we were not seen clearly to support the South African Government's position.

In last week's International Development questions, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development said she thought that the court case was ill advised. However, not much was said about the issue while the court case was in progress. Although the European Parliament passed a strongly worded resolution calling on the pharmaceutical companies to withdraw from the action, that position was not reflected in events in individual countries. Some activists in South Africa were disturbed by the impression—true or not—that the Government, and perhaps some other western Governments, were in the pockets of the pharmaceutical companies.

I agree with the hon. Member for Blaby that we must learn the lessons about the type of response that is necessary. Our response should not only be medical,

*[Mr. Neil Gerrard]*

because poverty reduction and education are other integral aspects of addressing the issue. In that context, I should like briefly to mention the consultation paper that the Cabinet Office performance and innovation unit produced, on 30 March, and which discusses in detail how such an international fund might be used.

The paper lists the following package of measures: a new global fund for health, including funds to purchase commodities and commitments to buy effective new products as they become available; tax credits to strengthen incentives for drugs donation and research; protection of intellectual property rights and support for tiered pricing; better co-ordinated publicly-funded research and development, including clinical trials support; streamlining drug approval and regulation; and action to strengthen and expand coverage of health care delivery systems. Looking at that list of six items, it strikes me that five of them concern drugs, medicines and medication, and that only one of them concerns the expansion of health care delivery systems. I am concerned that people in developing countries may think that the package contains a distorted set of priorities that focuses on the needs of the pharmaceutical companies and drugs provision, rather than on the wider response that we need and which the hon. Member for Blaby described.

I see little mention in the document of matters such as the supply of condoms, education, and the necessary social and cultural changes. In some countries, the empowerment of women is key to making a difference and dealing with the stigma attached to HIV. The hon. Member for Blaby mentioned the need to change the sexual culture, but, as he said, we cannot impose such changes on other countries. However, the example of Uganda shows that such measures, combined with political leadership, can work. Our response should involve using all the funds that are established not just to provide medicine and drugs, but to encourage other necessary developments. Of course we want medical solutions when they are available, and we should continue to invest in research to develop vaccines and microbiocides that might prove cheaper and more effective, but in doing so, we should remain focused on the other forms of response that are necessary.

We should set up global funds and use them to encourage social, cultural and educational changes. We must consider how to deal with poverty and embed the HIV issue in the development agenda. There must be a balanced response. There should be medical intervention when possible, and better and more effective research into drugs, but we must not put all our eggs in that basket. We must consider the entire range of responses. The Select Committee report clearly highlighted the responses that are necessary and which have made a difference. We should encourage those responses.

Finally, even if he cannot give the exact figures this morning, I ask the Minister to provide a clearer explanation of Department spending on HIV and AIDS. When responding to questions in the House last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development mentioned a figure of £100 million for last year. However, in June 2000, an HIV-specific spend of £17 million was mentioned. In July, spending for 1998-99 was said to be £43 million, but was later said to be £53 million. I must say that I am a little suspicious of what those figures actually represent. How much is spent directly on HIV, and how much spending on other reproductive health programmes is being included in that figure? We need greater clarity on what is really being spent and where.

During International Development questions last week, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it very clear that, in her and the Government's view, a wide range of responses was necessary to tackle those issues. She has also spoken frequently about the need to deal with poverty as an integral part of that programme—a point that has been made clearly this morning. I am pleased that we have had this debate, and I believe that the Select Committee has done an excellent job in producing its report. In the next year or two, I hope that we can move beyond this debate and use the report's recommendations to influence the United Nations and events internationally, and to ensure effective use of the money that would be generated by the international fund that the G8 is considering establishing.

11.29 am

**Sir Norman Fowler** (Sutton Coldfield): You caught me rather by surprise, Mr. Amess. I was going to intervene later.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on securing the debate. He spelled out the seriousness of the international crisis extremely well. In the past couple of months there have been two debates on the subject in Westminster Hall, in which a few of us have taken part, but although millions of people have been infected with HIV-AIDS and are dying of it, we have not yet had a serious debate on the Floor of the House. That is a pity, and I can think of no other crisis on such a scale that has not found its way on to the Floor of the House. I say that with no disrespect to Westminster Hall—thank God there is somewhere to raise the matter—but it is astonishing that we cannot find time to have a serious debate on the issue on the Floor of the House.

Much of the writing, debate and discussion in the past few months has concentrated on drugs and the case involving drug companies in South Africa. It should be emphasised that that issue is not remotely a panacea. The delivery systems of drugs are lamentably inadequate in many of the countries where the problem is most serious. It needs to be repeated that we still have no vaccine for HIV-AIDS and there is no cure for it. Drugs can extend life, but they will not cure the disease. We are a long way from acquiring a vaccine.

We should turn our minds towards the prevention of HIV-AIDS, which was a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby. We should be concentrating on public health education. We had our own public education campaign in this country back in the 1980s. We used television advertising, sent letters to every household, put up posters, and so on. It is absurd to believe that such a public education campaign could be replicated in Africa or India, but some elements of it could be. My hon. Friend was correct to say that when Governments start taking the issue seriously, there can be some improvement in the figures. That was

established in this country and it is precisely what has happened in Uganda. The Ugandan Government have broadcast their concerns to the public, resulting in successful public education.

**Mr. Rowe:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the paradoxical consequences of our highly successful public education campaign is that the new generation have almost forgotten the risks? There is clear evidence that the incidence of sexually transmitted disease in this country is rising sharply, and that will inevitably bring with it an increase in HIV-AIDS. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is time for the Government to take seriously the risk of HIV-AIDS in this country?

**Sir Norman Fowler:** I am grateful for that intervention, which brings me to my next point. There is an example in this country, which is relevant to international discussion. We took the risk very seriously at the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s. I do not feel that we are taking it so seriously today. The Minister is not from the Department of Health, but he obviously keeps in close contact with it, and that Department promised a strategy paper on HIV, not one or two years ago, but four years ago. My point is not really party political. Everyone on both sides has been disappointed by the Department's slowness in producing that paper—we are still waiting for it.

I cannot believe that we would have waited four years for a consultation paper to deliver a strategy on a different kind of issue. Will the Minister give us some guidance on when the strategy will be published, given that we are probably in the last days of this Parliament? We have all been long-suffering and good humoured about the matter until now.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Chris Mullin):** I can put the right hon. Gentleman out of his misery and tell him that the HIV-AIDS strategy will be published next week.

**Sir Norman Fowler:** That is very good news and I am extremely glad to hear it, but I take back not one word of what I said about the delay. Four years has been too long. I take it as a solemn promise from the Minister that the paper will be published next week, and I and the chairman of the all-party group on AIDS, the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), will be very pleased.

**Mr. Gerrard:** I will be happy to see the strategy published. Is what is being published next week the DFID strategy or the Department of Health strategy? I suspect that my hon. Friend the Minister was referring to the DFID strategy.

**Mr. Mullin:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I meant the DFID strategy, for which I am responsible.

**Sir Norman Fowler:** I realise that I should not have believed that the Government would suddenly emerge from their slowness on the matter. They are not publishing the Department of Health strategy, which is, of course, what I was referring to. I said that several times and I underline it again. The Department of Health said four years ago that it would produce a strategy for HIV and AIDS. There is no debate on either side about that. The Department has been saying for a very long time that the strategy will be published shortly, and perhaps it will be. From what the Minister has said, however, there is no sign that it will be published next week. The international strategy might be, but the domestic HIV strategy paper is not due for publication, as far as the Minister knows.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaby is entirely right: unquestionably, what is happening in Africa and Asia is more serious than the situation in the United Kingdom and in Europe. However, that is not a case for ignoring the state of affairs here and in Europe.

Although our figures are better than those of many other countries, including many of our European neighbours—thank God for that—we should take only limited comfort. The Public Health Laboratory Service estimates that today some 30,000 people are living with HIV in the United Kingdom. That equates to a prevalence among those aged 15 to 49 of about one in 1,000. It also estimates that the number of people living with diagnosed HIV is increasing by at least 10 per cent. a year. That is one reason why the disease was given the highest priority in the recent overview of communicable disease undertaken by the PHLS. Although HIV is an entirely preventable infection—that needs to be repeated constantly—the past two years have seen real cause for concern in this country. In January this year the PHLS reported almost 3,000 new HIV diagnoses for the year 2000, a number that is set to rise as more reports come in. It is expected that the number of new HIV diagnoses recorded for 2000 in the UK will be the highest ever, once all the reports have been collected.

That is the problem that the Government should be tackling. It is not remotely a party political issue, but it is one that many of us feel strongly about. We should hate it if the progress that has been made was not followed up.

There is no cause for complacency anywhere. Self-evidently, there is no cause for complacency in Africa or in many countries in Asia. The international situation is the most serious. However, I hope that we shall not ignore the fact that AIDS is an international problem and that it affects this country and others in Europe. I accept entirely what my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby has said; numerically, the major problem is in other countries. I also agree with the hon. Member for Walthamstow that there is a need for an international fund. However, I return to the point that we should not concentrate exclusively on drugs and treatment. We also need to try to prevent people from getting HIV in the first place. That must make sense. We need to make that an aim of our policy, and consider how we can most effectively put over the public health education message in other countries, not just in Europe.

11.43 am

**Mr. Andrew Rowe** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): In this age of e-mails, I understand that the Post Office service is now known as snail mail. With a small adjustment to the spelling, we might transfer the epithet to the Secretary of State for Health on the question of the AIDS strategy paper, which has not yet come out. The Select Committee report is full of suggestions about

*[Mr. Andrew Rowe]*

how the Department for International Development might assist the international community to take practical steps to alleviate this dreadful scourge.

Although I shall not spend long on the issue, I want to stress the fact that our big companies and banks could play a leading role in bringing together companies in sub-Saharan Africa to talk about how they can help to prevent the spread of the infection among their employees. They are not investing enough time, energy or money in that proposition.

We should all be challenged morally by the issue. It is easy to take what I would describe as the popular press view—if no British person is involved in a bus crash in Spain, it is not worth reporting—of the problem. If people in sub-Saharan Africa are the only ones who will die, does it really matter that much? However, we must remember that all people are equal in the sight of God and that we have a moral obligation to assist all our fellow citizens.

None of us on the Select Committee could remain unmoved when it was reported by the group that visited Cambodia, of which I was not a part, that in a conversation with a woman in a slum there, it became clear that, if she needed an operation to sort out her health, and she had other children to care for, the only way that she could pay for that operation would be to sell one of her children. None of us was unmoved. When, in this comfortable country of ours, we pontificate about moral attitudes and issues, we do so from a viewpoint that is often very far from the reality that gives rise to those attitudes. How does one argue with a woman who has other small children to care for, and who may die without the medical care that she needs, that she should not sell the only asset that she has—one of her other children? I would not wish to face such a dilemma in my household, and I do not think that anyone else would, either.

The problems will become increasingly acute as the epidemic sweeps across not only sub-Saharan Africa, but other parts of the world. We should always remember that Thabo Mbeki, whose reported views on the origin of HIV-AIDS are entirely wrong, is quite right to say, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) said, that it is inextricably linked with poverty.

The alleviation of the scourge is manifestly a matter of political leadership. The Select Committee's report described how, when a Minister of a Government fell ill with HIV-AIDS, he did not want any of his colleagues to come and visit him, because he could not stand the stigma that would be attached to his condition. I would have thought that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and the Inter-Parliamentary Union could both play a part in showing our parliamentary colleagues worldwide how important it is that they take the lead in removing the stigma from this dreadful condition.

I had a meeting in my constituency on Friday to discuss the question of drugs in one of the towns in my constituency—Faversham. The meeting was very interesting, not least because we had with us a number of families with members who were drug addicts and who had committed suicide or were in prison. Those families all told the same story. The children get bullied because their brother is a drug addict. The parents are shunned in the shops because one of their children is a drug addict, regardless of the fact that the others are not. If we, in this so-called civilised society, ostracise people for a misfortune that could happen to any of us, how much worse is it that whole societies overseas are ostracising people with a disease—even though perhaps as many as 30 per cent. of a given age group are falling victim to it?

Social attitudes to people with the disease are partly determined by the fact that it is the incidental infections, not the disease, that kill the victims. People can use that as a mask and pretend that TB or some other illness carried the victim off. If we cannot change those attitudes, we will not make the progress that we need. We as parliamentarians—perhaps I should say my successors as parliamentarians, because I am retiring—should take on board the thought that we can use the CPA and the IPU to increase awareness.

I am concerned about HIV in India. We are deluding ourselves if we believe that health service provision there will be robust enough to cope when the epidemic really takes hold. The health service in some states in India may well be able to cope, and I met a Minister in the national Government—he may have moved on by now—who had an intelligent strategy for dealing with HIV-AIDS. However, I believe that the disease will spread like wildfire in India, and the idea that there is a cultural barrier to promiscuity is a myth. It is interesting how all the nasties come from abroad—it's the foreigners wot brings them in. It does not matter which country one is in—it is never the native people, but always the foreigner who is responsible for importing the nasties.

Some of my colleagues went with me to what looked like a small housing estate on the outskirts of a town called Bogra in Bangladesh. That is a Muslim country where, as we all know, promiscuity is banned by the Prophet and, therefore, does not exist. It struck me as marginally improbable that that small housing estate, which was actually a brothel of about 800 prostitutes, could have been established solely to service the relatively small number of foreigners who happened to pass by. Until countries accept the fact that the behaviour in sexual matters of some of the population is perhaps not as anchorite as they pretend, we shall make little progress. If the population is more than a billion, the incidence of HIV-AIDS does not have to be high for a large number of people to be infected. If that happens, the disease is bound to get dangerously out of control. To return to the issue of our own self-interest, the links between this country and India are very good, and the interchange of personnel between us is legion. If the disease gets out of control in India, we shall be at much greater risk than we are even now.

**Mr. Robathan:** That relates closely to a recent outbreak of TB in Leicester, which is just next to my constituency. The TB came largely from people who had been visiting India or the sub-continent, at least. TB and AIDS are linked, although I am not suggesting that any of the current TB cases have anything to do with AIDS. However, HIV infection can easily be brought to this

country in the same way as TB. From time to time, we should stress the need for self-interest more because altruism is not as prevalent as it might be.

**Mr. Rowe:** Indeed.

Finally, I stress an observation that the Select Committee made in its report. The international community set the international development targets before the extent of HIV-AIDS was understood. As the report says, it is terribly important to understand that it is no good simply revising a target every time one finds it difficult to reach. However, when the basis of international development targets has been knocked to pieces by a scourge on such a scale, it is unrealistic for us to continue with a rod for our own back. We cannot conceivably reach the targets that were set before the scourge was understood. We need an international agreement about working together.

I shall make one more quick point. For goodness' sake, let us pour some resources into south-to-south education. A wonderful non-governmental organisation in Uganda keeps together a group of young people who have agreed to be tested for HIV-AIDS. Whether they are diagnosed as positive or negative, they support one another, work together and get involved in public education to help change the nature of the debate there. We should make sure that they have the resources to spread their expertise to neighbouring countries, because many of those countries are quite rightly becoming weary of being told what to do by white people from a long way away.

11.55 am

**Dr. Jenny Tonge** (Richmond Park): I congratulate the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on securing this debate. My only regret is that it is not longer, because I could easily speak for an hour on the subject; it was one of my specialties before I entered Parliament. I regret that I was not a member of the Select Committee when the report was being prepared, as I would have found it interesting.

We have heard many statistics about AIDS. My introduction to AIDS in the third world was, as hon. Members may remember, driving from Kampala airport into the capital of Uganda. I was mystified to see piles of rectangular boxes outside little shops in every village that we passed through. Some were tiny, some were big. I did not realise their purpose until I asked one of our Ugandan escorts, who told me that the best business in every village in Uganda was making coffins for AIDS victims.

One can see AIDS walking the streets not only in Uganda, but all over Africa. If one is a medic, one knows, because the victims are extremely ill, have sunken faces, and are thin, listless and weak. Many have open or closed TB. It is patently obvious that that continent is suffering terribly from the disease. I would not say that it was as obvious in Asia—not yet—but it is certainly obvious in Africa, where 34 million people have AIDS. There are families of orphans. One in five South Africans will die before the age of 15. That is the equivalent of one child in every family.

Before AIDS hit the world, the diseases that most affected developing countries, such as gastroenteritis and malaria, always killed the very young, the very old and the sick. The trouble with AIDS is that it hits the young, fit, economically active members of the community. That is what makes it so destructive, and so different from previous pandemics. Kofi Annan described it as a global security threat, for all the reasons that we have heard, which is why I was surprised that it was not mentioned as a cause of conflict.

What can we do? I want to concentrate on three aspects. First, I shall deal with the so-called triumph of the South African Government over the drug companies. I emphasise that it is a triumph, because cheaper drugs are needed in all developing countries. The agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights must be renegotiated—or at least, some detailed work needs to be done on it. Drugs are needed for TB, malaria and gastroenteritis. They are needed also to prevent the vertical transmission of AIDS from mothers to babies. That simple treatment can be given to pregnant women to stop their babies being born with AIDS. It is needed, and it is affordable.

The idea that developing countries can use the sort of retroviral regime that we use in this country—it involves a complicated cocktail of many drugs and is often combined with special dietary requirements and special medical checks—is utter nonsense. If people in those countries hear that there is a drug to cure AIDS, we are done for. All the messages about prevention will go out of the window, and everyone will let rip.

One has only to look at the history of antibiotics in our country to see how true that is. If an antibiotic is useful on specific bacteria that cause a specific disease, the pharmacological companies will promote it and people will all want it from their doctors. A good and useful antibiotic, septrin, one of the ingredients of which is trimethoprim, was overused and badly used some years ago. People do not take correct regimes of drugs, but stop taking them as soon as they feel better, instead of finishing their courses. That leads to resistant bacteria, which is the other danger of thinking that AIDS drugs will be the answer in developing countries. If they are not taken properly, there will be further variations in the virus and further problems in the spread of the epidemic that we will have no way to treat.

I emphasise caution in thinking that drugs will be any use. We should put in a little plug for the pharmaceutical companies, as I want them to develop microbiocides. Those will be an interesting development in the treatment of AIDS. I also want the companies to put money into the development of vaccines. In the long term, a vaccine for AIDS would be tremendous: a greater contribution than the smallpox or TB vaccines. Many vaccine projects are already taking place. The all-party group on AIDS went to Oxford to see the work of Professor MacMichael. In Africa, 10 different trials are going on for different strains of the AIDS virus that affect Africans.

I am told by the international AIDS vaccine initiative, however, that there is a shortage of money. We must tackle that problem, about which little has been said so far. The Department for International Development started two or three years ago by contributing £250,000. It has now upped that contribution to £14 million. That is a tremendous advance, and it shows that the Secretary of State for International Development is on-message on the AIDS pandemic. Another development in the spending review, announced by the Secretary of State

*[Dr. Jenny Tonge]*

and the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was the measures to encourage pharmaceutical companies to engage in vaccine research. I would like to hear more about that, as little on the matter has been said.

Prevention is the only tool that we can use at present against the disease. The only message that we can safely promote is that education, health education and the use of the poor old condom form practically our only defence against AIDS. I apologise in advance if I offend anyone in the Chamber, but I want to make a plea. The Roman Catholic Church has tremendous influence in the developing world. We all know—we have seen it on trips abroad—that Catholic charity workers all over the developing world promote the use of condoms. However, that is not the same as a clear message from the Vatican to say that condom use is acceptable. Would that not be a pro-life message from the Church, rather than an anti-life message, considering that millions of people die from AIDS because they do not use condoms?

I urge everyone in the Chamber to put pressure on the Catholic communities in their constituencies to try to get that message through. *The Tablet*, a Catholic magazine, is working hard to promote it. A Vatican announcement in favour of the use of condoms is vital and would have a huge effect on people in the developing world. At present, that is our only defence. We have seen wonderful projects, and hearing the hon. Member for Blaby talk about the play that we saw in the grammar school in Uganda took me back three years. A lot of us said at the time that our schoolchildren should be doing plays like that before the problem overtook us. A wonderful preventive message was going out and being taken on board by the children. We should push that message at every opportunity through health education and ordinary education.

That is why it is so important, as the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) said, that we have a strategy for HIV-AIDS. We have waited four years, which is a long time. I do not know why we have had to wait so long. It is vital for the world that we have a strategy for the west, as well as a good strategy for the developing world from the Department for International Development.

Will the Minister tell us why spending on AIDS prevention has gone down in recent years, as noted in the Select Committee report? Last year, £700 million was spent on AIDS projects worldwide. The United Nations estimates that between £5 billion and £7 billion needs to be spent. If so, what initiatives will the Government promote at the UN Special Assembly in June? What will the money be spent on? Will it be for all projects remotely connected with AIDS or only for particular health projects, including vaccine research and drugs? I do not know, and we need more detail. What I do know, however, is that AIDS is one of the greatest catastrophes facing the world. It is a problem not only for the developing world, because what happens there will spread to us as surely as night follows day—and night is what it will be if the AIDS pandemic spreads through western countries as it has done through developing countries.

I end with a quote from the Select Committee's report, which is excellent, although it does not mention the Catholic Church, as it would have done, had I been present. In its conclusions, the report states that the real crisis of the AIDS pandemic is the

"crisis of poverty. It is the denial of resources, services and rights which has done so much to exacerbate the spread of HIV/AIDS and control of the epidemic will only be secured when such poverty issues are addressed".

How true that is.

12.8 pm

**Mr. Bowen Wells** (Hertford and Stortford): I begin by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on securing a debate on such an important subject. As the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) said, it is probably the most important issue facing mankind.

The Select Committee's report was the product of all the time that its members spent on the Committee. In each country that we visited over the four years available to us, HIV-AIDS was a major topic, and my hon. Friend the Member for Blaby illustrated how important that is. The report notes that there are 13 African countries with adult prevalence of 10 per cent. and that potential gains in life expectancy will regress 17 years. That means that instead of reaching 64 years by 2010 to 2015 as previously expected, life expectancy will regress to an average of just 47 years. That represents a reversal of most of the development gains of the past 30 years.

What do those figures mean in a country such as Malawi? They mean that more teachers are dying of AIDS-related diseases than can possibly be trained to replace them. The impact on Malawi's capacity to educate its people is huge.

The conclusions of our inquiry make grim reading. As my hon. Friend said, in 1999, 2.7 million people worldwide died suffering from AIDS, which is more than three times the combined deaths from war, murder and violence. HIV-AIDS is also having a disproportionate effect on the poor, as many hon. Members have said in powerful speeches. The facts are starkly shown in the statistics. Of the estimated global total of 34.3 million people who at the end of 1 999 were living with HIV-AIDS, 24.5 million were in sub-Saharan Africa and 5.6 million were in south amd south-east Asia. HIV-AIDS prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa was 8.5 per cent. in 1999, compared with less than a quarter of 1 per cent. in western Europe. Some parts of Africa, including South Africa, have a rate of infection as high as 40 per cent. It is hard to imagine what that means for the complete undermining of the social community and of society. It will certainly lead to serious conflict and violence.

The report argues that poverty and HIV-AIDS are inextricably linked. First, there is the crisis of the global HIV-AIDS epidemic and the tragedy that it brings in its train. Secondly, sub-Saharan Africa has appalling levels of prevalence; levels of infection are so high that in many countries the collapse of the entire system is a real danger.

As the hon. Member for Richmond Park said, the only medical intervention, or semi-medical intervention, that will prevent HIV-AIDS from spreading is the

condom. What else can be done? The most effective action to reduce the effects of HIV-AIDS on a country is to reduce the number of transmissions by promoting effective prevention. The means of preventing or reducing transmissions of the virus are already known, but we lack the will to make them work on the necessary scale. Uganda was given as an example of a country where, from the President downwards, interventions have been made and have had the effect that the hon. Lady illustrated.

Another example is Thailand, where the army's general field marshal recognised that unless the AIDS problem, which had been rampant, was dealt with, he would not have an effective army to fight in a potential war and defend the country. With the total support of the Government of Thailand, he went to every brothel and place where HIV was likely to be transmitted and gave direct orders to every male in his army to use condoms. The result was a dramatic fall in the incidence of HIV-AIDS in Thailand. It is therefore possible to produce the result that we are looking for by human, if not medical, intervention.

The report also addresses the question of care. We noted that all too often the debate about access to treatment for HIV-AIDS is reduced to one about anti-retroviral drugs—an issue to which the hon. Lady also referred. No evidence to the inquiry called for the purchase and donation of anti-retroviral drugs to be a priority for donor funds. The Secretary of State told the Committee that even at cost price, such drugs cost in the region of $3 a day per person and, as the hon. Lady said, the care for those undergoing retroviral treatment is very complicated and unlikely to take place in remote villages and towns in South Africa or elsewhere in the developing world.

In many developing countries, annual health budgets amount to little more than $10 per person per annum. The use of anti-retrovirals in tackling the disease is completely irrelevant to the main causes that we are talking about, and we should remember that—although greater access is needed to cheaper drugs for opportunistic diseases such as TB, malaria and gastroenteritis, which are the biggest killers in southern Africa. The provision of anti-retroviral treatments to people with HIV in the poorest areas of the developing world is clearly not a practical or sustainable development intervention. Donor funds and activities should concentrate on the prevention of further infections, the development of basic health care systems, the provision of palliative drugs and basic treatments of opportunistic infections. However, the report does conclude that there is room for price reduction for drugs to treat opportunistic infections, and we welcome efforts to secure access to cheaper drugs.

An analysis of the expenditure by 10 major donors on HIV-AIDS showed an increase from $59 million in 1987 to $293 million in 1998. As spectacular as that fivefold increase appears, during the same period the number of infections rose from 4 million to 34 million—an eightfold increase. In per capita terms, expenditure on HIV-AIDS has fallen from $22 per person living with HIV-AIDS in 1988 to less than $9 in 1997. That is a massive fall. Expenditure on HIV-AIDS remains at less than 1 per cent. of donor countries' total annual overseas development aid budgets.

In the report, we examined DFID's expenditure on HIV-AIDS. Here I must make a confession. I got my noughts in the wrong place when I asked a question at last week's International Development questions. We think that the figure is £100 million or thereabouts—although, as the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) said, DFID gave us several different figures in the course of the inquiry. It is interesting to note that since the end of the financial year 1999-2000, DFID has made several attempts to assess its expenditure on HIV-AIDS, on each occasion increasing its estimate of the amount spent. In our first oral evidence session with DFID officials, we were told that expenditure was running at between £20 million and £30 million per year and that it was anticipated to rise to £40 million in 1999-2000. By the end of the inquiry, we were told that the figure for 1999-2000 had increased to £54.8 million—not yet £100 million—and in an answer to a parliamentary question in January this year, DFID claimed to have spent more than £84 million on bilateral HIV-AIDS related work in 1999-2000.

What is the Department including in those figures? How has it made them advance so much in such a short time? Last week, at International Development questions, the Secretary of State put the figure for the same financial year at £100 million. How do we get there? I was glad to hear from the Minister that the HIV-AIDS policy is to be published next week. The report called for its publication, and we believe that it is essential. One of the effects of the report has been to make DFID look carefully at the whole matter, which had been spread around a range of subject areas.

Although we naturally welcome the increased funding, there is clearly some confusion as to what constitutes HIV-AIDS spending. In an effort to examine DFID expenditure in this area, we examined a list of DFID-funded HIV-AIDS and sexual health initiatives from 1992 onwards. We examined bilateral expenditure between 1992 and 2003. Because most projects lasted for a number of years, we averaged such expenditure out—for example, we valued a three-year project costing £3 million at a cost of £1 million a year.

I refer hon. Members to the results of our findings, which are reproduced in a graph in paragraph 256 of our report. Although the graph is not an accurate representation of year-on-year expenditure, it provides us with a crude sense of the regional spread of DFID's HIV-AIDS work. The graph makes striking viewing, showing that bilateral HIV-AIDS expenditure in sub-Saharan Africa rose rapidly in the early 1990s to a peak in 1997, but that has been followed by a considerable decline in that region. Over the same period, DFID's expenditure in Asia has risen more gradually, but has now levelled off at fairly high amounts.

Obviously, the graph does not take account of any new spending commitments announced since the start of our inquiry and, if any such commitments have been made since that time, we would welcome them, but the basic point remains: bilateral expenditure should be increasing. Although we welcome DFID's prevention work in Asia, any decline on bilateral expenditure in sub-Saharan Africa is unacceptable.

DFID has considerable leverage in many of the countries worst affected by HIV-AIDS. In 1999, DFID was one of the top three donors in eight of the 10 countries with the worst HIV-AIDS prevalence in the

*[Mr. Bowen Wells]*

world. Furthermore, there has recently been a change in the political climate in Africa, with countries such as Uganda, Senegal and Zambia making serious inroads into tackling the disease. The report also calls for DFID to develop an explicit HIV-AIDS strategy, which we look forward to reading about next week.

HIV-AIDS is not only a result of poverty; it also entrenches poverty still further. The Committee has, as a result of its inquiry, concluded that donors, including DFID, have much work to do in assessing the impact of HIV-AIDS on the spectrum of their development activity. There is an urgent need to redesign development programmes, policies and approaches, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, to take account of the new realities caused by HIV-AIDS.

12.21 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr. Chris Mullin):** The hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) has raised an important issue and I thank him for triggering a good debate. The HIV-AIDS epidemic is perhaps the most important challenge facing the world in the foreseeable future. He and others have graphically set out the scale of the problem and I propose to concentrate on what my Department is doing about it.

I shall start by knocking on the head any suggestion that DFID is complacent about the issues. Contrary to what is sometimes suggested, there has been no decline in DFID spending on HIV-AIDS. On the contrary, spending on HIV-AIDS related work, which includes sub-Saharan Africa, continues on an upward trend from around £62 million in 1998-99 to more than £100 million currently. Furthermore, we expect that upward trend to continue.

Rather than getting in a tangle with the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) over figures in the limited time remaining, I shall write to him and attempt to clarify the funding issues, which are complicated for reasons that I shall touch on briefly. DFID is increasingly helping to tackle HIV-AIDS in the context of large sexual and reproductive health programmes and sustainable health systems. In those circumstances, it is often difficult to attribute spending to particular aspects of sexual and reproductive health. For example, the provision of condoms serves the dual purpose of HIV-AIDS prevention as well as family planning and protection against sexually transmitted infections. We strongly believe that a cross-sectoral approach to tackling HIV-AIDS is essential if we are to be successful, and I know that the Select Committee shares that view. The hon. Gentleman will understand the difficulties in attributing particular amounts of spending to particular problems.

DFID currently supports HIV-AIDS related activities in 39 countries throughout the developing world, including Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, China, Cambodia, India and Russia. Sub-Saharan Africa will nevertheless continue to be a priority region. Areas of growing concern include Burma, Vietnam and neglected vulnerable populations in central and south America and the Caribbean, where the epidemic is growing faster than anywhere else in the world.

As national strategic plans to tackle the epidemic improve, we have begun to place our support within the framework of those plans. Our HIV-AIDS strategy, which will be published next week, aims to balance immediate local prevention and mitigation measures with support for long-term initiatives. I realise that the hon. Gentleman is interested in the Department of Health's strategy, but I cannot help him today in that regard. However, I shall make inquiries and write to him.

In global terms, DFID's strategy aims to build political leadership and national capacity, to tackle underlying causes, to maximise the contribution of all sectors, to encourage a comprehensive approach that addresses both prevention and care, and to support research and development. DFID is a significant contributor to the global fight against HIV-AIDS, but it is clear that we cannot succeed alone. If we are to tackle the epidemic successfully, there must be a comprehensive response from donors, Governments, non-governmental organisations, the private sector, faiths and communities. I wholly endorse the comments of the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge)—who has had to leave early—about the need for a strong lead from the Catholic Church. In terms of HIV-AIDS, we are a major contributor to the efforts of the UN AIDS programme, the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and the UN population fund.

At this point I should say something about the recent court case involving the pharmaceutical companies and the Government of South Africa. The case was regrettable and it is sad that the dispute came to court at all, but we welcome the settlement that has been reached. One hopes that we have all learnt from the experience. In our view, the way to increase investment in, and access to, new and existing medicines to tackle the diseases associated with poverty lies in co-operation between the pharmaceutical companies, developing countries and the international community. We will continue to do all that we can to facilitate that co-operation.

In the past year, we have seen welcome reductions in the cost of anti-retroviral drugs for developing countries. However, as hon. Members have said, even at reduced prices those drugs remain unaffordable for the poorest countries. In addition, they are very toxic and complex to administer, and constant monitoring of the treatment regime is required. Tragically, health services in many poor countries do not have the capacity to deliver those drugs and other treatments safely and effectively. It is therefore vital that basic health systems are put in place to ensure that the poor can benefit from the availability of TB and malaria care, reproductive health care and HIV-AIDS care and treatment.

The Government are considering a range of policy options for improving the affordability of essential drugs in poor countries. As part of the global child poverty initiative, my right hon. Friends the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development announced several tax measures and purchase fund options to increase access to medicines in developing countries. The UK is working with other donors to mobilise additional resources. This morning, my right hon. Friends are chairing a breakfast meeting in New York with Kofi Annan and representatives of developing and developed countries to build support for

the establishment of a global health and HIV-AIDS fund to help developing countries tackle the diseases associated with poverty.

We are also encouraging developing countries to do more to facilitate lowering the price of drugs. Import duties, trade barriers, customs restrictions and delays all contribute to increased prices. It is crucial that we do not let dramatic headlines distract us from doing the things that work well, and that have already saved countless lives. I have no time to discuss the details, but our policy consists of four broad themes: raising the profile of the epidemic; prevention in, and beyond, the health sector; care for people infected with, and affected by, HIV-AIDS; and improving knowledge and technology.

In conclusion, I should point out that the situation is not hopeless. As hon. Members have said, Governments such as those of Uganda, Thailand and Senegal have already demonstrated that the tide can be turned. Progress has also been made in countries such as Zambia and the Dominican Republic. Above all, what is required is strong political leadership from Governments who are committed to the welfare of their people. For our part, the UK stands ready to increase its support for Governments and institutions that are seriously committed to tackling this dreadful disease.

## GM Crop Trial (Low Burnham)

12.30 pm

**Mr. Ian Cawsey** (Brigg and Goole): I am delighted to have the opportunity to debate the genetically modified crop trial in Low Burnham, in my constituency. I want to address two aspects: first, the specific problems at Low Burnham and secondly, the general handling of GM crop trials in future.

I am very pleased that my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment is here to listen to the debate and to answer for the Government. I am grateful for the welcome help that his private office gave me when I needed to raise residents' concerns about the matter with his Department.

So far as approvals are concerned, the matter relates back to directives that were agreed in 1990 and came into effect in 1993. Ministers can be held to account for many things, but not for what happened before they were in power. Nevertheless, government involves dealing with the here and now, and the Minister needs to address the real issues affecting Low Burnham.

Low Burnham is situated in an area of north Lincolnshire called the Isle of Axholme, which is reclaimed land—now some of the country's best agricultural land. It lies in the parish of Haxey, between Haxey and Epworth, and is a very small village with an agricultural tradition. The trial came to my attention when I received correspondence from the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and from Aventis. I quickly sent that out to the local parish councils and to the local National Farmers Union to make them aware of the situation and to ask for their comments.

An interesting feature of this part of the Isle of Axholme is that it is an area of strip farming, which is no longer widely practised in the UK, and is often described as a mediaeval method of farming. The fields in Low Burnham and nearby areas are open, and many people own small strips that border on to each other. There are, therefore, concerns that the field location chosen is an inappropriate place for a GM crop trial.

In addition, the field where the trial will be is adjacent to the village and next to the greenway, a disused railway line that is now a popular rural walk with much blossom and wildlife. People are obviously concerned about that. An organic farm is in close proximity and there is bee-keeping in the area. The location hits all the buttons of intense concern that have been pressed by GM crop trials in the past few years.

It is to the Government's credit that, some time ago, they tried to introduce a voluntary code of practice for the companies concerned to ensure that trials were more open and that people had greater access to information about them. However, that has not been the case in respect of Low Burnham. First, information was not sent out to the relevant parish council. I understand from the comments made by representatives of the DETR who came to a recent open meeting that information was sent out, but to the wrong place. That part of the code of practice failed to work.

Secondly, the published grid reference was wrong. Although it was in the locality, it was the wrong field. That led to some concern, not least for the farmer who owns the field at the published grid reference.

*[Mr. Ian Cawsey]*

Thirdly, the farmer did not consult local landowners. That led to frustration and annoyance among villagers and landowners. So the three safeguards that the Government had built in to help such situations all failed in respect of that trial.

There is little information or awareness of what happened at the start of the trial, and that has led to great suspicion. People take the view that they cannot have confidence in the regime and protocol of the trial if basic safeguards fail at the outset.

I have been asking questions of the DETR and Aventis on the issues that local residents have raised with me. I have sent the answers out to villagers, parish councillors and anybody else who asked for information. It has been a useful exercise that has given people a great deal of information, but I am concerned that it was down to myself and my constituency staff to send out information that should have been offered more willingly by those involved in the trial.

Local residents have formed a group to campaign on the issue and they have been diligent in that respect. It would be wrong to try to name everyone involved, but it would be equally wrong not to mention people such as Dr. Goodwin, who lives in the village and has done a great deal of work, Jilly Moore, Linda Patel and Councillor Jean Turner from Epworth town council. They have worked tirelessly in trying to access information about the trial and in talking to other groups across the country that have similar concerns.

Their actions resulted in a public meeting on 23 April, when Graham Davis from the DETR addressed residents and we went through the issues. Although little could be said about what went wrong, there was nevertheless a great feeling of dissatisfaction by the end of the meeting. For instance, the fact that information was sent out to the wrong parish council was acknowledged as a mistake that could not be put right. Similarly, the grid reference will be corrected, but apart from that, nothing will be done.

The Department thought that there had been consultation, which did not surprise me because both the DETR and Aventis had previously given me the same information. I spoke to the farmer on two separate occasions, and he told me up front that he had not managed to speak to the landowners concerned. That is not surprising in light of my earlier point about it being an area of strip farming. There are 10, 11 or maybe more landowners adjoining the field because of the method of farming used in this part of the world. The farmer involved in the trial told me that he was unable to contact the landowners because he did not know who they were. In short, the consultation failed completely.

There was great concern among the villagers present at last week's meeting that the voluntary code of practice, which failed in Low Burnham, did not matter because the trial went ahead regardless of it. I hope that the Minister will be able to address that point.

**Mrs. Jackie Lawrence** (Preseli Pembrokeshire): May I tell my hon. Friend that there was no consultation in respect of a similar trial in my constituency? The first that anybody knew of it was the posting of the sites on the DETR website. Does he agree that it is necessary to press the Minister to replace the failed voluntary consultation process with a statutory form of consultation?

**Mr. Cawsey:** I thank my hon. Friend for her comments. It is regrettable that these matters came to light only when grid references were published. I hope that the grid references were correct in her case, which would put it one step ahead of the trial in my constituency. However, she is right about the need for a statutory approach.

Other issues, which were not addressed, came up during the public meeting. One was contamination. The Government and Aventis said that there would be no more than 1 per cent. contamination, but people were still concerned by what they meant. In particular, a villager from Low Burnham said that he suffered from bad allergic reactions. How do we know that 1 per cent. contamination would not lead to allergy sufferers having problems? There was no answer to that point and, without wanting to be critical, it is a question that needs to be answered. The person available at the meeting could not answer it, so perhaps the Minister will ensure that we get an answer.

On liability, there are real concerns that the only means of redress is through the civil court, which, in theory, is open to anybody—providing that they can afford it. As we all know, the civil court is therefore open to few people. There ought to be some sort of statutory liability order on such matters. I know that the Minister answered a parliamentary question on that point earlier in the year, when he said that he wanted to consider the issue. Hopefully he will be able to say more today.

A further concern is the scientific validity of the trial because no baseline data was collected. The trial was designed to examine the effect on wildlife when a herbicide interacts with a GM crop. Local people are concerned that if one does not examine the wildlife before the trial, it will be difficult to identify any difference. One answer that has been given is that the trial will be in two halves of the same field: a genetically modified crop will be grown in one half and a standard crop in the other, and the two halves will then be compared. In an area such as the Isle of Axholme, that creates a problem in relation to good old strip farming. There is no guarantee that what are now two halves of the same field will have been farmed in the same way over the years—they may have been farmed in different strips with different crops and pesticide regimes. Even now, before a single genetically modified organism has been put into the soil, it is likely that an analysis of the two halves of the field would produce completely different results. If no baseline data capture is taken at the start of the trial, how on earth can any meaningful result be obtained?

The trial will not seek to consider key species such as earthworms, soil fungi and bacteria, and I have been told that funding to look at the impact of GMOs on bird life in the area has been withdrawn, so that work will not go ahead.

Separation distances are another worry, especially to people who keep bees. The DETR has told me that the separation distance for the trial is 50 m. That may be extremely optimistic from the point of view of ensuring confidence in the trial.

What can the Minister say or do for us? I could make several suggestions, but I shall try to be brief. First, I should like him to give me a personal assurance that he will investigate the Low Burnham trial and the mistakes that were made, especially in relation to the lack of information that was sent out, the incorrect grid reference and the fact that his Department and Aventis were content to accept that consultation had taken place merely because the farmer had told them so, although in fact that was not the case. My constituents would welcome such an assurance.

Secondly, given the nature of the area and the fact that 10 or 11 landowners farm on the border of the field, cannot the Minister, even at this stage, try to persuade the company that this is a highly inappropriate location for a GM trial and that it should pull the plug on it? I say in all candour to the Minister that if he is unable to do something, the code of practice will effectively be dead in the water. If, after all the concerns that have been raised about issues such as strip farming, the trial goes ahead anyway, how can there be any public confidence in the code of practice in future?

Thirdly, will the Minister tell us more about the statutory compensation scheme, in which I know that he is interested?

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) that we need a statutory approval system to give local authorities, parish and town councils, local residents and farmers a legal input into a site application and the right for their views to be taken into consideration. I say that not only because it would be an extension of democracy—something in which I am always interested—but because often local people can provide the best local knowledge about the appropriateness of a site. I do not mean to underplay the ability or role of civil servants in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, but I and others from Low Burnham who spoke to some of them received the impression that they did not even understand what strip farming was, or even that it still existed. And why should they? After all, they do not work at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. We need a system that would involve local people and allow them a say.

I do not blame the Minister for 1990 directives, but I look to him to introduce a more rigorous procedure generally and specifically to investigate the concerns of the village of Low Burnham and, for that matter, the whole of the isle of Axholme. If he can establish proper procedures and put matters on a more statutory footing for the future, he will have done a real service not just to my constituents, but to everyone in the United Kingdom.

12.45 pm

**The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher):** I very much welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey). They were made in sober tones, conveyed a forthright message and require a response. There is no question but that mistakes were made at Low Burnham and we need to learn from the experience. He referred to nearby organic farms and bee-keeping, and to the unusual agronomic condition of strip farming—which, as he made clear, was not properly taken into account. Those are all valid points.

I agree about the importance of informing the public and farmers—especially organic farmers—of the whereabouts of the farm-scale evaluation sites in time to allow genuine discussion and negotiation. I am committed to openness and transparency in that regard and to informing the public fully about the evaluations and what they entail. My hon. Friend has clearly shown that that did not happen in the case about which he is concerned. I apologise on behalf of the Department. It should have happened but did not.

The Government have asked the farming and biotechnology industry group, SCIMAC, to impress on farmers participating in the evaluations that they should inform local organic farmers and neighbours as soon as possible of their intention to grow a genetically modified crop. I noted what my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) said about trials and the failure to apply the principle that I have outlined. I am very concerned about that and should like to consider how we can improve matters.

To assist the process, we have announced that, this year, the locations of evaluation sites should be announced much earlier. I have asked that that be done six weeks before sowing, thereby allowing my Department and others to do more work in informing local people about sites near to them. In this and other cases, officials in my Department have written to provide information to all parish, community, district and county councils in whose area an evaluation is sited. My officials have offered to attend meetings with parish councils to explain the evaluations.

**Mrs. Lawrence:** My right hon. Friend said that he has asked for local people to be informed six weeks prior to evaluations. However, is there any potential for objections to be made in that time and for people to find ways of preventing the trials?

**Mr. Meacher:** My hon. Friend puts her finger on a sensitive point. Although the 92/20 directive includes notification and consultation requirements, EU legislation makes no provision for public consent. Information, discussion and consultation are certainly expected and required, but current legislation makes no statutory provision for agreement. I continue to believe that that is a serious problem.

The statutory requirements for notification are that, at least 15 days before planting, the company—in this case, Aventis—is required to inform the Department about its intention to plant a particular crop at a particular site; and that, no more than five days after that, and at least 10 days before planting, it should advertise the fact in the relevant local newspaper so that others in the area will know about it. That is not sufficient time, which is why I want the requirements to be changed.

In the Aventis case, officials wrote on 28 February to parishes and other councils where oilseed rape and beet were to be grown, and on 3 April to those where maize sites were planned. My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole has described what happened, and I do not dispute what he said. Indeed, I agree that mistakes were made. It was not a good or representative example of the public being informed about how evaluations were intended to work. Elsewhere, however, the procedure has generally worked as expected.

*[Mr. Meacher]*

On 28 February, following telephone advice from the local authority about the relevant parish, officials wrote to Epworth parish council about the oilseed rape site near Low Burnham. We were later informed that the site, despite being close to Low Burnham, was actually in the nearby parish of Haxey. We therefore wrote to Haxey parish council, with copies of all the information that had been sent to Epworth, and offered the participation of officials in any public meeting that the council might call.

Subsequently, we were informed by SCIMAC that the final figure of the six-figure grid reference that it had supplied for the site was incorrect. I emphasise that it was extremely unfortunate—I could use another word—that the two errors occurred at the same site, and I apologise for the confusion that the matter has caused local residents. However, I am told that local farmers and the public were fully aware of the identity of the farmer who was hosting the evaluation and of its true location.

In this year's spring sowing round, we have detected a similar error in only one of the other 84 sites. We suspect that the grid reference supplied for that site may be incorrect, and we are investigating the information supplied as quickly as we can. My Department told SCIMAC that it must re-advertise the site in the local paper to correct the confusion. I agree that it is after the event, but it is the right thing to do in the circumstances. My Department and English Nature have checked that the risk assessment for the correct field remains valid, and we are satisfied that it is. We have also updated our website to include the correct location details.

In the majority of cases this spring, the arrangements for notifying local people have worked rather better. Although I do not intend to diminish my acceptance that things went badly wrong and the situation was unacceptable, I believe that neighbouring farmers and local parishes have been informed about the evaluations in reasonably good time, and certainly in better time than in previous years. Indeed, I understand from SCIMAC that, some weeks ago—although I know that a different view is being put forward by the other side; one never knows exactly where the truth lies—the farmers hosting the site at Haxey spoke to their neighbours about their intention to grow GM crops and contacted the only organic grower in the area.

I am told that the farmers elected to host a GM oilseed rape crop evaluation because none of their neighbours usually grow that crop, whereas they do grow beet.

**Mr. Cawsey:** Just to clarify the point on what consultation took place, the farmer—I have spoken to him directly and am fairly confident of this—spoke to some of the landowners, but he did not speak to all of them because he did not know the identity of all of them. He could not contact those whom he did not know. When he did speak to landowners, he did so on a reactive basis, in response to questions about whether he was conducting a GM trial. It was only when people started to raise concerns with him that "consultation" took place. It is not in dispute that several landowners were not consulted.

**Mr. Meacher:** My hon. Friend gives an account that probably reconciles those two slightly divergent views. I accept that there was some communication, but that it may have been reactive rather then proactive, and probably was not comprehensive.

As part of the public information campaign for the evaluations, my officials, as my hon. Friend said, attended meetings with local farmers and the public in a number of areas. That included a meeting at Haxey, on 23 April, with local farmers and my hon. Friend. I understand the concerns and the irritation expressed at that meeting, and the wish to see information about the evaluations corrected and made available as soon as possible. I am also aware that some adjoining farmers have stated that they were not consulted. My officials are pursuing that point with SCIMAC.

The conclusion is that we have a voluntary system that generally works properly, but has not worked in a significant number of cases. We should certainly consider the request made by both my hon. Friends, that the system should have some statutory back-up. As the Low Burnham site shows, it can sometimes be difficult to ensure that everyone who needs to know about a site is told, and in good time. The voluntary agreement generally works well, but it undoubtedly works less well in some cases.

We need a fresh approach, and I should like to see improved notification and consultation processes for future rounds of the evaluations. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire, my preference is for a statutory system of notification to ensure that all those who need to know about the sites are informed, including organic growers, bee-keepers and non-GM farmers. I have also insisted that, before the next round of evaluations begins in the autumn, each site should have a specific risk assessment carried out on it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole made a number of general points on the trials. He also spoke about the issue of statutory consultation and my point on the need for greater assurance of public consent. We are considering the statutory liability provision. There is also an EU provision on liability across the whole environmental spectrum. I agree with my hon. Friend that we need to consider that provision specifically with respect to GM in this country, and we are doing so.

Like my hon. Friend, I remain concerned about whether people understand what 1 per cent. GM contamination really means. It should be made clear that it means that adjoining crops may be contaminated by GM at a rate of up to 1 per cent. There is also the question of whether there are health impacts for those who have particular allergies. I cannot speak about that, but it is an issue.

The issue of fields split into halves, one of which has been strip farmed, is a significant one, and we probably did not take it sufficiently into account. However, I shall raise with the scientific steering committee the issue of whether it invalidates the results in this case. I may write to my hon. Friend when I have done that.

The number of fields—although it is 84 or 85 this year—is not sufficient for us to be able to draw statistically valid conclusions about the effect of GM on the number of birds. However, we are considering using bird food as a proxy to try to measure that effect.

The separation distance in this case is 50 m, which is intended to deliver no more than 1 per cent. contamination. However, I am well aware that that is a very contentious issue. I t is also important to encourage dialogue between farming groups at national level. My Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have already discussed with industry bodies how we can do more to inform organic farmers and bee-keepers in farm-scale evaluation areas about the location of sites that might affect them. I shall ask my officials to arrange further meetings with the respective industry groups, both SCIMAC and organic and conventional farmers, to establish whether we can do more together in future to ensure that all their members who could be affected are informed of farm-scale evaluations near them in good time, and I repeat, at least six weeks before sowing.

## Listed Buildings

1 pm

**Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): It is a privilege to have the opportunity to raise an important issue in the Chamber. I ask the Minister for the Arts to put away his file on stately homes. I do not want to talk about stately homes or large monuments, but the large number of listed buildings that people live in.

I refer to people's normal residences, which they try to maintain at substantial cost with very little support through existing Government structures. I recognise that the Minister's Department understands some of the issues and values the historic, listed buildings in this country. It commissioned the important report, "Power of Place", which says precisely that. However, I ask him to listen to what I have to say and to make even stronger representations to his colleagues in the Treasury and in the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, because it is there that we need to see action to support the fine words that have been said on many occasions.

Part of the idyllic rural scene, almost the epitome of rural England, is the thatched cottage—one in a west country village—with roses around the door. What we must recognise is that the chocolate-box cottage costs a pretty penny to maintain. My interest has been stimulated by the fact that there are a great number of listed and thatched buildings in my constituency. Many of my constituents who live in those buildings have written to me over the years expressing their concern about the difficulty of maintaining their buildings in the way that they would like. I am indebted to Mr. Tregoing, a constituent from Long Sutton, who came to my surgery and clearly set out his concerns. He had had to look again at thatching half of his property and realised how expensive that would be. It has to be done every few years, using top-grade materials—that is required by the authorities—in order to maintain it. He cannot go for a cheap alternative. He cannot even use a cheaper material for thatching. In our area, reed thatching is not acceptable, so he has to use traditional thatch materials and that makes it an expensive job.

What Mr. Tregoing finds extraordinary is that first, he does not have access to any support—there are no local authority or other grants—and secondly, he has to pay what I think is the iniquitous imposition of 17.5 per cent. VAT. The majority of people to whom I have spoken who live in that sort of property consider it a great privilege to live in their houses. They love living in historic buildings. They recognise that in many cases not only are those buildings very beautiful in themselves, but they add beauty and value to the village or town in which they are located. The building might not even have been listed when they first lived there, and they find it difficult to understand that the value added tax system penalises them for maintaining it to an acceptable standard for the public good, although they obviously have an interest in doing so.

The Minister will be familiar with the facts, but I will set them out for the record. Since 1973, the standard VAT rate of 17.5 per cent. has applied to repairs and refurbishments of buildings, including listed and historic buildings. The difference is that newly constructed buildings carry a zero rate of VAT. At first

*[Mr. David Heath]*

sight, that seems totally anomalous; it flies in the face of everything that the Government have argued otherwise—and which Liberal Democrats have always argued—as regards sustainability and the proper balance between using existing buildings and allowing new buildings. However, there we are.

The regulations were amended slightly in 1994 to extend the zero rating to approved alteration work on protected buildings. If one applies for listed-building consent for an alteration to a listed building, the zero rate applies. Of course, that makes the situation even more anomalous. The extraordinary thing is that someone who builds an extension or undertakes a major alteration to his thatched cottage is not liable for VAT; however, someone who simply tries to maintain it in the historic form in which it has always existed is. Many people find that difficult to understand.

There has been a long-running campaign on the issue, and different concerns have been expressed. As regards churches, the Government have listened. It was announced in this year's Budget that the Treasury has devised a mechanism whereby listed buildings that are places of worship will benefit from a reduction in VAT. That has not yet been agreed with the European Commission, and discussion is still going on. There will be a general review in 2003, when it is hoped that the matter will be resolved.

The Government cannot hide behind the smokescreen of European rules, which I understand are restrictive in this regard. There is no scope under the current agreement for new—I emphasise new—zero rates of VAT for goods or services unless that is decided by general agreement. However, there is scope for introducing a 5 per cent. rate of VAT. Annexe H of the sixth VAT directive lists the goods and services to which Governments can apply a 5 per cent. rate. Item 9 refers to the

"supply, construction, renovation and alteration of housing provided as part of a social policy."

It is a matter of interpretation as to whether an historic building can be construed as part of a social policy, and I understand that difficulty.

In October 1999, a further qualification extended to member states an option to apply an experimental reduction to a 5 per cent. rate for three years on services including the renovation

"and repairing of private dwellings, excluding materials which form a significant part of the value of the supply."

That seems to many of us to offer the Government a much more realistic opportunity to do something significant. However, there is no indication that they intend to take any action whatever. I am disappointed by that, because the Government are failing to act in a way that would be of enormous benefit to a great many people in this country, as well as to our built heritage, and in a way that would meet the objectives—the core beliefs—of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. We will have the wrong end of the stick if we are not prepared to entertain a saner taxation system that encourages what we want, such as conservation and sustainability, but instead have a system that does the reverse—that provides a fiscal stimulus to build new buildings and allows old buildings to fall into disrepair.

Another aspect of the problem is the absence of grants for maintenance of listed buildings, which compounds the difficulties that individual householders face with respect to VAT costs. Local authority grants for maintenance are now almost non-existent. There was a time when local authorities had a little more spare cash and were relatively generous and when, perhaps, fewer people knew about the grants and asked for them, but times have changed. I checked with the two district councils in my constituency. Mendip district council does not have a great number of thatched cottages—that is not a vernacular style for that area—but it does have many historic buildings. It has offered no grants for the past two years. It still receives applications, which are kept on file, but there is no indication that grant aid will be available. At one time, it had funds of £25,000 for maintenance grants and £40,000 for buildings at risk. At present, it cannot deal effectively with grant applications for maintenance or for buildings at risk. That worries me enormously.

South Somerset district council, in the other half of my constituency, has 6,000 listed buildings in an enormous range of styles. The area contains the second highest number of listed buildings in the country. Even uneducated laymen would recognise many of them as historic, beautiful and worthy of conservation. The district council's fund, which is now down to £24,000, is targeted at buildings at risk. It is used almost exclusively for unoccupied buildings that otherwise would be in danger of dereliction, and not for occupied buildings. I understand that priority, but I also recognise that it leaves many people without the support that they would like.

The only other alternative is the heritage lottery grant. It currently allocates £86 million for historic buildings and townscapes, but I understand that that is set to fall to £53 million in the coming year. Those funds are oversubscribed by a factor of five to one and are clearly inadequate to the task. They are targeted largely at major buildings rather than the individual dwelling places that are, cumulatively, of as much historic importance.

We are in a very serious position. Mr. Colin Johns, a gentleman with whom I have had dealings, is a founder trustee and the honorary treasurer of the UK Association of Preservation Trusts. As an architect, planner and former head of conservation at Wiltshire county council, he knows a great deal about the matter. He has said:

"Access to the Heritage Lottery Fund is now the lifeline for many conservation projects, which without grant aid will simply fail. Until recently it was often possible to obtain funding from Cadw, English Heritage or Historic Scotland but these opportunities have been severely curtailed for most projects and the political pledges made in the past that lottery funding would be additional to existing funding, not a replacement for it look decidedly tarnished."

I agree with that comment.

Returning to the subject of VAT, many organisations take the view that it is an anomaly that must be corrected. A number of them have come together as the Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies, which has produced a report entitled "VAT and the Built Heritage". Its foreword states:

"Charging VAT at standard rate on repairs to listed buildings whilst charging nothing on alterations to them flies in the face of government advice on conservation. The present system is also at

odds with the ideas of sustainability which lie at the heart of recent thinking by the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions and which underpin the report of the Urban Task Force."

I agree entirely with those comments, and something must be done now.

The crux of the argument is that doing something about VAT and making grants more widely available would be good for the country. Compared with the alternatives, such measures make economic sense and are good in terms of sustainability. In keeping with the argument that I have already advanced, there is no sense in adopting a fiscal policy that encourages new building and is detrimental to older buildings that we want desperately to preserve. Such measures would also be good for employment. They would help to maintain a craft base and the artisans and craftsmen who carry out such work, and to ensure that the materials that they use are kept in use in this country. Such measures would also undoubtedly be good for tourism. Part of the image that we in the west country sell is that of the traditional townscape or village, of which older buildings form an integral and essential part. Without them, it will be even more difficult to bring back to the glories of the west country the visitors whom we have lost through current events.

Finally, such measures would be good for the residents themselves. They would be freed from the serious concern of maintaining a roof over their heads—literally so, for those who live in thatched cottages—and would be able to preserve their properties in the manner that they prefer. It is true that that would be to their benefit, but it would benefit everyone to whom the listed building process is relevant. Without such measures, the entire system for protecting historic buildings will remain a nonsense. Instead of paying lip service and offering pious hopes, this Government should reform the system so that it can make a real difference to those who live in historic buildings.

1.17 pm

**The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Alan Howarth):** I thank the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and congratulate him on securing today's debate. He makes a gentle and seductive case, and I should like to respond to it as fully as time will allow. He and I are certainly in agreement, inasmuch as historic buildings and other survivals of the past give profound pleasure. They stand as a record of artistic and technical achievement in many different fields, and we have a proud tradition of protecting and preserving important buildings. The listing of buildings of special architectural or historic interest began after the war, when planners in blitzed towns and cities desperately needed guidance on which surviving buildings were worthy of retention. Protection is now given to some 500,000 listed buildings, and a wide variety of structures are included—from castles and cathedrals, to thatched cottages, milestones and village pumps.

The Government are advised on which buildings to list by English Heritage, which conducts thematic studies such as those recently carried out on cinemas and military and railway structures. It also advises us on specific proposals for listing buildings that are, for example, under a perceived threat. Legislation is backed up by planning policy guidance note No. 15, which provides solid guidance on identifying and protecting the historic environment, and includes advice on the upkeep and repair of historic buildings. The guidance is directed not just at local authorities, but at other public authorities, historic building owners, developers, amenity societies and other members of the public.

As the hon. Gentleman noted, many owners are pleased that their properties have been listed, and therefore officially recognised, as part of our heritage. However, we realise that some owners may be uncertain or apprehensive about what listing will mean for them. My Department's publication, "What Listing Means: a Guide for Owners and Occupiers", deals with general queries. Local authorities and English Heritage are available to answer more detailed questions, and often best placed to do so. Many listed buildings are in public ownership. The Government are aware of their responsibilities and we are considering how best to give guidance to local authorities on best practice in the care of their buildings.

That a building is listed does not necessarily mean that it must be preserved intact for all time. The main purpose of listing is to ensure that care will be taken with decisions affecting the building's future, that any alterations respect its particular character and interest, and that the case for its preservation is taken fully into account in considering any redevelopment proposals.

Owners of listed buildings who wish to carry out works affecting the character of the building must first obtain listed-building planning consent from the local planning authority. When considering applications for consent, planning authorities must ensure that the terms on which consent is granted relate fairly and reasonably to the circumstances of the building and its conservation needs. Planning authorities must therefore ensure that conditions are necessary, relevant, enforceable and reasonable, and they should have access to the appropriate expertise. If an applicant is aggrieved by the terms on which consent is granted, he or she has a right of appeal to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Although owning a listed building can result in additional costs for owners, it can also bring benefits. In many areas, the cachet of listing can add to the value of residential property. As the hon. Gentleman said, many people regard owning a listed building as a privilege and accept it as a responsibility. We are aware of and appreciate the efforts made by the vast majority of listed building owners to maintain their properties in sound condition. PPG15 states that regular maintenance and repair are key to the preservation of historic buildings, that routine expenditure on repairs keeps a building weather-tight and that regular maintenance—especially roof repairs and clearance of gutters and downpipes—can prevent more expensive work becoming necessary later.

The lifespan of an historic building may be all but indefinite, provided that it is regularly maintained and that any major repairs are undertaken promptly. Major problems are often the result of neglect. If tackled earlier, they can be prevented or at least reduced in scale. PPG15 also encourages owners of listed buildings to seek expert advice on maintenance and the best way of carrying out works. The Government hope that local planning authorities will give owners informal advice when they can or guide them to other sources.

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*[Mr. Alan Howarth]*

English Heritage is a national source of information and expertise on matters relating to the historic environment. It provides much specialist advice on the care of historic buildings and can sometimes advise on individual cases, especially when there are unusual problems. Its learned and fascinating publication, "Thatch and Thatching", for example, provides valuable guidance on thatched cottages. It says that local authorities' policies should be based on a thorough knowledge of local traditions of thatching and take account of regional diversity, the preservation of materials and technologies and the maintenance of the area's character.

The hon. Gentleman made important points about the wider benefits to the economy, our craft tradition, tourism and heritage of ensuring that our heritage buildings are kept in good repair. He also said much about funding. I do not think that we dispute that local authorities have powers to give grants to owners of buildings of special architectural or historic interest, regardless of whether they are listed. The allocation of funds is, however, for local authorities to decide. I appreciate that there is not, in practice, great scope for authorities to grant funds, but it must be a matter for their priorities and a decision for them.

Grants for the repair of buildings of outstanding architectural or historic interest, which usually means grade I and grade 2* buildings—approximately the top 6 per cent. of listed buildings—may also be available though English Heritage provided that the application is made prior to the work being carried out. All applications for grant assistance are judged on their merits. English Heritage takes into account the importance of the building, the urgency of the proposed repairs and the need for financial support. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has grant schemes for the repair and reinstatement of traditional farm buildings, which includes listed buildings. The directory of grant-making trusts also lists a number of charitable trusts that make grants towards the preservation and upkeep of historic buildings.

The Government have long been aware of the concern that repairs to listed buildings attract the full rate of VAT. The Chancellor's approach to the European Commission last year to seek to lower the VAT burden to 5 per cent. on repairs to listed places of worship is wholly representative of the Government's willingness to play their part in sustaining that inheritance. The Commission has said that it will look carefully at the VAT treatment of heritage buildings when the VAT directive is reviewed in 2003. We shall continue to work with the Commission towards a positive conclusion.

**Mr. David Heath:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Howarth:** Will the hon. Gentleman excuse me, as I have very little time?

That is not to say that we are content to let the matter rest there. My Department, following the undertaking given by the Chancellor in his Budget statement, is working urgently on developing a system to administer grant payments to listed places of worship, which will effectively reduce the rate of VAT to 5 per cent. That new policy will mean a very substantial increase in public support for the repair of listed places of worship. The measure has already received widespread and enthusiastic response by all faiths nationally and locally, and we shall make an announcement as soon as possible on introduction of the scheme. Indisputably the nation's places of worship play a huge part in creating our sense of common heritage, but they also play a critical role at the centre of individual communities. It is partly for that reason that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, with whom the responsibility for VAT rests, chose to concentrate the benefits on those particular buildings.

A responsible Government must be circumspect and selective in targeting reliefs. All of us understand that a relief introduced in one area costs revenue that has to be made up from elsewhere. Of course we fully recognise the importance of the conservation of secular buildings and the important role that individual owners play in achieving that. We greatly appreciate what they do, and we do not underestimate the burden and difficulty for many of them. We play our own part in their preservation through the provision of the grant assistance to which I have already referred. I cannot hold out the prospect of asking taxpayers to provide grant to support the general cost of repairs to grade 2 listed buildings. As the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said, there are 6,000 listed buildings in south Somerset alone. The allocation of heritage lottery funding must be a matter for the trustees.

We have set in train a wide-ranging review of policies on the historic environment, leading to a major statement of policy on the historic environment later this summer. That is a Government initiative. As a first stage, I asked English Heritage to address a number of specific issues and to submit a report to the Government. Its report, "Power of Place", to which the hon. Gentleman referred, was published in December last year, and we are currently considering it very carefully. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for what he had to say about it.

The report contained a number of recommendations aimed not just at Government, but at the heritage sector and owners generally. The Joint Committee of the National Amenity Societies, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, was among those who participated in that process. The document also addressed the issue of the VAT burden, which was so central to the hon. Gentleman's argument. One of its recommendations was for an equalising of work that is new build or alterations, with work that is repair and maintenance. The Government understand the force of that plea and will consider the proposition carefully. Determination of the matter lies with the European Union, but these matters are not set in concrete. The Government have shown that they are willing to use the flexibility available. The overall system will be reviewed in 2003 at European level.

Another message was the need for the heritage sector to promote a shift from cure to prevention, by encouraging regular condition surveys and planned maintenance and by piloting self-help initiatives and low-cost insurance schemes, and for owners to carry out routine maintenance and regular condition surveys. That backs up the message in PPG15, and we are looking forward to seeing how the heritage bodies

respond to it as well as the other recommendations. I know that many of them have already seized the initiative and are actively considering future patterns of collaboration.

The Government are very much aware of the problems faced by those who own and live in listed buildings and the special responsibility that they carry for the maintenance and repair of those buildings. We pay the warmest tribute to owners for the work that they do in caring for their properties and ensuring that they retain their place within our national heritage. The proper upkeep of listed buildings is an integral part of our policy for protecting the historic environment, which matters greatly to the vast majority of people and is something about which we can be rightly proud. Our forthcoming policy statement will set out in full our vision for sustaining that policy.

## NHS and the Drugs Industry

1.30 pm

**Mr. Peter Bradley** (The Wrekin): I can only assume that the May Day disturbances have prevented the public and Members alike from flocking to Westminster Hall for this debate. I had expected a full Chamber, but I shall have to do my best to whistle in the wilderness, which is a practice that is not unknown to me.

A couple of weeks ago, I received a copy of the Association of British Pharmaceutical Industries annual review for the year 2000—and a very interesting and useful document it is. It states:

"Opinion surveys of Parliament show that overall favourability towards the pharmaceutical industry had improved again over the past 12 months. Six out of ten MPs express a positive attitude towards the industry and only one in ten is critical."

I am afraid that I am part of that one in 10.

I make no apology for raising the issue again, as I have done a number of times, both in this Chamber and on the Floor of the House. I recognise the importance of the drugs industry to the national health service and, indeed, to the economy, but I have a principled objection, as I am sure do most others, to profiteering. I have been disappointed in the past two years at what I can regard only as the Department of Health's complacency in the face of the excessive profits that some pharmaceutical companies are making at the expense of the NHS and taxpayers. I very much hope that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend, the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), in whom I have the utmost confidence, will restore my faith.

I acknowledge the industry's contribution of 60,000 jobs, a further 250,000 indirect jobs and £2.9 billion a year invested in research and development, which equates to about £8 million a day, according to the ABPI's annual review. Five of the top 25 selling drugs on the market have been pioneered in the United Kingdom and there were £7.1 billion worth of exports, producing a trade surplus last year of £2.3 billion. Drugs that are manufactured in the UK are our third biggest export, which is an impressive record.

However, we have seen too frequently the way in which the pharmaceutical industry and the companies within it have exploited their dominant position. We saw recently how multinationals sought to put pressure on the South African Government. I am pleased that they have now withdrawn their action against that Government in respect of AIDS drugs. We saw, too, the reaction of the manufacturer, which I believe is Glaxo Wellcome, although I stand to be corrected, when the National Institute of Clinical Excellence announced that it could not recommend that the drug Relenza could be prescribed through the NHS. As I recall, the chairman's response was that he would have to review the company's investment in this country.

It is interesting to note that drug prices are uniformly cheaper in Spain, where there is no drug industry, so that the muscle that the industry applies to the Government in negotiating drug prices is considerably reduced. It is my contention that there is routine profiteering at the expense of the NHS. I accept that the costs of research and development are considerable and I recognise the need for drug companies to recover their investment and to reward their shareholders. I do not object to profit, but to excess profit.

*[Mr. Peter Bradley]*

In 1999, Shropshire health authority and the primary care group in my constituency raised concerns about the deficit in their drugs budget. I carried out research and initiated an Adjournment debate in which I described the £69 million overspend that health authorities were contemplating, £66 million of which would not have existed had there not been the differential pricing between branded and generic drugs. I described how hospital-led prescribing was contributing significantly to the problems that they faced. When I say "they" I mean 78 out of the 100 English health authorities. Some 34 were facing a deficit of £1 million, and five were facing deficits in excess of £2 million. In summary, hospital-led prescribing is simple. Pharmaceutical companies offer hospitals drugs at knock-down prices—loss leaders—knowing full well that hospitals account for only 20 per cent. of the market, and that outside the hospital, in the community, which represents 80 per cent. of the market, the prices of those drugs can be significantly increased.

Typically, when a patient is released into the community, he or she goes to his or her doctor and demands the same branded drug that was offered by the consultant in the hospital. The patient will not know that in many cases the cost of the drug in the hospital is a fraction of its cost in the community. In the case of Frumil, the cost in the hospital was only 6 per cent. of the cost in community, and the in the case of Imdur, the figure was 2.5 per cent.

My health authority faced a deficit of more than £1.5 million in 1997-1998. The following year the deficit was roughly the same. In 1999-2000 it had risen to £3.5 million. Those deficits had to be met either from other budgets for health care in my community or from the taxpayer. In 1999, with the introduction of primary care groups, the NHS began to get to grips with the problem. Because PCGs control their own budgets, they have an incentive to switch from expensive branded drugs to the cheaper generics. The health authority in my constituency was encouraging closer working between primary and secondary care, to begin to tackle that problem. It introduced innovative IT packages to guide doctors as to the most cost-effective medicine that they could prescribe.

At the same time, the Department of Health negotiated with the branded medicine manufacturers a 4.5 per cent. reduction in the price of their drugs. That was very encouraging, until the drug industry hit back. Mysteriously, between the autumn of 1998 and the summer of 1999, the number of drugs on the category D list, issued monthly by the NHS to alert practitioners to the lack of availability of cheaper generic drugs, leapt from 30 to 170. Typically, drugs were featured on the list as being unavailable and were then removed from the list some time later. Fruzomide in particular leapt in price between September 1998 and September 1999, from 26p to £2.14, an increase of 723 per cent. Other drugs followed a similarly steep path. The price of 100 mg of thyroxine increased by 670 per cent. and that of 5 mg of bendroflurozide increased by 567 per cent.

So alarming were those increases and their impact on health authorities, that the Select Committee on Health held a snap investigation of the causes of this fluctuation in the market. In its report, the Committee referred to market manipulation, hoarding and collusion, and it concluded that the stratospheric price rises of the past 18 months must have enriched many individuals at the expense of the NHS. It was right.

Sadly, the Office of Fair Trading, which was asked by the Department of Health to investigate the causes of spiralling drug prices, is still investigating almost two years later. OXERA—Oxford Economic Research Associates—a consultancy commissioned by the Department, has submitted its report, but it is currently unavailable for public scrutiny and is still being considered by Ministers. Meanwhile, the plunder continues.

The category D list may not be an issue now, but at the time it cost the NHS £160 million. I did not fabricate that figure—it was provided to me in a parliamentary answer by the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham). So steep was the increase and so serious were the consequences for health authorities throughout the country that the Department of Health was obliged to make additional grants to those authorities of £90 million in December 1999.

Whenever I have raised my criticisms on those issues, they have provoked fevered denials from the APBI and individual drug companies, and rather sullen hostility from civil servants, which I do not understand, because I would have thought that if one could identify a way of spending precious taxpayers' money on the NHS more effectively, the Department of Health would be first in line to make use of it.

I first raised my concerns in an Adjournment debate in 1999. Some of the press interest generated by that debate caused the managing director of a small drugs company to write to me, explaining that he had been excluded from the market for pain relief medication for cancer sufferers. He ran a small company that made a generic drug that was a great deal cheaper than the drug known as MST Continus, which was produced by Napp Pharmaceuticals. I referred that complaint to the Office of Fair Trading. It is regrettable that the investigation took two years, but it was thorough. On 30 March, the OFT issued its findings—the first under the Competition Act 1998.

The OFT found that Napp's MST drug had captured about 97 per cent. of the NHS market in 1998, despite the fact that its patent had elapsed as early as 1992. It had achieved that by discounting the cost of the drug to hospitals by more than 90 per cent. It was being sold at less than 50 per cent. of the cost price. Napp's defence was that it could achieve that price through bulk sales to hospitals. I contend that a company that sells a product at less than the cost price will survive only if it can recoup the losses and make a tidy profit from other activities. In my view, that is exactly what Napp did. That was also the view of the OFT, which referred to Napp's strategy of eliminating competition. It spoke of selective "excessive" discounting in hospitals to capture 90 per cent. of the market within hospitals and, once it had secured that market and excluded those companies that could not compete with its discounting, it could capture the far more lucrative market in the community.

The OFT concluded that Napp had "abused its dominant position" in the absence of competition and had charged excessive prices in the community. MST treatments of 10 mg, 30 mg and 60 mg were 1,000 per

cent. more expensive in the community than in the hospitals. The OFT estimated that a profit of about 80 per cent. was being made on the drug and, more important, that it was costing the NHS about £2 million a year. Those unequivocal findings were serious enough to prompt the OFT to impose a £3.21 million fine. It also demanded that Napp should end the infringements, reduce its prices to the community and close the price differential between what it charged hospitals and what it charged doctors' surgeries.

OFT director John Bridgeman said:

"Napp's discounting policy to hospitals has impeded competition in the market for sustained release morphine by anti-competitively targeting rival's products. Discounts of well over 90 per cent. were offered in tendering for hospital contracts where Napp faced a rival"

interestingly, those discounts were not so generous if there was no rival—

"and at least one competitor was forced to withdraw from the market.

By keeping more than 90 per cent. of the hospital segment of the market, Napp was able to retain a similarly high share of the much larger business of supplying sustained release morphine to patients in the community. It was able to do this because GPs' prescriptions are strongly influenced by the brands used in hospitals. Community prices were excessive—typically more than ten times higher than Napp's hospital prices and up to six times the export price of MST.

I estimate that the price reduction I have proposed should immediately bring savings to the NHS of the order of £2 million annually. In the longer term developing competition should lead to further savings to the NHS and so to the taxpayer."

That was a landmark decision. Should Napp appeal, the case will be heard by the tribunal set up under the Competition Act 1998, and will be the first of its kind under the new legislation. That, too, will be a landmark. What the OFT found after its two-year investigation totally vindicated the criticisms that I and many others had made of the drug industry over the years. Napp's defence, according to its press release, was that

"discounting in hospitals is commonplace".

It went on to state that

"the OFT's attack on Napp's list price could equally well be applied to other companies governed by the PPRS (Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme) and represents an across the board attack on pharmaceutical companies' prices".

Hear, hear. That is less a defence than an indictment of the rest of the drugs industry. The practice for which Napp is condemned is as commonplace as it is cynical.

It is difficult to estimate the annual cost to the national health service. I have sought the benefit of the Department of Health's estimates through parliamentary questions, but it has not been forthcoming so far. I think that its estimate will be between £50 million and £300 million. That is not unreasonable when one realises that the annual bill for medicines is about £7 billion.

I am concerned about the responses from the Minister. In an answer that I received last week, she said:

"The Department keeps the level of competition in the pharmaceutical sector under review, and has mechanisms in place to prevent profiteering. It secures value for money through the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS) which controls the profits which companies make from the supply of branded medicines to the National Health Service. Under this scheme a high price for one product may be balanced against a low one for another, provided that the company's overall profits remain within the limits permitted by the scheme." [*Official Report*, 23 April 2001; Vol. 367, c. 168W.]

I wish that I could have such faith in the PPRS, but I do not, and I do not think that it is entirely shared by the OFT either. In its report, it referred to Napp's argument that the PPRS prevented it from charging excessive prices, and concluded:

"It is not considered that these restrictions prevent Napp from charging excessive prices on MST. In particular, it is noted that the PPRS is a portfolio constraint and does not seek to ensure that the prices of individual products are not set at excessive levels."

The officials in the Department who advise the Minister must do better on this issue. I welcome the Government's unprecedented investment in the NHS, but I am determined, as I am sure are Ministers, that every precious penny from the taxpayer that should go into front-line health care does so. That cannot be said to be the case now, as millions of pounds go in through the front door of the NHS and exit through the back, straight into the credit columns of drug company accounts. That is unacceptable.

I want the Minister to assure us that there will be a comprehensive and urgent investigation of the relationship between the NHS and the drugs industry. That should be followed—if it is justified, as I believe that it is—by decisive action to end profiteering. An end should be brought to differential prices in hospitals and the community. Consideration should perhaps be given to the establishment of a single central NHS purchaser for drugs.

If patients are to be at the centre of the NHS—I believe that they should be, and it is one of the central planks of the Government's reform of the health service—drug companies should move aside as much as other sectional interests in the NHS. It is time for the Government to take action.

1.48 pm

**Mr. Andrew Lansley** (South Cambridgeshire): I am grateful to the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley) and the Minister for allowing me to make a short contribution. The hon. Gentleman referred to the recent OFT case concerning Napp Pharmaceuticals. The company is based in Cambridge and it employs several of my constituents, so I want to mention some points that have been made to me.

The OFT decision appears to be based on the belief that, as a result of the abuse of a dominant position, NAPP secured excess profits from the sales of its sustained release morphine drug. The penalty that the hon. Member for The Wrekin said had been imposed on the company suggested that substantial excess profits were obtained. However, in the Minister's recent answer to his question, to which he also referred, she explained that the PPRS

"has mechanisms in place to prevent profiteering." [*Official Report*, 23 April 2001; Vol. 367, c. 168W.]

If the Office of Fair Trading decision stands, will it not undermine the purposes of the PPRS in encouraging research and development and the supply of innovative treatments?

We need clarity. Either the pharmaceuticals market should be subject to normal competition rules, along with full patent protection enabling innovative

*[Mr. Andrew Lansley]*

producers of drugs to secure a return while the patent protection applies, and doubtless involving higher costs for branded drugs during that period; or it should be possible for the purchasing power of the NHS to be applied through the PPRS to secure drug supply within negotiated profit levels. It is hard to dispute the effectiveness of that approach given the cost of drugs in this country relative to Germany or the United States. I would not regard Spain as a comparator because it does not have the same incentive to encourage innovation in its drugs companies, as the hon. Member for The Wrekin said.

Under the present regime, and following progressive price decreases in the PPRS, the price of MST tablets is lower than it was 18 years ago. The alternatives must be faced. It is unreasonable for the Government to impose the PPRS while appearing to allow it to be ignored, and letting the Office of Fair Trading apply normal competition criteria. In the era of supposed joined-up Government, Ministers need to tell us whether the PPRS is to be sustained or undermined.

1.51 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Gisela Stuart):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley) on securing the debate and on what I might describe—in the friendliest of terms—as his dogged persistence in getting the issue a public airing. I also note the comments of the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) about the relationship between industry and the NHS.

It is true that the NHS spends about £7 billion on medicines in the United Kingdom. I hope that we all agree at least on wanting a system that allows as much as possible of the overall spending to benefit patients. My hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin referred to the Office of Fair Trading investigation, which he instigated. It was an important investigation and a significant development in the way in which we deal with competition issues. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing it to the attention of hon. Members. As he mentioned, it was the first action of its kind under the Competition Act 1998.

The market for medicines is unusual in several respects and that has been recognised by all countries and by the European Union. First, it is unusual because it is not easy to apply the ordinary language of buyers and consumers to it. Doctors choose medicines on clinical grounds, being relatively autonomous and wanting what is best for their patients. That is the right approach. Secondly, there is often no way in which substitute products can be used, because of patents or sometimes, even when a patent has expired, because of features that make substitution difficult or impossible. That is the case with slow-release morphine, which is the subject of the Office of Fair Trading investigation. Thirdly, the medicines market is not uniform. One cannot automatically decide that manipulation of one sub-market means that the same will happen elsewhere.

My hon. Friend has been quoted as suggesting that the NHS could save vast sums from the drugs bill. We need to be careful about the use of figures. It would be dangerous to extrapolate from one example to the whole market. It is not safe to generalise from economic behaviour in one or even a few examples. There is no alternative to certain drugs. Some medicines are for life and others are taken only once.

My hon. Friend spoke as if discounts were automatically a bad thing. I do not believe that. Discounting can be abused, but initially discounts are an example of purchasers using their skills and bargaining powers to achieve savings. That is why it is so important to study each case on its merits. Simply ending discounts will cost money, not save it. Nor do I think that deciding on the right price for a medicine is straightforward. A large part of the price of new medicines relates to the cost of research and development. I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that without that there would be no new medicines. Of course it is less easy—and a matter for further debate—to say what share of the research and development costs the UK drugs market should include in the price of its medicines. The market is not always stable; I remember the Health Committee debate that was prompted by the unusual turmoil in the market, on the many ways in which the Department of Health could deal with it.

I recognise that companies must be allowed to recoup some of their research and development costs. What counts as "excessive" will probably be the subject of ongoing debate. However, we have a strategy; so despite his call for a thorough investigation, I hope that my hon. Friend is convinced that we are looking for the right balance. A number of elements are involved, including direct price control, help with prescribing decisions and profit controls at company level. We need to be careful that the interface between those elements does not damage the pharmaceutical industry, or in any way leech money out of patient care. The pharmaceutical industry is successful, and we would lose it at our peril.

My hon. Friend spoke at some length about the recent OFT report. I reassure him that we are studying that report carefully. It took two years to write, but we have had it for only one month, thanks to the confidentiality provisions of competition legislation. The Director General of Fair Trading has still not issued his direction, although I understand that that will happen very soon. I should like to make it clear at the outset that the OFT investigation does not claim to provide for the day-to-day control of medicine prices. However, the OFT recognises that the pharmaceutical price regulations scheme has considerable advantages as a system of profit and portfolio regulation.

My hon. Friend also asked me to investigate the prevalence of the practice of which Napp Pharmaceuticals is said to be guilty—in short, is the Napp case typical? For the reasons that I have set out—patents and non-substitutability of medicines—dominance of such a limited market is not unusual. Indeed, there might be good reasons for it to happen. However, in the light of the OFT investigation, we are examining further the areas where there is a dominant position and the potential for abuse. We cannot prejudge the case of Napp, which could be the subject of an appeal. However, we can put strategies in place to deal with imperfections in the market.

A great amount of work has been done to improve prescribing in the primary care sector. For instance, the area prescribing committees are working together with

the NHS trusts and the primary care groups, and the "Pharmacy in the Future" strategy was launched last September. We are making sure that good working relationships exist between trusts, drug and therapeutic committees and the area prescribing committees, including collaboration on formulary choices and the managed entry of new drugs.

My hon. Friend referred to generic medicines. We recognised that category D of the drug tariff was open to exploitation—it was one of the main topics discussed by the Select Committee on Health—and that changes needed to be made. That is why we abolished it last year, and there are now no products in that category. The market has changed over the past three years, and it has shown success in improving the use of generic medicines. The prices of generics increased, which is why we introduced the statutory maximum price scheme last year. The NHS is expected to realise savings of around £240 million on generic medicines in 2000-01, compared with price rises in March 2000. Overall, prices now are much as they were in 1999, before those steep increases.

There are real signs of the success of our strategy of working with the market. My hon. Friend referred to the OXERA report and the work that had been carried out. We are developing further options and drawing on that report. We are committed to publishing a summary of the factual basis for OXERA's findings and will discuss the options with interested parties before we take final decisions on the way forward.

The title of this debate is "NHS and the Drugs Industry". I should like to put on record that we have good relations with that industry. It is important, and it produces a trade surplus of about £2.7 billion; equally importantly, it develops medicines of enormous benefit to patients the world over. We value that and we have to ensure that the UK remains an attractive place in which to develop and produce new medicines.

The OFT investigation has shown that it can sometimes appear that a supplier is exploiting a dominant market position. We have the tools in place to deal with that, to have a proper and fair investigation and to apply the appropriate remedies. In the Napp case, we shall have to wait to see whether the company will appeal. I hope that my hon. Friend is satisfied that we are dealing with the matter vigorously and with great determination.

*Question put and agreed to*

*Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.*

# Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 2 May 2001*

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

## Regional Arts Boards

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Touhig.*]

9.30 am

**Mr. Robert Maclennan** (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): In recent years, the Arts Council of England has achieved laudable objectives. It embarked on a programme of devolution to the regions. It successfully advocated more central Government funding and sorted out the mess of lottery capital funding. For all those achievements, Mr. Gerry Robinson, the chairman of the Arts Council, deserves credit. Given such a record it was a surprise when, in mid-March, the Arts Council announced its plan to abolish all 10 regional arts boards by the end of April. The plans were sprung on the world and politicians without prior consultation. Whatever the chairman, Gerry Robinson, and his chief executive, Peter Hewitt, had in mind, they have disastrously mishandled their plan.

After the initial shock, anger has grown throughout the country at the Arts Council's unilateral attempt to remove local accountability from the arts funding system. The arts boards, elected politicians from all spheres—including Members of Parliament, the Mayor of London and councillors—universities, artists and regional consortiums have expressed their opposition to the plan. The Deputy Prime Minister is also opposed to it. It is an audacious and misguided attempt to centralise in an age when other organisations are moving towards devolution and localised decision making.

Moves to devolve arts administration began in the 1970s and were developed as a result of the Wilding report, when Richard Luce was Minister for the Arts. They have been vigorously pursued by successive Governments. ACE would sweep all that away. Everyone supports efforts to reduce bureaucracy and spending on administration in the arts, but ACE's proposals are not the way to achieve that. The plans are under attack from all sides and have created great confusion and uncertainty. It is high time that the House examined them and their genesis. It is also notable that the implementation of the plans is now behind the chairman's announced schedule.

What are the proposals? At present, 10 regional arts boards decide arts funding and policy in the regions with good input from local government and local education institutions and have developed links with regional development agencies and regional assemblies. ACE proposes to abolish those boards, take all decisions in London and execute them through subsidiary offices in the regions—a system similar to that which was abandoned as long ago as 1957. It argues that such action would deliver a range of benefits that most of us would happily support. They include a simpler, quicker, more arts-friendly service to the arts community, more flexible funding decided at regional level and reduced administration costs which would produce more money for the arts.

The press release accompanying the plans promised greater autonomy for the regions. It stated:

"more will be managed and delivered regionally than is currently the case."

The truth is, however, that such benefits are mere aspirations. No detail has been given regarding how they might be achieved. It is difficult to understand how requiring artists to engage with a regional office that must refer back to its boss in London about policy and funding will result in a more friendly arts service. While flexible funds may be further devolved to the regions, funding for regularly supported organisations will be clawed back to London. That amounts to more than 80 per cent. of regional arts boards budgets, but we will have gone through a complex and far-reaching process of devolution for nothing. Everyone would welcome reduced administration costs, but handing power to ACE in London is not the answer. Its record of restructuring to save money is not encouraging. In 1998, it promised to reduce its staff to fewer than 200 and plough an extra £2 million into the arts as a result. This year, ACE still has more than 200 employees, and staff costs at the centre have increased. Figures show that ACE employees cost a good deal more than RAB employees.

The promise of greater capacity to address needs and act on bold ideas for the arts throughout England sounds hollow when we consider how the inadequately bureaucratic London-based organisations respond to regional diversity and bold local innovation. The RABs were formed in 1991. They were built on regional arts associations, which were established independently to co-ordinate arts in the regions, and purposely involved local authorities. All RABs have guaranteed local authority representation, and local authorities pay financial subscriptions to them. ACE proposes regional offices accountable to London and advised by regional advisory boards, which will include local authorities. It also suggests that councils should hand over their financial subscriptions to RABs to new local partnership funds. Councils that have enjoyed a vote on the executive are extremely unlikely to be impressed with a post on an advisory board.

Already, in the south-west, councils are cancelling their subscriptions to the RABs. With local authorities providing half of arts funding in England, we cannot afford to alienate them from the arts scene. The proposed centralisation will do just that. RABs are also building relationships with regional assemblies. For example, South West Arts is a member of its regional assembly. In the capital, London Arts is currently developing a strong relationship with the Greater London Assembly and mayor—a model for progress under future moves towards regional governance. Both the mayor and the Assembly have rejected the proposals.

The Arts Council's prospectus promises a single agency that will

"provide the arts with one voice, a single voice and a single brand, and one funding organisation with one set of priorities and objectives."

*[Mr. Robert Maclennan]*

A clearer definition of a centralised body would be hard to find. In any event, is single branding the way to represent the diversity of the arts? We are not marketing sandwiches.

Chief executives of the regional offices will be line-managed by the chief executive of ACE. There will be regular reviews of their performance and agreement of targets. They will also sit on the executive board of ACE in London. While ACE makes sweet noises about devolution and decentralisation, the truth is clear. Taking back 80 per cent. of RAB funds and deciding priorities in London is indeed centralisation. Making regional chief executives accountable to a superior London chief executive is centralisation. Giving regional chiefs a job in London is centralisation. The many artists, business people and other volunteers who give their time and expertise to deliver the remit of the regional arts boards are unlikely to do so with as much conviction if their role becomes solely to advise London.

To understand the Arts Council's real attitude towards regional input and decision making, we need only examine how the root and branch changes were developed and proposed. Far from believing in consultation, it sent the proposals to the RABs 24 hours before they were launched to the press. Hon. Members received them at the same time as the press did, and it appears that even the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport had little notice. An article in Monday's *Guardian* painted a vivid picture:

"in mid-March...Gerry Robinson launched a dawn raid on England's ten Regional Arts Boards...Plans were drawn up in secret and sprung on astonished RABs, which were given six weeks to hand over all their assets to Gerry...The six weeks are up and no one has handed over anything. Eight out of ten of the RABs are in open rebellion."

The prospectus pledged that it would move swiftly to build a new structure, but only with the consent of the regional arts boards as to what form that new structure should take. ACE called on the RABs to sign over all their assets and staff, and then engage in consultation regarding the way forward. In other words, the main act of centralisation would be achieved before the new regional structures were agreed. At the time, such proposals were presented as having the support of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and most of the chief executives of the RABs. However, it has since emerged that the Secretary of State—and no doubt other Ministers—has serious concerns about the proposals and their effect on regional accountability in the arts.

Sue Robertson, chief executive of London Arts, who previously worked for the South Bank centre and the Arts Council of Great Britain, has resigned her post as a result of the proposals. RABs that regarded the plans as ill thought out and backward looking soon learned that they were not alone. All have registered their discontent about the lack of consultation. South West Arts noted:

"It would be wrong to under-estimate the offence this has caused and the extent to which it has undermined trust and confidence in ACE."

ACE's attempts to bounce the arts community and politicians, including the Government, into accepting its proposals have failed, and its timetable is in disarray. It had intended to have the new structures in place by the end of the year. The RABs are self-determining companies, and have rightly shown that they will not bow to ACE's calls to disband. ACE proposes a more detailed prospectus by June, perhaps to coincide with an election period and the first days of an incoming Government. ACE says that it will take on board concerns over loss of regional autonomy. Given its record on consultation, we should not be optimistic.

In a recent parliamentary answer, the Secretary of State said:

"I am looking forward to receiving formal, detailed proposals in due course and will consult".—[*Official Report*, 20 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 171W.]

Such proposals are far from ready and, given that the Secretary of State's commitment to consultation is greater than that of ACE, it seems unlikely that satisfactory proposals will be in place for months.

All the uncertainty has a cost. Staff have been told that no post is safe, which has had terrible effects on morale. Artists have been told that flexible funding for 2002-03 must be put on hold. Local authorities and regional development agencies have no idea whether the bodies with which they are engaging will have any power within months. ACE's staff are running up and down the country trying to convince RABs that the plans are the best way forward. RABs have been forced into hurried meetings, consultations and press gatherings, as well as into efforts to reassure local artistic and political communities. That is expensive.

We also know that ACE was planning to hire change-management consultants from the end of April to effect the changes. With the timetable in flux, will the Minister tell us whether such consultants are in place, what that has cost, and what funds ACE has earmarked for them? It is a curious way for an organisation that proclaims its intent to watch the pennies to proceed.

The Government's reservations about the proposals are understandable because they have consistently supported the RABs. In 1998, the Department's comprehensive spending review document stated:

"At a local and regional level, many RABs have successfully developed a role as a wider investment agency for the arts in liaison with other regional bodies and in building local partnerships...ministers want to ensure that decision making takes place as close as possible to the point of delivery".

Such goals were publicly shared by an Arts Council that at that time had pledged to devolve responsibilities and reduce itself at the centre. That was restated time and again in the House. The Minister will recall that on 5 November 1998 he told the House:

"In January, Mr. Gerry Robinson was appointed Chairman of the Arts Council with a clear mandate to bring about changes. Mr. Robinson has recently announced his strategy to restructure and redefine the Council's future role, and the Secretary of State and I fully support him in that...The Arts Council has already committed itself to delegation. The aim is to devolve as much as possible of what is currently dealt with by the Arts Council to the regional arts boards, including in particular grant-making and stewardship responsibility for regional clients."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 1998; Vol. 318, c. 1120-21.]

On 18 March 1999, the Minister still supported ACE's mission to become

"a leaner, more effective organisation. Many of its current responsibilities will be delegated in future to the regional arts boards".—[*Official Report*, 18 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 1378.]

On 26 November 1999, the Secretary of State told the House:

"The Arts Council is devolving decision making... the process of delegation chimes well with the Government's own emphasis on the importance of regional decision making."—[*Official Report*, 26 November 1999; Vol. 339, c. 862.]

It is, therefore, small wonder that the Secretary of State is now seeking detailed proposals to gain reassurance that the voice of the regions will not disappear.

Why has ACE made those proposals in such a disastrous fashion? At first glance, it might appear idiotic to make major restructuring proposals without holding consultations or explaining matters in detail, and in such a way as to cause disruption, recrimination and financial loss. However, such a view might be regarded as charitable. It seems more likely that, following ACE's failure in 1998 to restructure at the centre and to reduce waste, senior people at the council decided that the axe should fall on the regions.

Moreover, those people have seen that the writing is on the wall for ACE in its present form. The Conservative party has pledged to abolish the Arts Council, and my party has pledged to devolve further to the regions and to reduce the role and size of the council at the centre. As regionalism enjoys an ascendant position in the Government's political agenda, perhaps Mr. Robinson thought that the best time to pounce was a few weeks before an expected general election. Perhaps he thought that the political community would be distracted in the pre-election period, and that that would allow ACE to bounce artists and politicians into accepting its plans. Fortunately, a strong Department for Culture, Media and Sport manages to keep such issues centre stage. The secrecy surrounding the launch, and the duplicity of the false suggestions that the chief executives of the RABs supported the proposals, appear sufficiently Machiavellian to suggest that ACE knew that its grab for power would be opposed unless it rammed them through.

What should happen now? With trust between the centre and the regions destroyed, and the future uncertain for artists and employees, what must be done? All the RABs have acknowledged that bureaucracy must be slimmed down and that reform is desirable. There are several available options. One option is to rely on a single, centralised arts council for England that dictates to the regions. My party's preferred option would be for most funding decisions to be devolved to the regions, and for the Government to take responsibility for funding the few national organisations. The Arts Council would become a small but authoritative advocacy body for the arts at national level, advising the Government, and acting as a repository of expertise for the regional arts boards. It might retain some funding for touring, and to support innovation. The RABs would be accountable to regional government, and they would work closely with regional cultural consortiums.

Arts funding underwent a significant restructuring in 1998, and the RABs were established only in 1991. It might appear macho to sweep away all that went before, but real savings will be delivered by creating a system that is based on consultation and consent, and which will not be uprooted again five years in the future. I suggest that the Government make it clear that there is no question of the RABs' ceasing to exist. We do not need a new structure, as the existing one is fairly new and is only now beginning to function as intended. It must be made to work even better, and it should absorb less of the Treasury's grant in aid to the arts. It must be able to carry authority and trust, and to attract, at reasonable cost, regional managers of high quality. Its decisions must continue to be examined and endorsed at regional level: that will make it independent of central policy fashion. It must have an easy, close and knowledgeable relationship with artists and their organisations, and it must carry the respect of Parliament and the public.

I ask the Minister to invite the chairman and chief executive of the Arts Council of England to withdraw their unacceptable proposals and work within the system laid down by successive Governments and supported by all parties. Given the widespread rejection of the proposals, failure to do so may make the position of the chairman and chief executive untenable.

9.49 am

**Mr. Phil Hope** (Corby): I listened with great care to the issues raised by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan), and I understand his concerns. Change is always a difficult process, but I am sure that everyone wants a system and a structure that is simpler to understand and navigate, has clear links between the regions and national decision making, and is responsive to local concerns, flexible in its way of working and funding and organised on efficient lines to remove unnecessary waste and duplication. The new proposals must be judged against such criteria.

I shall reflect on the impact that the Arts Council and East Midlands Arts have made in my constituency, in the hope that future structures and proposals can be secured and enhanced in years to come. Art is playing a key role in the regeneration of my constituency, especially in the town of Corby, and several exciting initiatives in the town are helping to raise people's aspirations and educational standards and involve people, especially young people who have in the past been excluded from art almost entirely, in planning Corby's future and tackling problems.

Corby Community Arts was established as long ago as 1977 and is possibly one of the longest-standing arts organisations in the area. It has a proud track record, established by the Arts Council, of supporting community development through art throughout Corby's history, and throughout the closure of the steelworks, when Corby faced difficult circumstances in the early 1980s. Indeed, it was through a project supported by Corby Community Arts, the Corby Balls Up juggling club, that I first learned to juggle—a skill that, regrettably, you would not permit me to demonstrate in this Chamber, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I could cite many examples of how such projects, supported by the Arts Council, help bring young people who are otherwise excluded from art into art and into Corby's future, and raise the standard of art performance and the quality of life in Corby.

Another example is the It Matters photo-stories group, a young people's photography group, which is supported by Arts Council and East Midlands Arts

*[Mr. Phil Hope]*

funding. It is a group of young people who have produced a series of photo-stories as magazines, similar to those that young people buy in newsagents. They have written them from a young person's perspective, using photography to explore issues such as bullying, smoking, racism and even the stress of taking exams. They are written by young people for young people, using art as the medium to make that contact.

The latest project involves a photo-story about stealing cars, a problem that I assume is found in other constituencies. Young people are saying to other young people, "Look, come on, there's a better way of living your life." The group is working with young people from a local school who would not be attending that school if they were not engaged in that project: they would be out stealing the very cars with which they are now dealing in a magazine photo-story. The It Matters group has been recognised by the Home Office for its work in countering racism in its photo-story magazines, and it even travelled to China, with help and sponsorship from the Arts Council, to share its ideas and work with young people from another country.

Another group that is excluded are the young people from the Kickstart project, who have been excluded in years 10 or 11 and will not return to mainstream schooling. It is using art to tap into the creativity and imagination of young people whom the rest of the education system has failed. The fantasy town planning project in which they are involved has arts workers motivating and exciting young people with whom others have been unable to connect.

In Corby, the Arts Council has supported dance in a big way. Young people in Corby are famous for their talent in dance. A former mayor of Corby adopted dance as his theme for his term of office, and the celebration of talent and skill that that unleashed was staggering. As you may know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, Corby has a strong Scottish heritage, a legacy of the steelworks, and I am delighted to say that the two young national champions of Scottish dancing come not from Scotland but from Corby. Last year, the many different schools of dance came together to hold an evening of dance at Corby theatre, to raise money for Children in Need. They even managed to get me on stage, not juggling but tap-dancing, which is another hidden talent that—to the relief of all present—I shall not demonstrate. However, it raised hundreds of pounds for charity.

The Arts Council and East Midlands Arts have provided an arena for celebrating art and making art happen in Corby, as well as grabbing national lottery money. National lottery funding has paid for a "year of the artist" programme, a local residency and two artists working with young people at the Pen Green centre. It also funded the Shout youth theatre, which provides workshops for young people to explore issues of concern. The lottery also funded the Corby choral society, catering for an older age group, which provides musical performances for local communities and raises funds for churches and charities. Last year, millennium funding helped to pay for the making of a community banner to celebrate Corby's success, and, in the process, engaged people in talking about the problems and issues in the town.

There is also a strong link, supported through the Arts Council, between art and education. I recently judged a "Stars in their Eyes" competition—I dare say that other Members of Parliament do similar things—at the Kingswood secondary school in my constituency. It was a showcase of musical and singing talent of young people in the school, and the whole evening was organised by the young people themselves. That school is also host to the Corby music school, which meets every Saturday and allows young people to sing, perform and learn musical instruments. Students from that music school can progress to the renowned Northamptonshire youth orchestra. I am grateful that Studfall junior and Rockingham primary schools will be receiving £450,000 from the space for sport and the arts scheme, which is supported by the national lottery and the Treasury with the Arts and Sports Councils, to create new multi-use arts and sports spaces in the area.

I would guess that all of those present have a love of art. We know that art is special because it gives us hope, pleasure, inspiration and excitement, and that art can connect to parts of ourselves that other activities cannot. We also know that art can connect to people who have low self-esteem and self-confidence, and help them to find self-esteem and self-confidence. It can connect with people who are not reaching their potential, but who, through art, can achieve spectacular results. We must prove that, however, in order to convince policy makers, especially the Treasury, to fund more of the arts. We must show how art can have a wider impact, and we must measure that impact in terms of raising educational attainment and regenerating rundown areas.

I am therefore delighted that Corby has been chosen by the Arts Council as one of two pilot areas to assess the impact that arts can have on raising educational standards. The arts and education interface programme will measure the long-term sustained impact on young people as well as the impact of short-term discrete pieces of art on young people, teaching, educational attainment and arts learning in and out of the school, and, in the process, it will be part of the education action zone. A new forum of teachers in the town—the Corby arts teachers forum—is now in place. It is planning a musical play to raise young people's self-esteem, and is even talking about staging a large-scale rock opera in Corby, which will involve hundreds if not all of the young people in the town. Those and other projects in Corby show how the contribution of the Arts Council and East Midlands Arts has been successful in Corby. Elsewhere in my constituency, Oundle has a nationally famous festival, the Stahl theatre and the Court House museum, which opened last month, and other marvellous events.

Art is alive and well, and that is because the Arts Council and East Midlands Arts are doing such an effective job. They are not only raising performance in the arts but tackling social exclusion and the Government's whole agenda of trying to raise educational performance. I shall listen to the Minister with care. I hope that the new structures will ensure not only that those initiatives survive, but that they flourish and develop in the years to come.

9.59 am

**Mr. Peter Brooke** (Cities of London and Westminster): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Corby (Mr. Hope). My father worked for Stewarts and Lloyds before the war and once asked the chairman whether he had experienced any difficulty in introducing the concept of the works in Corby in the depths of the depression in 1932. The chairman replied that only one question was asked at the annual general meeting at which the concept was announced, from an elderly Glaswegian who stood up at the back of the hall and asked whether there was adequate provision for Presbyterian worship in the county of Northamptonshire.

There is an element of farce to the events that we are describing today. In an introduction by P. G. Wodehouse to a book of humour, he takes the line from "Julius Caesar" about "That day" we beat "the Nervii" after which he adds the results of a football match in brackets—Dulwich *v.* St. Paul's 3-0.

The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) will recall me saying on the Floor of the House, in the words of Milton's "Lycidas", that

"we were nursed on the self-same hill."

I do not know whether this is his valedictory speech, but I think that all of us are grateful to him for instigating this debate. As a Unionist, I am grateful that the matter was raised by someone from the north of Scotland. That is good for the kingdom as a whole—I note that we are discussing the Arts Council of England.

I will not rehearse the narrative that the right hon. Gentleman deployed because he did that admirably and comprehensively, but I reinforce his comments on timing and consultation. I am surprised that there was no reference to a referendum, but perhaps referendums have gone out of fashion since the first spate took place, when the rules could still be changed from referendum to referendum to suit the Government's view. Now that we have rules, perhaps referendums have become less popular.

I echo the right hon. Gentleman's comments about Mr. Robinson, and about Mr. Hewitt, whom I knew during his time at Northern Arts. I have the greatest respect for him and, in the context of the regional network, he certainly knows how many ducks make five. I also admire and respect Mr. Robinson, whom I knew during my time in the National Heritage Department. I understand how the private sector operates when it is engaged in restructuring, and there may not be much consultation about it. However, one still expects to have some idea of where the whole thing is supposed to go, and how it will work. I grew up, in part, at the Harvard business school, where there was a famous phrase:

"If you do not know where you are trying to get to, any road will get you there."

I add to my words of respect for Mr. Robinson and Mr. Hewitt, by paying tribute to those who have worked in the regional arts field and on regional arts boards over the past 10 years, some of whom are among the most outstanding people whom I have met during my time in public life. As for the Government, they either knew what was going to happen or they did not—which is a tautology. If the Minister says that the Government were not consulted, and there was neither wink nor nod, I shall, of course, believe him implicitly. The arm's length principle is reinforced when a case such as this proves an exception to the rule. That should be a reassurance. The Government have a rare capacity to turn a problem into a crisis. On the first evening following the Wall street crash of 1929, the French ambassador in Washington, Paul Claudel, was giving a soiree at which he expressed the view that

"between the crisis and the catastrophe there is always time for a glass of champagne"

If I may say so, that is a very new Labour sentiment.

We live in the era of devolution, but the Government deliver—by actions louder than words—the message that the man in Whitehall knows best. If there is any doubt about that, one need only examine what is happening in the national health service, or the actions of the Department for Education and Employment. It is not surprising that non-departmental public bodies—if that is what they are still called—do not know where they stand. This farce is a good index of what can happen. There is a separate problem for morale in the regions.

I do not think that the following fact is relevant, but in this era of political correctness one cannot be too careful, so I should tell the Chamber that I am the president of the British Antique Dealers' Association and of the British Art Market Federation. At the BADA millennial dinner last November, the Secretary of State heard Sir Nicholas Goodison, the chairman of the National Art Collections Fund, rehearse eloquently the problems in provincial museums. That is an index of the very problem that we are discussing.

I have said that we owe a debt to the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross for introducing the debate, because we do not know where we are, how we got here or where we are going. That confers major importance on the Minister's speech and I remind him of Mr. Claudel's words that between the crisis and the catastrophe there is always time for a glass of champagne. I look forward to his sparkling proof that we have all got the matter wrong and that in this new Labour era, all is still for the best—in the Panglossian phrase—in the best of all possible worlds.

10.5 am

**Dr. Lynne Jones** (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I should like to associate myself with the sentiments expressed by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) and congratulate him on raising this issue. It was not prominent in my mind until yesterday, when I received several communications drawing my attention to today's debate.

I, too, am concerned about the manner in which it was announced that a centralised structure would be created, especially given the lack of consultation or any real attempt to assess the scope of the work being done in the regions. There was no consultation with the partner organisations and the clients of the regional boards. That does not augur well for the claim that the new structure is intended to give more autonomy to the regions. The manner in which the new arrangements were announced and the speed with which they are to be implemented do not suggest that there will be that devolution of power or autonomy.

*[Dr. Lynne Jones]*

It would appear that, because the proposals have aroused such disagreement, the implementation of the structure has been deferred. However, there is concern that what consultation is taking place is based on the principle that the creation of a single organisation is non-negotiable.

It is clear to me, from the representations that have been made, that West Midlands Arts is valued as a partner by local authorities. I know that Councillor Andrew Coulson, the cabinet member responsible for regeneration in Birmingham, has written to the Secretary of State expressing his dismay. Staff of the board are also worried about the manner in which the proposals were announced and their lack of involvement in that process, and of course they worry about their own future. The arts organisations who have worked with West Midlands Arts value that partnership and are equally dismayed by the proposals.

I am heartened to learn that the Secretary of State is looking forward to receiving detailed proposals and that he will consult further on them. I hope that when the Minister responds to the debate, he will demonstrate that the Government are committed to the open consultation and debate without preconceived ideas or conditions that is necessary for us to progress and create arts organisations in this country of which we can be proud. I will not go into details of arts organisations in my constituency, but certainly the arts are an important part of generating an inclusive society. They are playing an ever greater role in our economy. It is essential that we get this right.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton):** Order. I understand that the Minister wants slightly longer than is normal to reply to the debate. I think that we want to give him that time. If the next two speakers are prepared to use self-discipline and be brief they will both get in, but I hope to start the winding-up speeches at about 10.20 am.

**The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Alan Howarth):** On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I emphasise that above all I want to hear the contributions that hon. Members wish to make? It may be for the assistance of the House if I have the opportunity to set out the Government's position a little more fully than is conventional in these debates, but I do not want anyone to feel constrained on my account.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** We are obviously grateful to the Minister for that response. It is an important subject.

10.10 am

**Mr. Nick Harvey** (North Devon): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) on securing this short debate on what he rightly described as an audacious smash-and-grab bid by the Arts Council. I was involved in a professional capacity in the previous reorganisation and when I heard about the proposal on the radio news, my heart sank. We are only just starting to make sense of the current system and it is premature to contemplate something as radical as this.

I echo the comments of my right hon. Friend and others in bemoaning the manner in which the reorganisation is being done. It was astonishing that the plan was whipped out of the hat in the middle of March and that those organisations were expected to hand over all their assets and amalgamate themselves by the end of April. I cannot imagine how the Arts Council supposed that anyone would acquiesce in the process on such a time scale. If it is attempting to convince us, the regional arts boards and the arts world that it will form a central organisation based in London, which will nevertheless be decentralist at heart and have the needs of communities at the forefront of its thinking, the manner in which it has gone about it could not have been less successful in persuading anyone of its noble intentions.

The prospectus that the council put forward advocating the changes spoke of creating an organisation that would be simpler, quicker and more arts-friendly. There was talk of greater flexibility for funding decisions at a regional level. As the council saw it, the reduction in administrative costs was behind the proposals. It is vital that more of those decisions are taken nearer to the community. The regional arts boards offer the right means for forming partnerships at a regional level with the emerging regional development agencies and the local authorities. I simply do not see how an office that is an outpost of a central organisation can possibly form the same meaningful partnerships at community level as an autonomous board, existing in the region in its own right.

The measures would have a hugely centralising effect. The majority of funding decisions would gravitate back to London and, with the best will in the world, no matter how talented the staff of an organisation based in London are, they simply cannot have the feel for what is going on in a region. They cannot know about emerging talents that have not yet hit their radar. They cannot know about a project that deserves to be given a break and some early funding so that it can go on to become successful.

My own regional arts board, South West Arts, looks after diverse interests throughout the south-west peninsula. I do not always agree with every decision that it takes. Even in its own notes on this subject, the recitation of the things that it has done reminds me yet again that I wish that it had done more for North Devon. My constituency is something of a rural outpost, although we have two good theatres and much emerging talent in the arts field. Nevertheless, I prefer my chances of persuading the regional arts board in Exeter of the need to support and fund specific projects in my constituency to my chances of persuading an organisation based in London.

No one claims that the current arrangements are perfect. It is always worth looking for improvements. It may well be that those organisations could have a lighter touch, or could respond more rapidly. The arts world could have a more effective voice in London, and no one is saying that the current arrangements must be preserved in aspic. However, the way in which the proposals have been brought forward, and the proposals themselves, are unacceptable. I am not surprised that there is open revolt throughout the country. There is no way that the arts world will be persuaded that this is the right direction to take. The

Arts Council should withdraw from the proposals. We should have a blank piece of paper and start again from scratch.

10.15 am

**Mr. Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) on securing the debate, the focus of which I thought would be narrow. However, having listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Hope), I realise that the debate is not just about the future of regional arts boards, but about procedures in the House. If we could find some way of allowing him both to juggle and to tap-dance in the Chamber, I would look forward to that.

Like my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones), I have had representations from the West Midlands about the genuine concerns of a wide range of people about the proposals for the regional arts boards. As the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross said, it is a shame that the proposals have provoked those criticisms, as many of the things that Gerry Robinson has done have been laudable and have met with a great deal of support. Last year, Birmingham celebrated its Forward festival—a massive extravaganza over the millennium year, involving hundreds of artists, more than 100 new works and 46 arts organisations—made possible by a whole range of organisations and bodies. The £1.7 million lottery grant was vital to the festival and the role of the Arts Council of England in that is to be applauded, welcomed and recognised. It put Birmingham back on the map as a city of culture, and we look forward to its bid to be European city of culture.

Coming on the back of those sorts of things and, as the right hon. Gentleman said, of the whole trajectory of policy making towards devolution and more local decision making, the proposals as they stand give cause for serious concern. Will the Minister give some indication of the kind of questions that will be asked of the Arts Council of England when it brings forward its proposals?

My hon. Friend the Member for Selly Oak referred to a letter to the Secretary of State from the Birmingham city council cabinet member for regeneration. Some of the cabinet member's comments do seem to outline some of the existing concerns in the arts community and the region about disparities in arts funding. Those concerns may be aggravated if the proposals go through in their current form. He gave the example of the City of Birmingham symphony orchestra—world famous under Sir Simon Rattle, with massive progress and a commitment to excellence continued by his successor. Its excellence lies not only in its work in Birmingham's Symphony hall and around the world, and in requests for tours, but in its community and educational work in Birmingham. It has received enormous support from the people of Birmingham and elsewhere. Yet there are worries about funding reviews. Even under the current system, the City of Birmingham symphony orchestra received a 3 per cent. uplift in funding, whereas two competitor orchestras, based in the capital, received an uplift in funding of 160 per cent.

I do not want to present the difficulties as a row between London and the regions because, as the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross mentioned, there have also been concerns from London about the proposals. However, I ask the Minister to recognise, and I am sure that he does, that there are real concerns in the regions that our ability to develop the arts in the way that we need to, and to do right by the communities that we serve, require an equity in funding. If there is to be that equity, there must be an element of local decision making. On the face of it, however, ACE's proposals—perhaps I have read them wrong—lead in the other direction. I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister will listen seriously to what is said today. I ask ACE to reconsider the way in which it has gone about the proposals, which seem to constitute a centralisation of power when all logic suggests that we should go the other way.

If we have read the proposals wrong, surely ACE needs to take the time to become involved in the consultative procedures. That would allow a dialogue to take place and a solution to be found with which everyone could feel comfortable. Unless that time is given and ACE has the confidence of people in the regions, the reorganisation will start on the basis of distrust, which sounds like a recipe for disaster.

I look forward to what the Minister has to say and I wish him well in asking questions of the Arts Council in the coming weeks. I ask the council to listen seriously to the genuine concerns that are being expressed in the regions.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I am grateful for the self-discipline that has been shown. I hope that the Opposition spokesmen will show similar discipline in winding up.

10.21 am

**Mr. Mark Oaten** (Winchester): I will indeed show discipline, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I take as an optimistic sign the fact that the Minister wants to speak for some time. I should have thought that if he had bad news, he would have asked for a shorter period, so I draw the opposite conclusion and assume that we shall hear an encouraging speech.

I join other hon. Members in congratulating my right hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) on securing the debate. The issue was in danger of being swept under the carpet, but by putting down a marker for it in what could be the final week of the Parliament, he has done a great service. He has brought the situation to the attention of the media and of many hon. Members who were unaware of what was taking place. The Minister has also been provided with a chance to respond, so the debate is very welcome.

I shall discuss the timing, the proposals and the way ahead. If I may, I shall also indulge in saying a little about Southern Arts, which has its base in my constituency. We should first place the debate in context. We have heard about the many aspects of the work carried out by the Arts Council that we should celebrate. As a vehicle for managing the considerable funding from Government and the lottery, it has been successful. Hon. Members have described projects throughout the country that would not have happened if we did not have the Arts Council.

*[Mr. Mark Oaten]*

I join other hon. Members in paying tribute to the work carried out by some of the individuals whom we are now tempted to criticise. The tone of the debate is interesting, because there has been no anger, as there sometimes is when such proposals are made. Instead, there is bewilderment: we cannot quite understand why an organisation with such a reputation has done what it has, and in such a way.

The decision taken on 15 March to bring forward the proposals took the arts world by surprise. We rightly condemn the plans immediately to announce the abolition of the regional boards without giving them notice. I understand that six weeks' notice was given to wind up staff contracts, undertake the difficult process of talking to staff about the change and send through centrally all the contracts and administration. How can any organisation suggest that it can turn around in such a period? It was pleasing that it at least recognised that early and decided to extend the consultation period. However, it has been extended only until mid-May. Given the broad range of the issues that have been raised this morning, a much longer period is needed to enable us to work out where the organisation is going.

I am told that Southern Arts, for example, has still been put on notice that, subject to that consultation period, it is expected to wind up its organisation by the end of the year. It seems bizarre that those plans must be put in place before a consultation period has been completed. Let us imagine the reaction of the 400 or so staff who are affected by the proposal. They must be very worried, and we must ensure that their rights as employees are protected throughout the process.

Why was the process so rushed? Can the consultation period be further extended? It would help if the Minister said when the Government first knew about the proposals. There would be concern if the Government had been made aware of them before the arts world was. Might the system be examined to ensure that the Arts Council can never again do anything like that?

On the proposals, we have heard many arguments why it does not make sense to move towards a single tier. The Arts Council has argued that it would be a quicker, simpler and less bureaucratic structure. Why is it assumed that delays in the process have been caused by the regionality of the system? It has been put to me that one reason for those delays is the structure of the centre and the way in which it operates, and it has been argued that the centre has been at fault for not giving clear guidelines to the regions. I have heard examples of lack of clarity in communication. Will not centralisation prolong the decision-making process? If decisions are taken from the centre, will not fieldwork have to be done in the regions to try to establish local knowledge? Rather than speeding things up, suddenly removing the arm in the regions that gives immediate information about applications could lengthen the process.

The administration costs of the Arts Council run to about £36 million. It is estimated that the regions cost about £16 million. Why, then, is it assumed that the burden of responsibility for reducing costs should fall on the regions? Has the option of reducing costs at the centre been examined? I have seen nothing to suggest that such work has been undertaken. The board members of regional boards give up their time for no payment. If one is trying to reduce costs, it seems strange to remove a tier of individuals who give knowledge and expertise at no cost.

Will the Minister also comment on what assessment, if any, has been made of the administrative costs that will be involved in the proposals? Hon. Members have talked about what I would describe as the deficit of democratic accountability. A third of the members of Southern Arts are from democratically elected councils, which is extremely healthy. As other hon. Members have said, we need to protect the link between local government and local authorities, which already do so much for the arts. They have invaluable knowledge.

Do not the proposals go against the devolution to the regions that we are trying to enable? Do not regions know what is best for them? Do we not want to celebrate diversity? Do we not want a structure that allows different systems in different regions? What works best in northern England may not work in the same way in southern England. We could lose all that with a centralised system.

Southern Arts is based in my constituency and I am proud of the work that it has done in the area. Its chairman, Robert Hutchison, came to see me two days ago to express his concern about the proposals. In the time scale that Southern Arts has been given, it has done its best to consult some of the individuals that it supports. I do not know how scientific the consultation was, but the organisation claimed that 85 per cent. of the people to whom it had written, whom it has supported over the years, are against the proposals. I am sure that other hon. Members, like myself, have received several letters from high-profile organisations.

We are proud of the work that the regional arts boards have done. Incredibly, three years ago Winchester had no theatre or cinema—a bizarre anomaly for such a city. We now have a thriving cinema and hope to have a theatre opening within months. We do not, thankfully, yet have "Stars in their Eyes" competitions, but I was interested to hear the list of work that also goes on in other areas.

We need a sensible way forward. Hon. Members have demonstrated their willingness to try to work through the issue. No one is against change for change's sake—not even the regional arts boards, which recognise that the systems need to be improved. It is annoying that the Arts Council does not accept that some faults, and some of the need for change, could lie at the centre. Is the possibility of cuts at the centre being explored? The regional boards may need to be reduced in some way, but do we not need better decision making and clearer criteria on how decisions should be taken to speed things up? Above all—I am optimistic about it because I believe that the Minister can take a lead in this respect—we need to buy ourselves time to think about the proposals and to ensure that, at the end of the year, there is a robust organisation that supports arts in this country.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** I am grateful to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) for his co-operation in this important debate.

10.29 am

**Mr. John Greenway** (Ryedale): As I was driving back to Yorkshire last Thursday evening, wondering what on earth we would discuss in the debate called by the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan)—the area of responsibility is usually that of my hon. Friend the Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth)—I tuned into Radio 3 and heard the live relay of the first concert in the BBC tour of south America from a cinema in Montevideo. The orchestra was outstanding and it was given a tumultuous reception. It served as a timely reminder of how successful and precious the arts are to so many of us.

I congratulate the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross on securing this timely debate. I am grateful for the presence in the Chamber of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), who referred to the fact that the right hon. Gentleman came from Scotland. I cannot match the courtesy with which my right hon. Friend alluded to the incongruity of a Scottish Member securing a debate on the arts council for England and Wales and discussing our regional arts boards. However, we are grateful to the right hon. Gentleman and acknowledge his vast experience and interest in the matter.

We have too few opportunities to debate the arts and the debate is all the more welcome to the Conservative party as we highlighted the need for the reform and restructuring of the Arts Council and the regional arts boards in the launch of our arts policy on 13 March, to which the right hon. Gentleman briefly alluded.

The case for reform should not be ignored or underestimated. Hon. Members have referred in the debate to central and regional bureaucracy; staff in the regional arts boards have grown in number from 380 to 419 in the past four years and more than £16 million has been spent in administration. Levels vary significantly between boards, but in the most recent year for which figures are available South East Arts spent 34 per cent. of its entire budget on administration. That is too much. Equally, too much of the Arts Council's budget is spent monitoring and administering the regional boards, and more money is wasted by the requirement for the Department to monitor the Arts Council. There are English regional arts boards, the club of the arts boards and the regional cultural consortiums set up by the Government—what are they for?—all of which are a potential waste of time and money.

It is disturbing that the Arts Council, the prime purpose of which is to distribute funds that sustain the arts—it is remarkably successful—appears to command so little respect or affection. I commend to hon. Members an article in the *Evening Standard* on 27 March by Mr. Brian Sewell, which encapsulates the attitude of many people to the Arts Council.

Our policy paper, "Common Sense for the Arts and National Lottery", promised a fundamental review of ACE, its structure and function. If the present organisation, which is half a century old, proves incapable of further reform we will replace it with a new, simplified national body that will better reflect the contemporary needs of the professional and voluntary arts.

Four principles should underpin any reformed structure, whatever emerges following the Arts Council's announcement. There must be consultation with the arts sector to achieve a system of funding in which artists can have confidence. We must reinforce the arm's length principle in arts funding, enabling decisions to be taken in the interests of art, rather than in pursuit of Government policy. We need to ensure that the voice of the voluntary arts sector is heard where decisions are taken and to ensure that more money from the arts budget is spent on the arts themselves and less on administration.

We were favourably surprised when, two days after making our views public, the Arts Council made its own announcement. We have heard what a furore that caused. At the same time, we were bewildered, if not astonished, that the Arts Council had taken its decision without consulting the regional boards or their many clients. There was no evidence of consultation with Ministers—not even a nod or a wink, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster said.

Our own discussions with the Arts Council chief executive threw some light on why this stance was adopted. The Arts Council concluded that a single structure was essential to achieve the objectives of a new streamlined organisation with less bureaucracy, and wanted to signal that that was its clear and settled intention. It was a serious mistake not to consult because it generated great opposition and hostility, much of which has been articulated in the debate. A new maxim has been coined: how to displease all of the people all of the time.

The announcement may have been heroic but, having so clearly and controversially set out the stall, the chairman and chief executive now have the monumental task of explaining how the new structure will work, and how regionality, local decision making and accountability can be maintained and strengthened—the stated aim. How can the regions be represented on a single national council that avoids over-centralisation but must not become too unwieldy? How can more money be spent directly on the arts?

Part of the problem is that there is no obvious model or organisation that adopts the structure that ACE advocates. The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross mentioned that ACE intended to publish a more detailed prospectus in June, which we look forward to reading.

Some critics say that the existing boards could be reformed and restructured. Several representations made by the regional boards to Members of Parliament advanced that view. The Southern Arts brief says:

"there are cheaper and better ways of achieving the aims stated in the prospectus".

Southern Arts spends more than a quarter of its budget on administration. Yorkshire and Humberside Arts in my region was slightly less critical, but is not persuaded that the removal of regional autonomy means anything other than increased centralisation.

Critics cannot argue that a regional structure is essential and then deny ACE the opportunity to establish a new, less bureaucratic structure based on regional committees with closer links to the council and perhaps including dual membership between the council

*[Mr. John Greenway]*

and the regions. ACE already gives considerable resources—even more in recent years—to the regional arts boards, which demonstrates how regional committees could redistribute funds. Such a demonstration would be vital to winning over the regions.

As the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross said, the regions are independent now and cannot be forced into the new position. The council must take people with it and win the argument. An enhanced role for local government will be a crucial ingredient of any new arrangement if the new organisation is to be more responsive to local needs and local democracy.

The present arrangements are highly unsatisfactory and some reform is needed. The question is as to the form that any change should take. The Conservatives recognise the need for change in our own review of arts policy and emphasise the value of consultation to take the arts world along with any proposals. ACE should now do the same and put some meat on the bones of its ideas in an effort to win over the regional arts world. We say, give it a chance and then review. We believe that ACE has the interests of the arts in Britain at heart. Reference has been made to its achievements under the chairmanship of Gerry Robinson. I believe that Peter Hewitt, with his background in Northern Arts, has the interests of the regions at heart.

However, the one missing ingredient in the debate is the view and role of the Government. In light of all the furore, the lack of any leadership from the Secretary of State has been lamentable. We hope that the Minister will explain today—we are grateful for the opportunity to provide him considerable time in which to do so—how the Government view the matter and what they want the structure and governance of the arts to be in the long run. For our part, we have criticisms of the way in which the announcement was made, but the objectives are right.

The Arts Council may have bungled its announcement, but it is difficult to resist the temptation to rejoice at the prospect of a serious setback to the Government's regional agenda if the plans proceed. We feel sure that the Secretary of State will not allow that prospect to influence the eventual outcome of that sorry mess, because the arts in Britain are too precious for that.

10.41 am

**The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Alan Howarth):** You have noted, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that this is an important debate. I welcome the opportunity to respond on the Government's behalf. I am most grateful to the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) for giving us the opportunity to debate these matters today. It is entirely proper that we should; they are serious and important. The right hon. Gentleman set out his anxieties fully in a passionate speech. He was wrong in some of his interpretations, but none the less stated some important issues.

I am most grateful to all hon. Members who have contributed. The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) was mellow—he hardly needs champagne. He will undoubtedly correct me if I am wrong, but I recollect that Disraeli characterised the speeches of Palmerston as ginger beer, not champagne. The right hon. Gentleman's speech this morning was sparkling, and we are all grateful for it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Mr. Hope) gave us all pleasure by introducing a thoroughly positive note and describing the successes that have been achieved in collaboration with East Midlands Arts in Kettering. My hon. Friend spoke of Corby Community Arts, with its long and distinguished history. He drew attention to the successes of the young people's photography group. He surprised us all by telling us how Scottish dancing is thriving in Corby—but we can understand the historical reasons for that. He spoke of the Northamptonshire youth orchestra, and I am grateful for what he said about the contribution of Government funding for the project to provide space for sport and the arts. He was right to stress the value of the arts in encouraging young people to have high aspirations, and the contribution that the arts can make to education and social inclusion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden) drew attention to the position of the City of Birmingham symphony orchestra—an orchestra of which he and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Dr. Jones) are, rightly, especially proud. I should just say that it has been offered a funding increase of 6 per cent., not 3 per cent., which will bring its funding level above that of the London orchestras. It is worth our reflecting on the fact that that decision, about which my hon. Friend to some extent complains, was a decision taken at regional level about an orchestra of national—indeed, international—standing. We must reflect on how things work now and how they might work. My hon. Friend the Member for Selly Oak also set out her anxieties.

I am most grateful to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) for speaking in a thoroughly constructive spirit. He expressed some bewilderment—a well-chosen word—at what may be in train, but he was fair minded, and I am grateful to him for acknowledging that additional funding is entering the system. It gave me especial pleasure to hear what he said about Winchester, which is my home town. I am delighted that there should now be a cinema and hope, as he does, that a theatre will also be established.

We all appreciate the gallant efforts of the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) in deputising for the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth). I will return to some of his comments.

Let us be clear about what the Arts Council proposes. It is proposing that the regional arts boards and the Arts Council of England be merged into a single organisation, and that the offices of the regional arts board become regional offices of the Arts Council of England. It is proposing that the regional chief executives become members of a national executive team and that the Arts Council regions be aligned with the Government office regions, which would mean a reduction in the number of regional organisations of the Arts Council from 10 to nine. It also proposes that more funding be delegated to the regional offices and that new

relationships be established between the regional structures of the Arts Council and other regional Government structures and local government.

The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross was incorrect in what he said. The Arts Council wants to scale down the centre, reduce the overall cost of administration and spend more on the arts. We are all at one on much of this, as we desire greater simplicity, a smaller centre, less money spent on administration, more spent on the arts and—as the hon. Member for Ryedale said—an enhanced role for local government. I praise him as a repenting sinner, as that was not always his party's view.

The proposals emanate from the Arts Council. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State believes, as I do, that it is entirely appropriate that the Arts Council should have taken an initiative in this respect. My right hon. Friend has consistently enjoined the Arts Council to cut excessive bureaucracy, and it has made an important start in doing so. In 1999, 330 staff were employed in Great Peter street; in 2001, 220 were employed there. That process has been traumatic and painful for Arts Council staff, but none of us would dispute that it was important to scale down that central bureaucracy.

The overhead costs of the Arts Council and the total system, including the regional arts boards, are approximately £36 million. We should place that in context: the total turnover of the system is some £500 million, so the overheads represent some 7 per cent. Many may feel that that figure of 7 per cent. is too high, however. In all, some 660 people are employed in the system.

**Mr. Maclennan:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Howarth:** If the right hon. Gentleman will excuse me, we are tight for time.

For a long time, we have operated on an arm's-length principle in the funding of the arts in this country, which is a vital principle in a liberal state. I hope that if the Conservative party contemplates the abolition of the Arts Council, it will consider the possible risks in politicising arts funding decisions, because that would be a dangerous policy to follow.

If the arm's-length principle is to work, we would all agree that the precondition must be that there will be trust, that full information will be given and that there will be proper consultation. That is the strong opinion of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Of course, it is true that Mr. Robinson and Mr. Hewitt came about a week before they made the proposals public to advise my right hon. Friend and myself of what they had in mind. We believe that it is proper, in an arm's length arrangement, that the Arts Council should initiate consideration of reform for a process that it is tasked to operate. However, let me make it clear that it is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to approve any eventual restructuring, because the proposals are plainly of major importance. They offer an opportunity for major benefits: reduced bureaucracy, devolved decision taking and benefits to the arts throughout the country.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is attracted by the objectives that the Arts Council has established and broadly supports them. I shall not dwell on the technical reasons why it would be necessary for my right hon. Friend to approve important proposals such as those for pay, pensions and conditions of employment. Under Treasury rules, matters concerning insurance and trusts all need to be approved by him. As Parliament wishes, he must be satisfied that public funds are applied efficiently. There can be no rushing headlong into a premature resolution of such matters.

**Mr. Oaten:** Will the Minister give way?

**Mr. Howarth:** I am sorry; we lack the time.

I understand the worries that have been expressed about the time scale originally set by the Arts Council. It wanted to bring matters to a rapid conclusion to minimise the period of uncertainty. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and I made it clear from the outset that it was important to be realistic about the timetable and to consult fully. The Arts Council has accepted that fuller consultation is needed than it envisaged originally. It made that clear in its letter to the chairmen of the regional arts boards on 30 April. The Arts Council has now proposed that the consultation period should close on 15 May, but said that it will remain in listening mode. I am sure that Mr. Robinson and Mr. Hewitt agree with us that it is a case of more haste, less speed.

I shall clarify the tests that my right hon. Friend will apply when he makes a judgment on the proposals that emerge from the process. He said what the tests would be when he first discussed the matter with Mr. Robinson and Mr. Hewitt. As a result of change, there must be more genuine power in the regions. The devolution of power must be real, not cosmetic. The regional directors must become not representatives of the centre but champions of their region. There must be a genuine increase in decision making in the regions. We require a reduction in bureaucracy, so that it would be genuinely simpler for clients to navigate the system and cut out duplication and waste. We must achieve real savings throughout the system, which should be genuinely deliverable and delivered. As a consequence, more money should be spent on the arts. There must be a clear benefit for the regions, one that must be sufficiently accepted in the regions.

We must ensure that the voice of the arts is enhanced in the emerging regional forums to make possible richer collaboration between the Arts Council bodies—whatever regional entities emerge—and other regional organisations sponsored by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. In response to a point raised by the hon. Member for Ryedale, I say that such policies must not run counter to other key Government policies for the regions.

I say to the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross that we need to emerge with an open, intelligent, collaborative pattern of dealings between the citizen and the Government. Gone are the days—if ever they existed—when culture was a matter of crumbs thrown down from Olympus or from some metropolitan Parnassus.

The main themes expressed in representations to us concur with the analysis of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. People ask how we shall ensure genuine local and regional distinctiveness under an altered system. How will regional autonomy and accountability be preserved or enhanced? How precisely

*[Mr. Howarth]*

will regional voices be heard under the new system? What decisions will be made at regional level? What relationship will there be with other regional structures? What will be the savings in bureaucracy and administration? Will the new model really mean less bureaucracy, a simpler structure and no duplication? "If so, good, but persuade us", people are saying. There is scepticism about whether such action is genuinely that of devolution, or centralisation as suggested by the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey). Both he and my hon. Friend the Member for Selly Oak insisted on full consultation. As the hon. Member for North Devon said, people have told us that they agree that change is needed. They would welcome more simplicity and greater consistency and fairness across the country.

Let me note that the criticisms that have been expressed have come predominantly from politicians and people working in the system. Relatively few criticisms have come from artists or arts organisations. Ultimately, the crucial test will be how the system works for artists.

I join those who paid tribute to the work of those who are responsible for administering arts in the regions—I appreciated what the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster said about that.

A distinguished theatrical manager and director has described the costs of operating the regional arts boards as a handling charge. That grossly underestimates the contribution that members and chief executives of the regional arts boards make. I have spent days alongside Felicity Harvest of South East Arts—the administrative costs of which are high, as we have noted—and with Sue Robertson, who, as was mentioned, has resigned because she does not see a future for herself in the model proposed by the Arts Council. I have no doubt that the work that they do in fund raising, mobilising local authority support, spotting talent, offering advice and counselling, in diplomacy and brokerage is an important and indispensable contribution to the vitality and success of the arts in this country. Some arts practitioners grumble about the very existence of the regional arts boards, but that is an overwhelmingly unfair change. We cannot decide everything at the centre.

The issue of the balance between the centre and the regions is an old conundrum. It has been a live issue in the administration of arts funding since at least the late 1940s. The Arts Council was set up in 1945 and, by the late 1940s, offices were being set up in the regions, in big cities outside London. People have gone to and fro with a variety of attempted solutions ever since. We now have an important challenge to arrive at the right solution in our time, and to do better than has been done previously.

Perhaps the most difficult set of issues are those in connection with regionalisation and relations with other regional structures and local government. The Arts Council recognises the strength of feeling on that point and the importance of it. Solutions must be found that genuinely command wide assent in the regions. Hon. Members will have seen the useful briefing note for Members of Parliament that the Arts Council issued yesterday. I hope that it will be recognised that that briefing note expresses a serious attempt to come to grips with issues of regionalisation and relations with local authorities. I am grateful to the Arts Council not only for initiating the discussion but for seriously addressing such issues.

Following the close of a two-month consultation period on 15 May, the Arts Council will draft a new prospectus, which will be submitted to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who will heed carefully everything that is said to him on the issue. We have set out our tests; if they are met—and only if they are met—my right hon. Friend will approve the proposed changes.

## Common Fisheries Policy

10.59 am

**Dr. Norman A. Godman** (Greenock and Inverclyde): I think that this is the first opportunity that we have had to discuss the European Union's Green Paper on reform of the common fisheries policy. If I can catch the Minister's ear for a moment—someone is blathering away to him—I shall tell him that I think that this is also the first opportunity that he has had to comment on the Fisheries Council meeting of 25 April.

The subject is heavy and controversial, but I make my usual promise to be brief—unlike some hon. Members. I am grateful for the excellent briefing documents and advice that I have received from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the World Wide Fund for Nature. I also thank personally Mark Dixon of the graduate school of environmental studies at the university of Strathclyde for his advice and assistance about the reform of the common fisheries policy.

My family's experience relates to distant water grounds, and I am hugely inexperienced in coastal fisheries. However, the Minister may be interested to know that my brother Keith, an ex-trawler deckhand, has received what, for an ex-trawler deckhand, is a substantial sum of money from the compensation scheme. However, I shall now take the smile off the Minister's face by telling him that my brother Leslie, who is the skipper of a freezer trawler, and is sailing at this moment off the north Norwegian coast, has not received a penny. I told him to appeal, because some of the decisions are fanciful, and I hope that all fishermen who are entitled to compensation receive their just rights. I thank the Minister for his support on the matter.

Every fisherman, and every hon. Member, knows that the common fisheries policy is the means by which the European Union manages and regulates the fisheries' fishing effort and the fish markets of the member states. As a system of fisheries management, it is over-centralised, over-bureaucratic and inflexible. The WWF stated in its brief:

"it is widely recognised that the system of management underpinning the existing EU Common Fisheries Policy has not adequately protected target stocks or the interests of the fishing industry."

I think we all agree with that.

I shall outline three of the many failures of the existing CFP. First, over 40 per cent. of fish caught in the North sea are discarded. That is due to the CFP's system of fishing quotas. Secondly, most of the commercial stocks fished by UK fishing vessels are at historically low levels, with more than 50 per cent. in danger of collapse because of the CFP's failure to address the critical matter of over-fishing.

Thirdly—I speak as a Scots MP—the CFP fails to take account of the fact that, although numerous Scottish fishing communities are located close by what were once rich fishing grounds, they are on the periphery of the EU itself. Mark Dixon pointed out to me that while such communities receive sympathetic treatment from the social and cohesion polices, they are severely disadvantaged by the CFP. I have no doubt that my English colleagues would agree with that observation.

The political management of the CFP is characterised by the annual round of bargaining or horse trading by national Ministers who attempt, at all costs, to maintain their national quotas in real terms. Such horse trading is always accompanied by jingoistic media coverage in all the maritime states of the EU, demanding the retention of the domestic fleet.

In a recent letter to *The Herald*—formerly the *Glasgow Herald*—Mark Dixon wrote:

"On every single occasion when the quotas have been set by the Council of Ministers of the EU the scientific advice relayed to them by the Commission of the EU has been ignored, due to the horse-trading that takes place annually in Brussels.

This is entirely down to the wishes of politicians who seek to come home and show their constituents how hard they are at negotiating with Brussels bureaucrats. This is however not true. The negotiations take place between national politicians and the Commission only relays scientific recommendations. Therefore, no real debate takes place with regard to the European fishing industry as a whole and it becomes pork-barrel politics of the worst kind."

That view is supported by the RSPB, which, in the briefing sent to all hon. Members, argues that there is a huge onus on the radical revision of the common fisheries policy in 2002. In fairness to the European Commission, because I am trying to be even-handed—

**Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): Oh no.

**Dr. Godman:** I expected this kind of heckling from my old and hon. Friend. The European Union has produced a review of the CFP, and a Green Paper has recently been published on the future of the policy. That Green Paper is far more extensive than the requirements of the review, which I fear will not encourage a move towards the radical and comprehensive reform of the CFP that is necessary if we are to protect the interests of our fishing communities and the maritime environment. The Green Paper contains an admission of the pressing need for such reform. On page 4, it states:

"The CFP has yielded some positive results during the last 20 years."—

I think that one would have to look hard for them. However, it goes on to say that

"Today's situation calls for a thorough and urgent reform of the CFP independent from the legal requirements linked to the 2002 deadline."

Again, every fisherman and every hon. Member here today knows that. That deadline signals either the abolition or the renewal of the rules of access to the six to 12-mile limit, the Shetland box and the North sea.

The Minister attended the Fisheries Council on 25 April. Am I right in thinking that the Government expressed their support for the Green Paper, but that other member states were less supportive? Is it true that Spain and Portugal are resistant to the proposal to reduce the size of domestic fleets? In the absence of reform and change, is there not a strong possibility that Spain and Portugal will gain, or at least demand, access to the North sea? Many people believe that we will probably not achieve the reform of the CFP, because of the unwillingness of certain member states to accept change. Despite my own pessimism about the likelihood of reform, I want to outline some of the changes that the Green Paper will, I hope, bring about, which recognise the need for a reform of the CFP.

**Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this timely

*[Mr. Lawrie Quinn]*

debate. Based on his experience of the industry, has he made any personal assessment of the environmental damage caused by the common fisheries policy, especially in areas such as the North sea? Does he not think that the mainstay of any reform should be a consideration of the environmental consequences of the CFP in the past and future?

**Dr. Godman:** My hon. Friend refers gently to my experience of North sea fishing, which is confined to two or three days when I went out on Arbroath boats. I have also been out on a couple of Aberdeen boats. As I said, I am an observer of, not an expert on, this industry. However, we must recognise the need to protect the wider maritime environment, not only the fishing grounds. The Minister recognises that, as does the Green Paper, which is radical for the European Union, even if not radical enough for us.

One of the most important reforms should be the creation of regional systems of fisheries management. That should be at the heart of the reformed CFP. I would like the Minister's comments on that, but the Government should support the extension of exclusive national control of territorial waters to at least 12 nautical miles, as the Green Paper proposes. I support the resolution passed by the European Parliament that calls for national control to be extended to 24 nautical miles—that represents a rare occasion when that Parliament got something right. The resolution has the support of the Irish Republic and Portugal. What does the Minister think about a 24 nautical mile exclusive fisheries zone?

A larger territorial sea would make it much easier for a coastal state to control access to an area of considerable significance vis-à-vis spawning and nursery grounds. I fully support the joint advocacy of the RSPB and the Scottish Fisherman's Federation, which call for a permanent restriction of access to inshore waters. They argue for member states to control their inshore waters and the vessels that fish those waters. I fully support that; it is of profound importance to the Scottish fleet, more than three quarters of which—some 2,000 vessels—fish inshore waters. As the SFF and the RSPB say:

"These waters are vital not just to the fragile economies of our coastal communities but to all who value and enjoy Scotland's diverse coastline."

I am sure that hon. Members would agree with those sentiments.

Important stakeholders must be actively involved in any coastal fisheries management scheme, and none are more important than the local fishermen and their communities.

Many other elements of the reformed CFP, too numerous to mention in a brief contribution, should be given serious consideration—inter alia, the question of multi-annual total allowable catches. The CFP places an impossible burden on the catching and processing sectors, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for the Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) would agree. How can the catching and processing sectors make sensible and realistic plans on the basis of this annual horse trading? What is the Government's view of multi-annual TACs? Also, what do the Minister and his officials think of multi-species TACs? Fish are part of a dynamic and multi-layered environment. Multi-species TACs make sense in terms of stability and of focusing on responsible management by the fishermen.

I cannot allow a speech to pass without mentioning the disgraceful problem of discards, which makes a mockery of the present system of TACs. Perhaps the Minister will tell us that this is already being done, but why not examine the Norwegian method of dealing with discards? Am I right in thinking that the Norwegians compel fishermen to land all by-catch fish, for which a small price is paid? It appears that the discards problem is much less severe in the Norwegian catching sector than in the EU fishing fleet.

As for technical measures, Scottish fishermen have shown the way on increased mesh size. I come from a fishing family, but at the risk of angering fisherman throughout the United Kingdom, I say that we should examine closely developments in the United States of America and in Canada. The plan to increase our mesh size of 100 mm to 135 mm makes many fishermen deeply unhappy. However, in America the net size for certain species is to be increased to about 166 mm, on the basis that too many juvenile fish are being netted with 145 mm nets.

As for industrial fishing, it should be banned. I congratulate the Minister on his efforts to reduce such a dreadful wasteful form of fishing, but we must secure its total abolition. In a recent letter to *The Sunday Telegraph*, the Minister rightly said that we should not make the mistake of claiming that the decline of North sea cod stocks is due entirely to sand-eel fishing. Industrial fishing vessels should go the same way as the sailing smacks and the sidewinders. It is time that their day was brought to an end.

I thank the Minister for his letter about the recovery of cod. However, we must go further than that. We should be arguing for longer closures of the areas threatened by total collapse. I think that I am right in saying that, in the United States of America, 6,000 square miles of George's bank have been closed since 1994. There is now evidence of some recovery of fish stocks that were almost extinct.

The CFP must be altered radically. I have only touched on some of the management controls that need to be introduced. At the heart of any reform must be the implementation of zonal or regional management, and the active involvement of fishing communities in systems of management. Maritime states of the European Union must be given the right to develop and manage their coastal fisheries. At the least, such a management system would allow for a more adaptable response to economic and environmental needs at both local and national levels.

Such developments will be affected by the enlargement of the European Union. We must get the CFP right, in a way that will not be achieved with the common agricultural policy, before enlargement takes place.

When European Union fishing vessels fish in the waters of developing countries, a Europe-wide code of conduct that ensures that those countries are not exploited by large fishing vessels from member states should be in place. Codes of conduct govern other

interchanges and relationships with the third world, and we should be governed by such a code. We must put into practice in our fisheries policy a genuine and fair-minded application of the EU's principle of subsidiarity. Nothing less will do for our fisherman and their communities.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton):** Order. This is an important debate, and winding-up speeches must commence promptly at 12 o'clock. If hon. Members share an element of self-discipline, I am sure that those who seek to catch my eye will be able to speak.

11.19 am

**Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): I congratulate my friend the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman)—I was about to call him "my old Friend", but he applied that term to the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), and I am not sure that it was a compliment.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I am happy to be called that.

**Dr. Godman:** It was meant to be a compliment.

**Mr. Salmond:** I hope that that was not the valedictory performance in the House by the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde. Whether it was or not, it showed a wisdom that has characterised his speeches in Parliament on this and other subjects over the years. Of course, the hon. Gentleman comes from a fishing family, as he keeps telling us—although they were wise enough to push him into politics and keep him out of the family business, apart from that one trip on the North sea that he told us about. However, his experience in fishing is well known and well understood.

I shall focus first on the Green Paper that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. Undoubtedly, no European Commission document on fisheries has been so well received as the Green Paper that has been published in the past few weeks. Considering what the previous documents were like, that is probably not saying much. None the less, the paper contains a number of substantial and positive indications. I look for the Minister's confirmation that, given the terms in which the Green Paper is written, we can be reasonably certain that relative stability will be secure.

There is a steer in the direction of multi-annual quotas, which the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde mentioned. There is also a hint that zonal management is moving up the agenda, and many of us who have campaigned for that over many years will welcome that, although we would like to see something more decisive. I am particularly interested in the passage that speculates that in the fishing environment into which we are moving, recovery plans and substantially enhanced funding for structural measures—including tie-ups—will be required. I certainly hope that the Under-Secretary welcomed the terms of the Green Paper, and will give us an indication of the Government's change of heart on that particular aspect, because it is very much part of an overall package. If we are going to engage in recovery plans, including temporarily closing off areas of the sea, there will have to be temporary structural means of dealing with that pressure, such as tie-ups. Otherwise, we run the risk of destabilising the entire fishery—a point that I will return to shortly.

Secondly, I shall refer to an interesting letter, not from the Under-Secretary but from his boss, which was published on 27 March in the *Glasgow Herald*—or rather *The Herald;* as I write a racing column for that newspaper, I should know its name. It is worth looking at exactly what the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food had to say in that letter, addressed to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, which was that he had been "holding the line" against decommissioning grants. I had understood for many years that the Under-Secretary was an enthusiast for decommissioning grants in certain circumstances, and I remember many good speeches of his that I supported, and that hon. Members would also support. Now, however, we discover that the Minister's boss has been holding the line against decommissioning grants.

Even more interestingly, the letter goes on to say:

> "I am facing heavy and renewed demands for the English fishing industry to respond to the economic pressures which they face as a result of the strict measures which have been further developed and imposed during February to conserve fish stocks. At present there is in prospect only the small package of measures to regenerate areas affected by the decline in the industry being prepared by the DETR, DfEE, and DTI. And there is nothing planned which will respond directly to the problem of overcapacity."

That is a fair comment, and there have been some changes since the letter was published. It continues:

> "We now face a development in Scotland, where the executive has responded to mass demonstrations by fishermen by offering a decommissioning scheme worth up to £25m for next year. The English industry is arguing strongly that this puts them at an obvious disadvantage and that I should offer a similar package.
>
> This is a most unfortunate situation. The four fisheries departments of the UK have traditionally sought to move together on policy, but with devolution of fisheries policy we no longer have control over territorial handling."

That is a devastating leak. If the Minister does not comment on it, that will confirm that the letter is a genuinely leaked document. The Government do not comment on leaked documents, but if it is not genuine, I am sure that he will tell us. Much publicity and reaction were generated, so let us consider what the letter means. We already know that the Under-Secretary's heart is in the right place, but that leak certainly places substantial question marks over whether the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is genuinely in favour of structural measures to help the industry.

The letter goes on to tell us what we already knew in Scotland—that the impact of the massive fisheries demonstration was to force a substantial concession from the Scottish Executive. It then argues—reasonably, in my view—that the English industry should receive a similar concession. That shows how having a Scots Parliament and Executive allowed a different policy, and subsequently led reluctant English Ministers to go to the Treasury to seek equivalent funding.

What differences might Members of Parliament in fishing constituencies have with the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in the light of the

*[Mr. Salmond]*

letter? First, they would be enthusiastic, rather than reluctant, about structural support for the fishing industry. Secondly, instead of having the problem of "holding the line"—"an unfortunate situation", to quote the Minister of Agriculture—Members of Parliament with fishing constituencies south of the border would be wise to learn the lessons and, when the fishing industry dominates the political agenda north of the border, they should view it as an opportunity to gain extra support for English fishermen.

It is difficult to sustain the proposition advanced by some hon. Members that the only place to which the fishing industry should look for structural support is this place. On the evidence of the letter, they should look for it north of the border, and argue the case for an English catch-up policy.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I agree absolutely, and if I could express my gibbering gratitude to the Scottish Executive—

**Mr. Salmond:** And the fishermen.

**Mr. Mitchell:** —and to the Scottish fishermen, and the incentive to demonstrate, but let me ask the hon. Gentleman a question. English vessels fishing from English east coast ports are registered in Scotland as Scottish vessels. Will we be able to share in the greater largesse that should go to vessels registered in Scottish ports?

**Mr. Salmond:** The scheme has not yet been published in detail, but is likely to be based on port of registration, so the hon. Gentleman effectively answers his own question. No doubt the Scottish Government will soon publish the details; perhaps the Minister is privy to them. We have been promised them for weeks, and keep being told that they are imminent.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman agrees with me; no doubt his Scottish colleagues are even more enthusiastic in their agreement. Worryingly, he and I have been in agreement about fisheries policy in recent debates. I do not know whether that does more damage to the hon. Gentleman or to me, but we—as well as the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde—have a long-standing concern for the fishing industry and want the best for it. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby should learn from this letter that the impact on the political process of the mobilisation of an industry can be considerable.

**Miss Anne Begg** (Aberdeen, South): I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman is saying. The Scottish Executive's offer of £23 million was on the table before the Scottish National party issued a press release inviting people to a demonstration. The demonstrations took place after, not before, the Scottish Executive made its announcement. I am pleased to hear the hon. Gentleman welcoming the news, because at the time the SNP was looking for something quite different.

**Mr. Salmond:** The hon. Lady is factually wrong. [*Interruption.*] I shall explain it to her. The fishing demonstration sailed up the river Forth on Monday night and Tuesday morning, and the package was announced to the Scottish Parliament on the following Thursday. The hon. Lady can check the facts, but that was the sequence of events. We also have it on no less an authority than the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who wrote:

"We now face a development in Scotland, where the executive has responded to mass demonstrations by fishermen by offering a decommissioning scheme".

If the hon. Lady disagrees with me, she disagrees with her colleague in the Cabinet. That may not too bad a thing in some circumstances, but it might not do her career prospects any good.

Mobilisation of the industry was a factor in making fishing dominate the agenda of the Scottish Parliament in a way that it has never dominated the agenda of this Parliament. I should have thought that English Members would be interested in that, to find out whether fishing could gain its proper importance in this place, as it already has in the new Parliament on the Mound in Edinburgh.

A final point, which is absolutely vital if we are to make sense of fisheries policy, is encapsulated in a good quote from the briefing by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, which the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde outlined. The briefing states:

"It is necessary that the plan"—

the cod recovery plan—

"should be truly comprehensive and include ... potentially beneficial measures interacting in a coherent way. It is also necessary that the plan should have, at least, the tacit approval of fishermen and this will require action to minimise the level of economic disruption."

Those are extremely wise words. Attempts at a cod recovery plan were implemented quickly, resulting in substantial confusion and disruption of other fisheries.

Cod is the third most important whitefish species for Scottish fishermen, after haddock and whiting. It therefore does not make any sense to disrupt or jeopardise other main species unnecessarily as a result of an attempted cod recovery plan. Everyone supports a recovery of the cod species, but a cod recovery plan put the haddock stock in extremely substantial jeopardy in March, and forced the bulk of the Scottish whitefish fleet to fish in areas that they would not otherwise have been near at that time of year, right among a stock of juvenile haddock that is the largest in the North sea since 1965—a golden year class of haddock.

A recent deputation to the Scottish Parliament included John Goodlad, a well respected leader of the Shetland fishermen. He told MSPs in Edinburgh that in 1965 the Shetland economy was on its knees. That was before oil; agriculture and crofting were doing extremely badly. Then that year class of haddock turned up, and the number of fish-processing factories in Shetland increased from four to 13, purely on the back of that year class of haddock in the mid-1960s. That is the extent of the resource opportunity of such a massive stock of haddock in the North sea, and that is why fishermen were so angry at that stock being jeopardised, and almost sacrificed, in pursuit of protecting another species.

Cod is an extremely important stock. Everyone hopes that a cod recovery plan can be successful, although international examples of attempts are not encouraging. There is a class of haddock in the North sea that is already two years old. Surely fisheries policy should be designed to protect that stock and that species, not to put them in great danger.

Although the three-week voluntary tie-up of fishermen was attacked and criticised, I estimate that over that three-week period, 10 million young haddock were saved that would otherwise have been discarded, dead, into the sea. Whatever people said about it, that voluntary tie-up of fishermen, which I enthusiastically supported, not only concentrated the minds of the Scottish Executive but was probably the single most important conservation initiative, saving a minimum of 10 million juvenile haddock in the North sea.

As it was with haddock, it is now with whiting. As the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde said, mesh size and technical measures are important, but for most boats it will be extremely difficult to pursue a whiting fishery in the North sea if boats fish with 110 mm nets: whiting will not be caught. We are pursuing a mixed fishery in the North sea, and it is not a case of one size fits all.

Those who are familiar with fisheries know that seine-net boats are probably the most selective in the North sea, and have the highest quality catches. Their pulling speed is 1 knot, and the fish in seine nets are not dead, as they would be in those of other trawlers, which pull at a higher speed. If seine-net boats must have the same mesh sizes and arrangements as boats with vastly greater pulling power and speeds, those highly selective boats will be unable to pursue their fishery. As other countries have sought derogations, will the Minister say whether it would be possible, for example, for boats to fish with one mesh size if they agree to take cod only as a by-catch, and with another size if they take cod as a major species?

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde talked about the substantial mesh sizes used in the American fishery, but the size depends on the fish that people are trying to catch. If we move to 135 mm, for which the Norwegians have argued, a directed cod fishery will emerge in the North sea, because at that mesh size, it is the only species that will be caught. In trying to recover a stock, we would in fact be encouraging boats to concentrate on that stock, because it would be the only fish that they could catch. That is why we are in a complex situation, in which reason and judgment are required.

I would like the Minister to give an undertaking that—unlike his boss, who does not even like decommissioning schemes—he is aware that if we engage in temporary closures of fishing areas, we must have temporary structural support through a tie-up to make that viable. I also want him to say that he is aware that in a mixed fishery, different boats catch different fish in different areas. He will have to produce regulations that make sense to all sectors of the fleet.

As the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde said, we must have a fishing industry in which industrial fishing does not take priority over fish for human consumption. No one in this place, and no one who fishes, can understand how the industrial fishery has managed to be sustained at its present size while other stocks are starving for lack of food in the North sea, and fishermen are struggling for their livelihoods. I would like assurances from the Minister on those points.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. I repeat that the winding-up speeches need to commence at midday. If all those who want to speak are to be able to, perhaps hon. Members will bear that in mind.

11.37 am

**Mr. Frank Doran** (Aberdeen, Central): I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) on securing this timely debate. I hope that it is not his valedictory speech, but the newspapers tell us that it might be. I do not disagree with much of what he said, so I shall not go through all the points that he covered.

The Green Paper certainly represents progress, but those of us with an interest in the industry feel that it is not radical enough. The starting point seems to be current practice and how we can develop from that, whereas I believe that we need a fairly strong cultural change in the way in which the industry operates in the North sea and is regulated, which is my main interest. Technical measures and gear changes are certainly necessary, but are not the whole solution to the problem. There is the prospect of some cultural change if we can have a proper scheme of regional and zonal management that allows partnership and the development of stakeholding in the industry. We want a lot of support for that, but the culture is wrong and we need to address that.

We must also consider the serious problems of a cyclical industry, which is sometimes cyclical in very short time frames. Currently, we are all trying to come to terms with the problems that have been created by a shortage of fish stocks. The processing sector has been especially seriously hit. Friends in the industry, however, tell me that we will see a glut of fish in July or August. The market will be awash with haddock and cod, and we are likely to see much-reduced prices.

Apparently, the catching side of the industry is doing well at present because, although fish are in short supply, quayside prices are good. However, in July and August, prices will plummet. With the shortage of fish stocks, the industry has been forced to adapt. In Aberdeen, a few years ago we could have said that the fish came from the North sea. We fished in distant waters—from Iceland, the Baltic and Norwegian waters. I am told that now in Aberdeen we can buy fish from virtually anywhere in the world. Fish from China, the far east, Australia, Canada and America are all available in the market. Of course, that affects the viability of the fish catching industry. Yesterday, one merchant told me that about 60 per cent. of the fish processed in his factory is now outsourced—coming from other than the marketplace in Aberdeen. It is a serious problem that must be considered.

Part of the cultural change in the industry is that until relatively recently we could never have said that we had a united industry—there was a great divide between the processing side and the catching side. Sometimes it was

*[Mr. Frank Doran]*

jocular: the processors worked on the basis that the catchers were all thieves and pirates and the catchers operated on the basis that the processors took the food from their bairns' mouths. During the past four or five years, however, there has been considerable change as the industry has come together to start addressing problems.

For example, through the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the Scottish fishing industry encourages the Government to accept the introduction of the square mesh panel—a major advance in the industry's approach to the environment and its own sustainability. The Association of Fish Merchants and Curers in Aberdeen develops its own environmental policy and lobbies the Government on it—that is a fairly radical change. It is essential to have a united industry that can speak to the Government and persuade them of its case, so that Government and industry can go forward to argue their case in Brussels.

Unfortunately, there has been a fracturing in the industry of late. I had to chuckle quietly to myself when the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) accused the Government of destabilising the industry. Nothing has been more destabilising to the fishing industry than the recent action on the east coast of Scotland under the auspices of the Fishermen's Action Committee. That has rent the industry asunder. The fish catching side of the industry has been split, with the west coast fishermen based in the Clyde area and in Mallaig falling out with and threatening to withdraw from the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, and with a major split between the fish processing and fish catching side of the industry.

I attended a meeting of Scottish fish processors at Newburgh about a month ago, when they decided to withdraw their support from the action by the Fishermen's Action Committee—an organisation based in Peterhead. Like everyone else who has read the newspapers and seen the scene, of course I have sympathy with the catching side of the industry, which is going through difficult times. However, by the time of that meeting in Newburgh it was clear that the whole event was being stage-managed and heavily politicised. It was being organised by the Scottish National party as an assault on the integrity of the Scottish Executive.

I do not need to look hard for proof. One of my hon. Friends made a comment from a sedentary position about the burning in effigy of a Scottish Minister at a protest in Peterhead. I wonder what sort of image of the fishing industry that gives the general public. That event was called by a press release issued on 12 March by the Fishermen's Action Committee. It was issued on Scottish National party headed notepaper—I have a copy of it here. If that is not a political event, nothing is. I feel strongly about such politicisation of any industry.

**Miss Begg:** Does my hon. Friend agree that that event took place after the Scottish Executive had offered £23m for a decommissioning scheme?

**Mr. Doran:** It certainly was. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan juggled with dates to pretend that the Scottish Executive's decision to invest £27 million in the restructuring of the Scottish fishing industry was a result of the fishermen's protests. That is nonsense. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman spoke for 20 minutes and I now want to make my contribution.

**Mr. Salmond:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Doran:** No, I will not. The hon. Gentleman has spoken for long enough, and other hon. Members wish to contribute to the debate.

The hon. Gentleman's claim that the Scottish Executive announced the investment because of the fishermen's protests is nonsense. The Scottish Executive and the Fisheries Minister had been holding discussions with representatives of the fishing industry for about two months before the protests began.

It is a tragedy that the announcement of the largest single investment in the restructuring of the Scottish industry was treated as a cause for protest. Fishermen should have been celebrating. However, the welcome that the announcement received from the Clyde and Mallaig fishermen was perhaps more typical of the reaction of most people in the industry. They wanted a decommissioning scheme to be introduced, and they wanted to sit down with the Government to ensure that the investment scheme was properly implemented.

**Mr. Salmond:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Doran:** No, I will not. The hon. Gentleman has spoken for long enough.

**Mr. Salmond** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan must sit down as the hon. Member for Aberdeen, Central refuses to give way.

**Mr. Doran:** I have made my point. A split industry would be ineffective. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said that the fishing industries in England and Scotland had different profiles and priorities. I agree with him about that. The industry should have a higher profile in England. We recognise that it is an important industry in Scotland, but it is difficult to see how, in its present state, it can make progress by coherently communicating its case to the Government.

The discussions that I have held over the past few days with both sides of the industry have shown me that they are beginning once again to come together and to consult about matters. It is widely recognised in the industry that it is foolish to become involved in campaigns that are politically stage-managed. I hope that that will not happen again.

I want the Minister to encourage the industry to come together: his predecessors pursued that end by holding fisheries summits. I congratulate my local authority, Aberdeen city council, for holding a regular fishing summit that is attended by all sides of the industry, and which encourages people to pull together and to make common cause. The Minister should sit down and discuss matters with all sides of the industry from Scotland, England, and Northern Ireland to ensure that the best possible deal is secured as a result of the Green Paper.

11.47 am

**Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): My intervention will be brief, although I would like to launch into a lengthy analysis of the common fisheries policy and its iniquities. We should never have accepted the CFP. It was cobbled together and forced on us when negotiations were beginning over our entry into Europe. It was a deliberate attempt to gain access to the richest fishing grounds in Europe, and it could have been resisted, as Sir Con O'Neil's memoir highlights: he was prevented from resisting it, at a time when it was malleable, because there was a desperate desire to enter Europe.

By accepting the policy, the Government of the day accepted the principle of equal access to a common resource. However, the proper approach to fisheries conservation can be taken only by the nation state, as it alone has an interest in maintaining stocks to be inherited by future generations of fishermen, and it alone can control all those who have an interest in exploiting stocks. That has been the experience in, for example, Iceland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

I would like us to withdraw from the CFP. The Scottish National party once shared that desire. It has now stood on its head with regard to that policy, as it has with regard to many others, but I will continue to carry the flame in favour of withdrawal—[*Interruption.*] I do not want to discuss that matter any longer, as I did not decide the Scottish National party's policy on it; I want to express my own point of view clearly. My basic point is that the common fisheries policy is not a policy of conservation but a political policy. The process often consists of doling out paper fish to satisfy the conflicting demands of nation states, and proper conservation is not possible on that basis.

The CFP is also a policy that is remote from the fishing grounds and the fishermen. Some of the decisions on timing in relation to the opening up of areas under the cod preservation plan could have been made more sensibly if the Commission and its officials knew something about the spawning processes of fish, and what happens in fishing grounds, which clearly they did not. The policy has not worked effectively.

It is difficult for us to prevail, because we are just one voice. Our problem is unique because each country has a specialised interest—usually in a specific species—whereas we are a country of mixed fishing. Therefore, we have interests in a wider spread of species, which involve many different approaches and types of net. We are therefore negotiating at a disadvantage. My hon. Friend the Minister has done a good job, but when other national interests intervene, fishing has only a small voice, and is likely to be overruled by higher national priorities. That was certainly the case under Conservative Governments.

The overlap between national Government policy and the common fisheries policy causes another set of problems, as fishing tends to fall in between. The Treasury seems to have no idea about the needs and problems of fishing—it views fishing as a greedy supplicant, to be slapped back every time; it never sees it as a possible investment, or a framework for development. However, all the studies—the WWF study is fascinating in this regard—show that a proper policy of managed conservation and managed restructuring of the industry, which requires money, would increase the return and produce a much greater dividend on investment. That is especially important at present.

As the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations argued last night, there is a desire to progress from the present situation, in which fleets are too large and stocks too small, to the situation that we want to inherit—one of sustainable, growing stocks, on which to base a sustainable industry. The financial problem is that the Treasury is not willing to finance that process, which involves restructuring, support and subsidy for the fleet. It involves the modernisation of onshore facilities and investment to get from A to B and to reap the rewards of proper conservation and a proper common fisheries policy.

The British side has always been weakened by the Government's failure to provide the necessary finance, and their reluctance to accept finance from Europe. Finance has poured from Europe into the fishing fleets of every other country, which have been modernised, rebuilt and re-energised, whereas the British fleet has not had access to the European money that is available. Other countries' industries receive finance from Europe to install satellite surveillance, but ours does not. That is a ludicrous example of the way in which the British industry loses out every time because of the failure of national financing and our lack of access to European financing, to which other countries have access.

The consequence of that, as the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) pointed out, is that our industry is run down. It is interesting to remember that we opposed the Government's plans to control fishing by limiting days at sea. We demanded a decommissioning programme, which the Treasury was too mean to finance. As a result, there were bankruptcies, closures and sell-offs of licences, which were bought up by quota hoppers who became yet another problem for our industry. That was the Treasury's fault. We are now back in the same situation. If finance is not available, the industry's restructure will be weakened. Licences will be sold on. Who will buy them? It will be the fishing industries that have been subsidised by their Governments and by Europe. That will be the inevitable consequence, unless financial action is taken.

I am about to sit down and shut up, because other hon. Members wish to speak—but first I must point out that there is a failure of co-ordination between a common fisheries policy that would be adequate to our needs, and a central Government approach to fishing that is narrow-minded and reminiscent of Gradgrind. That is damaging an industry that may have been pushed into the shadows by the foot and mouth epidemic, but which has an equal demand for fair and proper financing to keep it going from now into the future that we want it to inherit.

**Mr. Quinn** *rose—*

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** The hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn) said that he would speak for about four minutes, so I am happy to call him.

11.55 am

**Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am glad that you have been in some sale rooms in the fishing industry, understood the figures and accepted the bid that was being offered.

I have been a Member of Parliament for only four years, but I wish to take the opportunity to say how much I have enjoyed listening to my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) in fisheries debates. If, indeed, his speech was his valedictory performance, he will be of great service to the fishing community whatever he does in the future. What he has done in the past has been deeply appreciated by the communities in Scarborough and Whitby. It is important to put that on the record.

I never thought that I would be in a position to say that I was in some sympathy with the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), especially in respect of his argument for devolution. As he and my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) know, I am a passionate advocate of English devolution. Eventually, there will be a Yorkshire and Humberside regional assembly. If any issue concerning the economy of our region demands such an approach, it is fishing. It is absolutely desperate that the need for a regionalised agenda is recognised in respect of our fishing industry north of the Humber up to the Tweed.

I hope that the Minister will continue to use whatever powers he has to influence the regional development agencies in the north-east and in Yorkshire to approach such an important part of our economy with greater seriousness than they have done so far. I thank the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan for encouraging fishing communities north of the Humber whose boats are registered in Scottish ports to take their fair share of the £23 million that has been negotiated.

**Mr. Salmond:** May I briefly acknowledge the support of several boats from the hon. Gentleman's constituency in the fishing demonstrations? That belied the argument that the fishing demonstrations were centred in Peterhead.

**Mr. Quinn:** I was about to come to that point. The hon. Gentleman indeed recognises the contribution of the boats from Whitby. Such matters concerned with the common fisheries policy show that not only do we need to take a United Kingdom approach but we must recognise the international aspects of the industry that are vital to this country.

In recent years, the shellfish industry in Whitby has been thriving. The Minister visited Whitby and Scarborough recently and the fact that refrigerated lorries leave the port of Whitby for places such as Barcelona and Paris with catches that are almost pre-booked shows that we are in a global marketplace. It supports the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran).

I have three specific questions for the Minister. First, let me say for the record that I would like a response to the letter that my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby and I sent him recently regarding the Government's position on net sizes. He knows about the considerable concern in the north-east Yorkshire ports over the proposals that are on the table about net sizes in an attempt to assist with the cod recovery plan.

Secondly, will the Minister tell us how inshore fishermen such as salmon netsmen will be impacted by the CFP reforms?

Thirdly, as well as supporting the industry in discussions with the Treasury, will he argue the case in Europe on behalf of the Government? We must ensure that there is a contribution from the European purse in future proposals for environmental recovery plans, to fund the measures necessary for the industry to make sustainable progress and ensure the prosperity that many hon. Members wish to see in our communities all round the British Isles.

12 noon

**Mr. Andrew George** (St. Ives): Like other hon. Members, I strongly congratulate the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) on securing this debate, and making a significant contribution to fisheries debates in the past. Today, he set out a sensible case for the reform of the CFP, welcomed the Green Paper and reminded us of his highly respected knowledge as well as his close family connections with the industry. As well as taking a robust attitude to me when I first spoke in fisheries debates, he has an honourable record of standing up strongly for the importance of safety in the fishing industry—a passion that we share. He has consistently maintained a line that is now gaining currency within the industry, which was considered less important some years ago. He has also made telling criticisms of the CFP in the past, all of which I agree with.

The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) emphasised the importance of maintaining relative stability, but from my own perspective, and that of Cornwall, it does not give fishermen in the western approaches—in area VII—the same fair share of fishing resource that Scottish fishermen managed to achieve. Therefore, fishermen in my area have mixed views about greater stability. Nevertheless, if that is making the best of a bad job, it is worth maintaining.

The hon. Gentleman quoted from an interesting letter from *The Herald*, and the Minister will no doubt deal with the issues concerned if not with the letter itself. He also made a good case for investment in the industry according to WWF models. If we are to establish seasonally closed areas to protect the collapse of target species, we should find the necessary finance over four or five years for all those circumstances in which tie-ups are required. I was encouraged by a recent statement by Commissioner Fischler supporting that line. The Minister should speak to his colleagues in Europe and encourage Commissioner Fischler to direct structural funds to support tie-ups.

**Mr. Salmond:** If the hon. Gentleman's colleague, the Scottish Minister for Rural Development, took the same view on tie-ups as he does, we could achieve the same progress on tie-ups as we made on decommissioning.

**Mr. George:** That causes me no discomfort because, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the debate is ongoing and

we must push the matter forward. We are all pushing in the same direction and the question is how that can be practically achieved in the immediate future. We are pushing towards finding medium and long-term solutions to establish a sustainable fishing industry, and short-term comments such as the hon. Gentleman's should be left for the party political scrap that is no doubt approaching. We should all take on board the responsible point that if we are to establish a sustainable fishing industry and fisheries, we must examine the matter and budget for it in the future.

The hon. Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) was right to suggest that the future of the fishing industry could be examined with cautious optimism. Many challenges lie ahead but, if we know what they are and are prepared to meet such management and financial challenges, there are good reasons to push the matter forward, given the opportunity afforded by a reform of the common fisheries policy.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby characteristically lambasted the CFP, as he always does. He is absolutely right. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] His fundamental criticisms are correct that the CFP is a political compromise and too remote in terms of where management decisions are made. However, his conclusion that we should pull out of the CFP, as if we could pull out willy nilly, is clearly unrealistic, although I agree with his criticisms. He is correct that the UK fleet was treated unfairly during the 1990s in relation to other European fleets.

The hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn) emphasised his passion for devolution, which I share—[*Interruption.*] I like passion, provided that we have passionate devolution to regions that people feel passionate about, rather than to sanitised, synthetic places that do not exist. Provided that it is on that basis, I am sure that we can passionately step forward.

I have a number of questions for the Minister, some of which relate to points that have already been made. What progress is being made on the hake recovery programme? There was supposed to have been an announcement, and there may have been, although it has not yet reached my desk. The Commission's emergency powers are to be clarified, and it is disappointing that there is still an across-the-board cut in the hake quota for the western approaches that affects the whole fleet, although as far as Cornish fishermen are concerned, hake stocks are in a healthy state. Our fishermen are catching larger fish than their Spanish counterparts.

What progress has been made on the scientific assessment of the use of pingers in the tuna driftnet fishery? I understand from the industry that the use of pingers is making such a method as eco-friendly as line-caught tuna. I would welcome the Minister's comments on that.

An interesting and telling article appeared on 20 April in *Fishing News*, which is an excellent publication, as the Minister knows. It appeared on the back page and mentioned a trawler owning family from Hull, the Boyds, who pointed out the problem of catching small fish, particularly cod, haddock and plaice. They made it clear from their long professional and family experience in the industry that there is a commercial advantage in purchasing small plate-sized fish. There appears to be an increase in the catching of small and juvenile fish. Will the Minister tell us what he knows about numbers of small fish being caught and about the actions being taken to address that?

The common fisheries policy presents major opportunities. I welcome the regional dimension in the six and 12-mile retention zone, although certain hon. Members, who seem strangely to be absent today, tell us that not all those reforms are possible in one round. I have been promoting multi-annual quota setting for years; I welcome that and the consideration of improvements in technical measures to enhance stock management.

Fundamentally, however, the regional dimension of the CFP is the most important focus. The Green Paper considers it from a purely advisory and consultative viewpoint. I urge the Minister to give those regional committees real teeth. If we want adequate pan-European enforcement and monitoring of the CFP, it must be seen to be even across the board. I encourage the Minister to establish bilateral agreements, whereby United Kingdom fishing inspectors might spot-check Spanish fishing ports or any other ports, rather than going down the route taken by the Green Paper, which would establish a joint inspection structure. In that way we might maintain national fisheries enforcement instead of setting up a new European structure.

12.11 pm

**Mr. Malcolm Moss** (North-East Cambridgeshire): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman), not only on securing the debate but on his customarily authoritative contribution. He said that the CFP was over-centralised, over-bureaucratic and undemocratic, and I could not agree more with that assessment. The longer I listened to him, the more I thought that he was persuaded by Conservative party policy on fishing, as I agreed with about 90 per cent. of what he said. When he talked about taking back national control, I thought that he was with us, but he then qualified what he had said by suggesting that national control should stop after 24 miles. Why stop after 24 miles?

**Sir Robert Smith** (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Moss:** No, I have only eight minutes, and plenty to say.

I agree with most of the comments that the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde made about multi-annual total allowable catches and multi-species quotas, and with his important point about industrial fishing. It makes no sense to anyone in the industry that, when there is a huge ban on fishing in a large area of the North sea for the sake of cod recovery, in other parts of the North sea we are allowing industrial fishing that is reducing the base of the pyramid of the food chain. I know that the Minister supports curtailment of that industrial fishing, but it should come as no surprise if the stocks are under pressure.

The industry's view of that cod recovery programme and the closure of the area is that it is ill thought out. It is a panic measure introduced far too late in the proceedings, which, as the hon. Member for Banff and

*[Mr. Moss]*

Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said, has forced fishermen into grounds and fisheries where they would not normally fish at this time of year. That has led to pressure on those fisheries, and the discarding of huge quantities of young year class haddock, which would not normally be caught at this time of the year.

Given the perilous state of the fish stocks, if the stock recovery programmes are to be repeated in the future, some thought must be given to how best to sustain the fishing industry when it is not allowed to catch its normal quotas. Several speakers alluded to that, in particular the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, who asked the Minister a direct question that I repeat: what aid will be forthcoming from the Government to sustain the fishing industry during the tie-up periods? This year will not be a one-off. It is obvious that there will be a repeat, so the Government must tell us what aid they will give the fishing industry during such periods. Otherwise, the fishing fleet will ultimately be much diminished.

The core and heart of the CFP is, as we all know, regulation 101/76, the equal access principle—the acquis communautaire to which every country that has joined the EU has signed up. What is the CFP? We assume that it is a current entity that will continue after December 2002, but the CFP as we know it, and the two principles of the six and 12-mile national limits, and the relative stability are, as the policy is currently formed, derogations, as the European Court confirmed. A Commission paper states:

"the Court of Justice has itself recognised that the quota system, as a system of national quotas, is a derogation from the general rule of equal conditions of access to fishery resources ... and the principle of non-discrimination laid down in Article 40(3) of the Treaty... And there are long-standing derogations for access to inshore waters. These two factors demonstrate that at this time in the CFP's evolution"—

the paper dates back to the early 1990s—

"there are respects in which there is not complete common access to resources."

What is the real CFP? Will the Minister confirm that he recognises that those are derogations? Will he confirm that the Green Paper that has briefly been discussed this morning is not part of a review of the CFP, but simply a requirement under the regulations to report by the end of the 10 years, which is next year?

The 1991 report produced at the end of the first 10-year period of the derogations contains some interesting statements, including the following:

"The years from 1993 to 2002"—

looking ahead, as that then was—

"must be regarded not simply as a continuation of the period from 1983 to 1992 but rather as a preparation for the years to follow, when access to the Community's fishing areas will in principle be free. It is for this reason that operators in the fisheries sector must be told as soon as possible how the rules are likely to change."

That was written in 1991. What have we done in the decade since then? We have not prepared our fishing industry for the likely outcome of the meaning of the CFP momentum.

**Mr. Andrew George:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Moss:** I shall not give way, as I do not have much time.

The report goes on to say that

"the principle"—

of relative stability—

"would be maintained after 2002 subject to possible adjustments to the allocation key adopted in 1983 and"—

the crucial point—

"the specific limitations resulting from the Act of Accession of Spain and Portugal to be decided on the basis of this report and submitted before ... January 2002."

Given the Commission's words, we should not be surprised that, although the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said that the Green Paper was warmly welcomed, it was not warmly welcomed by Spain and Portugal, as they have a completely different agenda.

As the treaties and the Commission's 1991 report state, any relative stability that continues in future—I do not oppose a form of relative stability in principle—must involve a share-out on a sensible basis for all sea resource areas. However, that relative stability will not be based on the same apportionment and allocation that we currently see. The real message for the British fishing industry is that if it has to make way at some point for Spain, Portugal and the other countries that acceded later than the early 1980s, that will be at the cost of its quotas. The papers that the Spanish are submitting want the mechanism for that equal access to be tradeable quotas.

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) made the important point that over the next few years, as our unaided industry runs down, the only fishing industries that will be economically robust enough to make the necessary bids for the quotas will be in the EU countries—I mentioned Spain in passing—that have received considerable quantities of state aid. They will be able to buy into the quotas, and our industry will atrophy on the vine as the fishing fleets of other EU countries buy up our quotas. It would be criminal to sit back and allow that to happen. The Minister must tell us how he sees the future, and how he will protect the interests of the British fishing industry.

12.21 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Elliot Morley):** I add my words of congratulation to my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) on securing the debate. I, too, hope that that was not his valedictory speech. For the record, I should say how much I have appreciated his encouragement over the years. His family experience, which is probably unrivalled in the House, has provided much valuable advice. I was also pleased to hear that at least one member of his family has benefited from the pay-out from the loss of the Icelandic waters. Like him, I am glad that the Government have honoured a long-standing commitment and put right a wrong for the distant water fleets.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Morley:** I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) has long campaigned for that.

A range of issues has been raised, and I will try to get through the points raised by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), my hon. Friends the Members for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg), for Great Grimsby and for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn), and the hon. Members for St. Ives (Mr. George) and for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss).

First, I shall deal with discards. It is not altogether fair to blame the common fisheries policy for discards. Most discards are undersized and unmarketable fish. There were discards before the CFP, and there are discards in countries where there is no CFP. That is not to say that the CFP does not have its flaws, however and we must address the issue. As has been outlined in the debate, it is a policy well overdue for reform and revision.

The Green Paper has been broadly welcomed because it has clearly been influenced by the debate in this country, and particularly within our fishing industry. The papers produced by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation and the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations have fed into it. I welcome that. In relation to the trade-off in the annual quota negotiations, it is fair to say that there has been a lot of horse trading over the years. Ministers have been anxious to come back with increased quotas to show to their domestic industries—but that is changing. There is more realism in the Council of Ministers, and I can assure my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde that in the last Council I did not argue against the scientific advice on any quota. I accepted that advice.

In 1999 the Council of Ministers accepted the precautionary principle as a basis for setting quotas. I argued against some of the figures when the Commission recommendations went against the scientific advice. Indeed, it is important to listen to the comments of the industry. I have always tried to take its views into account in the discussions and negotiations. There is less horse trading now. It is more about examining the science and talking about what is sustainable. That applies to all countries.

We had a preliminary debate on the Commission's Green Paper at the previous Council. Spain was the only country to speak against it; even Portugal, which is keen on coastal limits, did not do so. Every country except Spain broadly welcomed it as a basis for discussion. It is clear that there is a consensus on taking the Green Paper forward.

In my contribution at the Council of Ministers, I stressed how essential coastal limits are for supporting sustainable low-impact fishing. They are an important conservation management tool. Some EU countries have argued for an extension of the limit from 12 to 24 miles; I am confident that we will be able to maintain our coastal limits, and I have no objection in principle to extension. My attitude would depend on what it means in practice. It would be a pointless and empty gesture to argue for an extension to 24 miles while accepting the historical rights of vessels currently fishing within the 12 to 24-mile zone. It is difficult to deal with the question of people's historical rights.

I do not know what the Conservatives' argument about national control means—nor, I think, does anyone else. We have national control over our own waters within the CFP. One can argue for national control, but does that mean confiscating quota or keeping out other vessels with historic rights? We would need another treaty to effect such changes, and a Conservative Administration could not have that without withdrawing from the European Union. If that is the Conservatives' policy, they should say so, and people could judge them accordingly.

The issue of national management is related to coastal management, which we can secure. I also strongly support the case for multi-annual quotas and welcome the fact that the Commission is making proposals about them. The principle of relative stability is also extremely important. It would not be in any country's interests to open up the principle of relative stability—a principle that is not under threat. My legal advice is that it will continue unchanged unless there is a qualified majority against it within the Council of Ministers. I do not believe that there is such a qualified majority.

Norway's policy of landing discards is an interesting one, which I have discussed with the Norwegian Minister—and the Icelandic Minister, when Iceland had the same policy. The problem, which those countries admit, is the difficulty of enforcement. Norway, Iceland and the Faroe islands have fewer discards because they use bigger mesh sizes. They do not have the mixed fishery that we have in the North sea; theirs is more of a single species fishery. Nevertheless, we need to learn lessons in that regard.

I agree with hon. Members' comments about industrial fishing. My own views have been well documented over the years. As a Minister, I take pride in the fact that we have introduced closed areas for industrial fishing, as part of a proper scientific analysis. We have also reached agreement with the Danes, to whose co-operation I pay tribute, on the science of industrial fishery, the impact on fish stocks and the ecological chain, and the levels of by-catch of whitefish. We need sound scientific information if we are to argue for change. I have consistently made it clear that fisheries for human consumption must take priority in the CFP and the Council of Ministers.

There are arguments about how the industry should be financially supported. I have always accepted our industry's case for support for structural change, and have kept my promise to argue for that; indeed, I have delivered a package of measures. There will always be argument about whether the money goes far enough, but that package consists of £11 million for the financial instrument for fisheries guidance package, £6 million for a one-year decommissioning package and £5.5 million for support for ports. There are additional funds for the regional development agencies in England, and money is even available through the rural development programme. Considerable funds can therefore be directed towards the industry.

Time does not permit me to go on. Suffice it to say that there are changes to the industry. We need effective recovery plans and the support of the industry to achieve them. The industry has a good future and untapped potential, which warrant the support that the Government are giving for structural changes. I do not believe that demonstrating is the right way to achieve that.

## NHS Appointments (Political Bias)

12.30 pm

**Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise the matter of political bias in national health service appointments. As the Under-Secretary of State for Health will recall, it is about nine months since we lasted debated the subject in Westminster Hall. It is now more than a year since the Commissioner for Public Appointments published her report on 22 March 2000, in which she made some damning indictments against the Government's record on political appointments in the NHS. I shall quote briefly from her report:

"I conclude from the evidence...that there are examples where a candidate's political association has been a decisive factor in their early selection and appointment, and that decisions have not always been based on merit ... the process itself has been politicised".

On 22 March 2000, the Department of Health responded to the report and, in a press statement, promised a fundamental overhaul of the NHS appointment system. That overhaul did not happen, and primary care trust boards were stuffed with Labour party activists in the same way that health authorities and NHS trust boards had been before. Instead of real action to tackle the problem, we had spin and media management.

Ministers repeatedly deny that there is a problem. They even deny that Dame Rennie Fritchie, the Commissioner for Public Appointments, criticised their actions and record. They point frequently to increased numbers of women and ethnic minority candidates who have been appointed. Such outcomes are welcome, but only if they come alongside appointment on merit—appointment of the best possible person for the job—and not instead of it. As Dame Rennie said in her report last year, positive discrimination would be a step too far.

I have been pursuing the matter for some time and, on 31 March 1999, I raised my concerns at Prime Minister's Questions. The Prime Minister's response was very interesting. He baldly stated:

"An independent system now appoints people."—[*Official Report*, 31 March 1999; Vol. 328, c. 1087.]

That was two years before the independent commissioner for NHS appointments was appointed. A written answer that was given to me by the Under-Secretary about a week ago points out that the independent mechanism has not yet come into action; therefore, in light of the evidence, the Prime Minister stated something two years ago that was hard to support. That, in turn, was a year before Dame Rennie's report, which was so damning.

On 22 March 2000, I again raised the matter with the Prime Minister. In typical fashion, he tried to avoid a straight answer and tried to manipulate facts to his advantage. He quoted part of a sentence from the commissioner's report:

"The issue of politicisation of appointments is not new—the practice of inviting MPs to comment on the shortlists of candidates was first introduced by the Conservative Government".—[*Official Report*, 22 March 2000; Vol. 346, c. 994.]

He failed, of course, to conclude the sentence with the phrase

"but has gained a new momentum since the last General Election."

He went to the heart of the commissioner's report and pulled one sentence to pieces to try to excuse or justify conduct that had been criticised by an independent officer who was appointed to maintain high standards in public life.

Some people have raised the question whether an appropriate political balance has been maintained. I asked the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office about that on 21 March 2001, and he replied to the effect that the number of councillors appointed to NHS boards reflected the proportion of councillors on the ground. Again, that is not supported by the evidence—by neither my experiences nor by rigorous scrutiny of evidence taken by the independent Commissioner for Public Appointments. Ministers might wish to ignore the facts and make other claims, but they should not be allowed to get away with it.

I raised my concerns with the Leader of the House on 30 March 2000. She stated that

"appointments are undertaken by a panel with an independent assessor".

Referring to me, she said:

"The hon. Gentleman...continues to raise a matter that is erroneous".—[*Official Report*, 30 March 2000; Vol. 347, c. 508.]

That is as though the commissioner's report, which had come out just a week before, had never been published. It also found that people were appointed for reasons other than merit. The commissioner raised doubts about the effectiveness of the independent assessors and said:

"Not all independent assessors are independent."

From 22 March to 5 July 2000, the Department of Health took no action apart from issuing a press release. On 11 April, the Minister confirmed in a written answer:

"We have no plans to meet the commissioner"

to discuss the findings of her report. Indeed, no Minister had taken the trouble to meet Dame Rennie before the Department issued its press statement on 22 March. The Minister also promised that

"a detailed response will be made in due course".—[*Official Report*, 11 April 2000; Vol. 348, c. 132W.]

However, there was nothing until 5 July. As we rehearsed in July's debate in Westminster Hall, that response came a day after I had succeeded in securing a 90-minute debate on the subject.

On 2 May, I asked how many hon. Members had been consulted on appointments, contrary to the recommendations of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Minister answered that the selection process had been largely complete when the Fritchie report was published. The implication was clear—that action had been taken but that it had been impossible for that action to impact on appointments already made. When I asked, nearly a year later on 26 April 2001, what representations had been made by hon. Members in connection with appointments to NHS trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts, Ministers avoided the question. The reply stated only that

"the process of consulting hon. Members was discontinued in September 2001".—[*Official Report*, 26 April 2001; Vol. 367, c. 333W.]

I presume that that was a typographical error and that it should have stated September 2000. Even if that consultation of hon. Members was discontinued in September 2000, it would have been six months after the commissioner had criticised the Government on those grounds, six months during which the systematic politicisation of the NHS continued, and six months after the Government promised a radical overhaul of the appointments process.

In a written answer to me on 26 April, the Secretary of State confirmed that he had not met Dame Rennie during the past year. There is a damning report of the Government's record of politicisation in NHS appointments—a critique which suggests that the best person for the job is not appointed—and the Secretary of State has not even bothered to meet the Commissioner for Public Appointments since her report was published a year ago. The only ministerial meeting with the commissioner was on 29 November 2000, when the Under-Secretary of State paid her the courtesy of a visit.

On 26 April, I asked what undertakings had been given to the commissioner in respect of her report's recommendations. It was clear from the response that there was only one: that an NHS appointments commission was to be established, under the chairmanship of Sir William Wells. The body was established on 1 April and I was told in the written answer that it would begin making appointments shortly. That is a year after the Fritchie report was published, a year in which no action whatever was taken and two years after the Prime Minister told me on the Floor of the House that an independent appointments process had already been established.

What is the current position? To find evidence of what the Department of Health is doing, rather than what it says it is doing, I examined the evidence of appointments to primary care trusts. It is significant that the trusts were established on 1 April 2000. They have entirely come into being since Dame Rennie's report on appointments to NHS trusts and health authorities. The Government have had the benefit of the guidance, recommendations and evidence of Dame Rennie since the existence of primary care trusts. Yet the evidence is that of all those appointed to primary care trust boards, 20 per cent.—one in five—declare a record of political activity for the Labour party, 6 per cent. for the Conservatives and 5 per cent. for the Liberal Democrats. That is almost exactly the same proportion as in NHS trusts and health authorities. No wonder that a report in *The Times* on 14 April stated:

"Dame Rennie Fritchie is said to be furious that Alan Milburn, the Health Secretary, has ignored her advice".

She receives as many complaints as she received 18 months ago.

I have pursued the matter for some time, as the Minister knows. I have tried to raise its profile and to ensure that action is taken. I took stock after a year or so and asked myself what was its significance, why it mattered, and whether I should continue my investigations. I concluded that it was a matter of the greatest significance and that I am right to pursue it assiduously; I shall continue to do so. It matters, first, because all parties accepted the basic principle of fairness embodied in the Nolan report and in the steps taken by the Committee on Standards in Public Life to try to raise the standard of behaviour. All parties pay lip service to those principles, but if they are ignored they are worthless and might as well be swept away.

Secondly, it matters because of the important question of competence. If people have been appointed other than on merit, the best people for the job have not taken the job and these vital posts in our NHS will end up in the hands of people who are not up to the job. That is a serious issue, especially now that primary care trusts are to be given an expanded role and more control over larger budgets. A certain person might have been considered competent when trusts had smaller budgets and a less important role, but the standard will need to be higher in view of the expanded role envisaged for primary care trusts.

Thirdly, it is indicative of a culture of dishonesty among the Government, who have refused to accept Dame Rennie's criticisms. Mr. Anthony Harrison of the King's Fund investigated the Government's record on the NHS prior to a likely general election. In a passage reported in the weekend press, he said:

"There is a reign of terror in the Department of Health. Nobody is talking to us about these activity figures."

A respected independent institution cannot acquire the information on which it depends because of a reign of terror.

Two million people—twice the number when the present Government came into office—are now waiting to see a consultant, and the average waiting time for in-patient treatment is also higher than in 1997. The president of the Royal College of Surgeons described the Government's health policy as unethical and said that patients were suffering as a result. This week has seen GPs adopt an unprecedented work to rule.

It is now more important than ever to have the most able people—not political placements—running the NHS, and to have people who are prepared to speak out when there is evidence of wrong-doing or incompetence. By ignoring the findings of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, the Government have shown contempt not just for Dame Rennie and her office, but for the House of Commons and the Nolan principles. It is a perfect demonstration of the arrogance of power and its ability to corrupt, so well exemplified by the Government.

12.47 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Gisela Stuart):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) on securing the debate on NHS appointments. One could be forgiven for thinking that it was a debate about the relationship of the Department of Health and the Commissioner for Public Appointments rather than the actual title of the debate—NHS appointments and political bias.

I realise that the subject is close to the hon. Gentleman's heart, but I am taken aback if he believes that repeating the same fact over and over again amounts to evidence. Neither is the quotation of isolated comments from favourable newspaper sources my idea of proper evidence. The hon. Gentleman might benefit from taking note of an old IBM maxim: one should not mistake activity for achievement. The hon.

*[Ms Gisela Stuart]*

Gentleman may be right that we have not moved quickly enough, but I shall challenge and refute his allegation that we have not taken any action.

I am happy to affirm that people are appointed to NHS boards on merit and not as a result of political bias. If an NHS non-executive director has a declared political commitment to Labour, the hon. Gentleman seems to equate it with not being up to the job. Just because a Labour sympathiser is appointed, it does not mean that standards are dropping. The hon. Gentleman appears to believe that standards are falling simply because Conservative appointments are not made.

I shall outline what the Government have done. There is no evidence that party affiliation is connected with competence. I want to put it on record that we have the highest regard for our appointments.

**Mr. Brady:** Will the Minister give way?

**Ms Stuart:** I shall give way once, but only once.

**Mr. Brady:** I am grateful. The allegations that the Minister refuses to accept are not mine, but are contained in the commissioner's report. Does she accept that the commissioner found evidence of appointments being made other than on merit?

**Ms Stuart:** I take the line that we decouple non-political bias. Where is the evidence to support language such as "stuffing with appointees" and saying that they are not up to the job? Those are two different issues, and I should like to make it clear that we have the highest regard for those being appointed.

In a debate last year, I pointed out to the hon. Gentleman the comments of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Even the commissioner's independent auditors, Ernst and Young, supported many of our arguments that the process is proper. The commissioner's report on NHS appointments stated:

"The data available suggest that the proportion of candidates declaring political activity at the application stage of the process are similar to the proportions declaring political activity at the appointment stage."

Almost two-thirds of applicants for primary care trusts declared no political activity. In other words, there was no suggestion that those with a Labour party background were any more likely to be appointed than anyone else. The fact is that if only a small number of Conservative activists come forward, only a proportionally small number are likely to be appointed.

I also pointed out in my response last year that since January 1999 the evidence showed that applicants who had declared political activity on behalf of the Labour party had a 39 per cent. chance of being appointed, whereas Conservative applicants had a 56 per cent. chance. The hon. Gentleman chose to ignore such evidence at the time, and he has done so again today. I have no doubt whatsoever that when Dame Rennie Fritchie concludes her current examination of appointments to primary care trusts, the same picture of a fair process will emerge.

On taking office, we wanted to ensure that NHS boards were firmly rooted in the communities that they serve. We therefore placed a premium on candidates' records of community service. We wanted people from all walks of life, not only business, so we advertised widely in national newspapers, specialist journals and the minority press to attract people who might otherwise not have come forward. In addition, all appointments to primary care trusts have been advertised locally to ensure a wide field of candidates. Also to widen the pool of candidates, we asked hon. Members and local authorities to make nominations from their local knowledge.

Our changes have been hugely successful in making NHS boards more representative of their communities. The proportion of women on the boards has increased from 39 per cent. before the election to 49 per cent. today. I am proud of that record; I make no apology for it. I resent the hon. Gentleman treating the matter as if it was used as a fig-leaf. It is a good record. We have an even better record on the proportion of black and ethnic minority candidates appointed, which has increased from 5 per cent. to 12 per cent. The proportion of people with disabilities has also more than doubled.

Equally successful has been the increase since 1997 of those appointed with a community background. The number of people from the voluntary sector or who are primarily users or carers has increased to 19 per cent. We have moved away from the domination of NHS boards by white middle-class business men that prevailed under the Conservatives. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman considers that they are the only people who are up to the job; I do not. Of course, our boards still need business skills, and people from that background are still represented, but overall the balance has changed to help boards focus on real local issues.

In planning the way forward, we have responded positively to the recommendations in Dame Rennie Fritchie's useful report. To suggest that the Government have failed to respond to her recommendations or to take them seriously is simply wrong. Dame Rennie herself has not suggested that that is the case. I know that the hon. Gentleman entered the House of Commons only in 1997, just like me, but one thing that we should have learned is that simply because one newspaper report cites sources close to someone does not, never has and never will amount to evidence. Let us just consider the facts.

We have, in fact, gone much further than the commissioner's own recommendations in order to meet her concern about the perception of politicisation. I take issue with the hon. Gentleman's definition of what is independent. He sneeringly refers to independent assessors who are not independent. The process was independent.

**Mr. Brady:** On a point of order, Mr. Gale. I should like to make it clear that I was quoting directly from the commissioner's report.

**Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair):** That is a matter of record, but it is not a point of order for the Chair.

**Ms Stuart:** It has been the practice under successive Governments to involve Members directly in the appointment of trust and health authority chairs. Members' views have been sought at the short-list stage. It was not this Administration who introduced the

process. We put at an end to it. Dame Rennie was critical that this part of the process did not meet her requirement for transparency at all stages. Critics were able to suggest that it introduced an element of political patronage into the process. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health therefore wrote to all Members advising them that their views would no longer be sought from last autumn's trust appointment round onwards.

We also adopted measures last year to streamline re-appointments. If candidates serving their first term had performed well and had received a satisfactory appraisal report, they were recommended to Ministers as the sole candidate where they wished to be re-appointed. Again those were suggestions that were put forward that we adopted. We accepted Dame Rennie's recommendation that we should continue to give members the opportunity to draw from their local knowledge and nominate candidates. That was always on the understanding that their nominees would be interviewed and treated in exactly the same way as all other candidates.

However, we did not accept the commissioner's recommendation on the issue of councillors on NHS boards. Dame Rennie suggested that we review whether

"the presence of so many councillors on NHS boards is healthy".

It should not be a surprise, particularly to hon. Members, that many of those applying for a position on an NHS board also show their public spirit through involvement in local politics. We do not see that as a disadvantage. On the contrary, it can be a positive advantage.

We have been quite open about our wish to see the NHS acting with its local partners so that all the issues that make for a healthy community can be considered together. When one sees how the NHS is working more closely with social services, it is obvious that that is the right way forward. Similarly, it should be noted that the Select Committee on Public Administration, including Conservative Members, also rejected that recommendation from the commissioner.

Most significant of all the Government's measures, however, has been our decision to establish an independent NHS appointments commission for all appointments to NHS trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts. That was not in fact recommended in Dame Rennie's report, although the Select Committee itself suggested it. We have gone further. We wanted to remove the process entirely from the political domain, going well beyond what is required by Nolan principles and the commissioner's guidance.

The commission came into being on 1 April, and all non-executive and chair appointments will be its responsibility from now on. However, it will continue to be subject to Dame Rennie's guidance, and subject to independent scrutiny and regular audit. The new chair of the appointments commission, Sir William Wells, has already met Dame Rennie and will be working with her closely over the coming months as the commission begins its work. Sir William was appointed as a regional chair under the previous Administration, and they awarded him his knighthood for services to the NHS. He has never been politically active, but has served the NHS in a variety of different positions for more than 30 years. It is for that reason that we made an appointment on merit irrespective of political background. That is now on the record.

There is more harmony between Dame Rennie's office and the Department of Health than the hon. Gentleman would like to believe. We have been able to discuss our proposals for the NHS appointments commission with it during the course of its formation. I know that the first official act of Sir William's term of office as chair has been to meet Dame Rennie. I understand that that meeting was constructive and fruitful. Neither are we ignoring the needs of those whom we appoint. I have recently discussed with the NHS Confederation how we might review the roles of chairs and non-executives. That was another recommendation in the report. Its role has moved on from the quasi-business model introduced to support the ill-conceived internal market. We need to ensure that everyone is clear about the contribution that he or she is expected to make to our new NHS and its development through the NHS plan.

I have agreed with the NHS Confederation that we will build on the extensive consultation that it has recently carried out with its members in setting out its new role. In conclusion, we value our non-executive directors. We draw them from the wider community. We would like to put on record our gratitude for the role that they play. Appointments are made on merit, not as a result of political bias.

I hope that the new system will move beyond even the suspicion of bias.

## Asylum Seekers (North-East Lincolnshire)

12.59 pm

**Mr. Austin Mitchell** (Great Grimsby): I shall raise the specific issue of the transfer of use of Springfield Hall in Grimsby to accommodate about 209 asylum seekers and the general issue of the dispersal of an unknown but probably substantial number of asylum seekers to north-east Lincolnshire. That is being done without the consultation of North East Lincolnshire council. Indeed, it found out what was proposed only by accident. South Humber health authority and the education committee were not consulted either. They have all been treated with contempt as a result of what looks to be an administrative cock-up or mess. There has certainly been confusion, and I would like the Minister to say who is responsible for the mess and exactly what is going on.

The shaft of light that has fallen on dispersal procedures as a result of the situation shows neither an attractive picture nor a process that will win good will and consent. I emphasise that this is not a matter of racial hostility or hostility towards asylum seekers in general. Indeed, North East Lincolnshire council has shown the way by welcoming asylum seekers. Early in the process, the local authority made a voluntary offer to accommodate asylum seekers. I think that 50 or 60 have been going through—or 40 at any one time—and they are accommodated in the Towers.

The situation has worked well, as it should have done. Grimsby is a good place in which to be or to live. I hope that the asylum seekers have enjoyed being there and liked it, because they have certainly caused no problems. The reaction to them in Grimsby has been supportive and welcoming, which is in total contrast to the experience in Tetney, which is across the border of civilisation down in Lincolnshire. There have been problems with accommodation provided there, including fighting, racial hostility, the eventual disappearance of some asylum seekers and the closure of accommodation.

That has not been our experience in north-east Lincolnshire, but we share the circulation of a newspaper, so problems in Lincolnshire become headlines in north-east Lincolnshire even though the problems and the fault for them are not ours. I want to make it clear that north-east Lincolnshire is not hostile towards asylum seekers—I am not and nor is the council. The problem is the consequences that flow from the initial and maintained generosity of offering accommodation for asylum seekers. As a result, Grimsby, not Cleethorpes, was designated a cluster without being consulted or asked.

Answers to my parliamentary questions, however, show that we should have been asked. One answer says:

"All accommodation is acquired within defined Cluster Areas the extent and location of which is agreed between the local authorities concerned and National Asylum Support Service".

There was no agreement on the extent and location of the cluster, so that answer is wrong.

The answer to another parliamentary question—I have tabled a substantial number—says:

"The identification of suitable cluster areas for the dispersal of asylum seekers and their dependants is based on research conducted centrally by NASS. Information is obtained from local authorities and other organisations".

No information has been obtained, so I am not sure about the quality of that research. The answer goes on:

"NASS consulted the regional consortium to enable the relevant local authority to have an input into the decision making process."—[*Official Report*, 30 April 2001; Vol. 367, c. 541-42W.]

However, we had no input; North East Lincolnshire council was not consulted in the decision-making process.

More important, North East Lincolnshire council was not told the consequences of any designation as a cluster area. The problem with being a cluster area is that it opens the door to larger numbers. Even if it had been told, the consequences that now apply did not apply in 1999 when the area took the first asylum seekers. Since 1999, private accommodation providers have been brought into the game, financed by NASS—that is, by the Home Office. Clearly, the incentive for private accommodation providers, who have access to the clusters for dispersal, is to buy where property is cheaper and where they can make the biggest profit. That has nothing to do with the suitability of an area; it has to do with local house costs.

One of the joys of living in Grimsby is that our house prices are comparatively low. I will bore you some time, Mr. Deputy Speaker, with the sad tale of the depreciation on my house in Grimsby, which was a heart-breaking experience. Property prices are an incentive for accommodation to be sought by private accommodation providers. Indeed, that will be a mandate.

On 30 April 2001, the Minister told me what neither I nor the local authority knew, that there are now four private contractors and one registered social landlord seeking to purchase property in north-east Lincolnshire. "Seeking to purchase" indicates that the process has gone some way. That does not give the number who have not yet found property, but shows the number who are looking for it. That is disastrous, because north-east Lincolnshire does not fulfil the criteria set down for an area to be designated as a cluster. Those criteria were set down by the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), in answers to parliamentary questions and in a letter to me of 24 April 2001. She says:

"This will ideally include: where available accommodation is located; where a multi-cultural or multi-ethnic population is evident, and where there is scope to develop a voluntary and community support infrastructure. The nomination of Grimsby as a cluster area has been discussed and agreed between the Regional Consortium and NASS."

There is no mention of north-east Lincolnshire playing any role in that. The letter goes on:

"Accommodation Providers who wish to offer a property to NASS which includes more than 6 bedspaces must do so having obtained any relevant planning permission."

However, planning permission has been applied for, but not yet obtained. The letter continues:

"Thereafter, NASS will also consult with Local Authorities via the Regional Consortium".

NASS is clearly involved in the purchase, because it is coming to see the council tomorrow to discuss it. Therefore, NASS is playing a part at an earlier stage than the Minister said.

Grimsby does not fulfil the criteria. It does not have a substantial ethnic population that can provide asylum seekers with supportive networks and contacts. It seems

at times that I am the only immigrant in Grimsby, because a total distaste for Yorkshiremen is advertised from time to time in graffiti—not, I hope, directed at me. There is only a small ethnic population, mainly of professionals. Indeed, the health service in Grimsby would not keep going without the ethnic community. However, many of the applications for education finance have been turned down because Grimsby does not have a sufficiently large ethnic population to qualify for special educational measures. Therefore, it seems ludicrous that Grimsby is supposed to have a large enough ethnic population to accommodate networks and support for asylum seekers, but is considered too small to qualify for anything else. That is nonsense.

I want to know what research has been done on Grimsby and who carried it out. Is it just opportunism that the Home Office is now working on its well-known principle of never giving a sucker an even break? Grimsby volunteered to take asylum seekers in 1999 and now it is facing the problem of accommodation providers coming in because property prices are cheap.

The Minister stated that another criterion was the provision of services and back-up, but health services and education provision are already under strain in north-east Lincolnshire, because of inadequate finance in the past. Neither South Humber health authority nor the education authority has been consulted. Responsibility for the decision to designate Grimsby as a cluster was attributed to the Yorkshire asylum consortium, which issued its own press release three days ago stating that Grimsby is not suitable to take large numbers of asylum seekers. That is a clear statement that the consortium is not happy with the designation, so why was it given?

I want Grimsby's designation as a cluster area to be withdrawn, because it was imposed without consultation and without the consequences being explained. Local good will is needed if the necessary services and support are to be provided, but if a decision to designate an area as a cluster is imposed, that will not be forthcoming. If there is to be harmony and acceptance, there must be consultation and co-operation. Dispersal of sizeable numbers will not work if local opinion is not taken into account; if the local authority and local services are not consulted, they will not willingly co-operate or give their support.

An application has been made for the change of use of part of Springfield Hall, an old hospital which was in existence when I was elected Member of Parliament for the constituency, and which has been used as accommodation for students and nurses. There is an old people's home and a crèche nursery nearby in the hospital grounds, and old people's private accommodation in the surrounding area. It is a quiet area about a mile and a half from the centre of Grimsby and two miles from the more swinging centre of Cleethorpes—south Yorkshire's holiday paradise. There is not much to do in Springfield for 209 asylum seekers. The first that the local authority knew about the matter was the planning application, which caused alarm and concern, especially as one big application indicates that an unknown number of others are in process.

The locals are most upset and I have had a large amount of mail on the subject from my constituents. I was called to a protest meeting on Tuesday which was packed with very angry people. One gentleman at the back kept bawling, "We won't re-elect you." I had to point out that I could not do much for people if they did not re-elect me. However, that is the atmosphere that has been produced.

The only control available is planning. The local authority has to give its planning consent for the change of use; a planning application is pretty well automatic, but it does not consider local reaction or the needs of social services. It might be difficult to take such an application before November, but as substantial money is involved, if it is rejected the purchaser will appeal to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the cost of that appeal will fall on Grimsby. That is no way to decide a major issue which has considerable social repercussions.

The arguments about suitability will be considered only after the planning application. The Minister of State said in answer to earlier questions that local authorities may in some cases advise that particular areas, identified by postcode, may not be suitable for asylum seekers and that that information will be taken into consideration in determining whether to accept accommodation for asylum seekers. However, that consideration will come only after the planning application—which cannot take account of such matters. Suitability should be considered first, not second.

In conclusion—words that my hon. Friend the Minister has been eagerly awaiting —I say that the situation is a totally unacceptable mess into which the local authority should not have been put. It is a cock-up. Who is responsible for it? The Home Office owes us the consideration of reconsidering—indeed, of withdrawing—the cluster status that has been imposed on us without our consent. It is no use approaching such a major and emotive issue as dispersal—right and proper though dispersal is—with a mixture of cock-up and opportunistic grabbing at the cheapest property around. Local good will, support and co-operation from the local authority are needed, as is careful management. That is why the acceptance of 40 or so asylum seekers into my area in 1979, which has been maintained since by careful management and preparation, has been successful.

For a policy to work, we also need to assure local people that we are working on a level playing field. There has been no dispersal to the neighbouring authorities of North Lincolnshire or the East Riding of Lincolnshire, for example. The only safe action seems to be to withdraw the cluster. NASS is seeking new cluster areas. It will not find them if it operates in such a fashion; it will not gather good will from the areas that it is approaching. We want the unsuitable planning application, which is conditional on the cluster status, to be withdrawn and to start over. The local authority has been treated with contempt, which is disgraceful. The people of Springfield have been upset and made resentful. As their Member of Parliament, I cannot justify or even explain what has happened. It is not a policy; it is a farce. I appeal to the Minister to withdraw the cluster status. We are happy to talk about the issue and to do our best to accommodate asylum seekers—voluntarily, and with good will, not in the way that it has been done.

1.17 pm

**The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Charles Clarke):** First, I apologise for being present instead of my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), the Minister of State who deals with asylum matters. She is engaged in parliamentary business in the European Standing Committee discussing common asylum procedures, a matter close to her heart. She has asked me to stand in for her today, which I am happy to do. She had a substantial meeting with my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) on Thursday last week to discuss several of the issues that he has raised. I shall report on the progress made on them.

It is important to place on record our appreciation of my hon. Friend's point that his approach is not informed by racial or other hostility to asylum seekers or by a NIMBY—"not in my backyard"—syndrome. We also entirely accept his fundamental point that it is important for our dispersal policy to be warmly received by the local community. Before dealing with the issues that my hon. Friend addressed, it is appropriate to make a couple of remarks about the overall policy on asylum seekers.

When the Labour party came to office, the responsibility for providing housing for destitute asylum seekers fell on the shoulders of local authorities, in particular those in London and Kent where our main ports of entry are situated. That situation was not helped by the fact that most asylum seekers preferred, for a variety of reasons, to stay in London or other parts of the south-east, which has meant that those areas have had to bear a disproportionate responsibility for our obligations in regard to asylum seekers, with economic implications in certain circumstances of the type that my hon. Friend described.

We decided at an early stage that that situation was not sustainable. We attempted to devise a scheme that would lead to the transfer of responsibility for the support of destitute asylum seekers from local to central Government, and we set up the National Asylum Support Service to administer a support scheme. A feature of the scheme is the provision of housing that is located away from the south-east of England for those asylum seekers who need it.

In order to achieve that, it was necessary to ensure that the National Asylum Support Service had access to a range of accommodation across the country that was ready for use by asylum seekers who turned to the service for support. To that end, in the latter part of 1999, the National Asylum Support Service set in hand the procurement of accommodation from both the private and the public sectors through a tendering process. The aim was to negotiate contracts to provide for the delivery of accommodation in areas to be known as cluster areas—hence, the word "cluster", which my hon. Friend used.

Before going into detail about the situation in north-east Lincolnshire and Great Grimsby, I want to emphasise that I believe that our policy to disperse responsibility among different areas is the right policy. I did not hear my hon. Friend say that he does not agree with that policy, but he might correct me.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I accept that.

**Mr. Clarke:** My hon. Friend commented on the way in which the policy had been put into effect in his local authority and the constituency that he serves. I appreciate his comments, and we will examine the issue.

The approach that we took was to establish the cluster areas where there is suitable and available accommodation, where it is possible for asylum seekers to link with existing communities and where the support of voluntary and community groups can be developed. However, we accepted that at first it might not always be possible to achieve our aims completely, because all the criteria might not be in place before asylum seekers were dispersed. It is also the case that some support structures are unlikely to develop until asylum seekers are actually located in an area.

I now turn to the key point that my hon. Friend raised: the identification of cluster areas and the process by which that happened. The identification of areas relied on research carried out centrally by the National Asylum Support Service and on local and regional information fed through to us by regional consortiums, local authorities, voluntary sector groups and other organisations. The National Asylum Support Service has been circulating, and continues to circulate, information about the areas that we are using and are likely to use and the languages that we need to accommodate.

We understood that the Yorkshire and Humberside regional consortium had nominated Grimsby—there might be an issue for discussion here, to which I shall return in a second—and that Grimsby had been an active member of the Yorkshire and Humberside consortium until at least last June. However, it appears that there was a lack of understanding about what was involved in the process, and we are now addressing that.

The Minister of State, Home Office—my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green—wrote to all Members of Parliament on 25 May 2000, informing them of the cluster areas throughout the country. Grimsby was specifically mentioned at that time. None of that excuses the problems that my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby raised, because a parliamentary letter or a particular process is not enough; it is necessary to have a proper dialogue about what one is trying to do. My hon. Friend said that, in his opinion, such a dialogue did not take place at the appropriate time.

In establishing the regional consortiums, including the Yorkshire and Humberside regional consortium, we tried to provide information. We also consulted on offers of accommodation where the premises would have more than six bed spaces. That is the basic structure that we established.

Turning to the provision of accommodation, we understood from the Yorkshire and Humberside consortium that Grimsby had been identified as a suitable cluster area for accommodation of that type. As I said earlier, we made it clear that we would seek accommodation from both private and public sector

sources. Indeed, when the scheme started in April last year, we had some difficulty with public sector sources. In fact, we had a contract with only Glasgow city council, but I am glad to say that we now have seven contracts with local authority consortiums: Yorkshire and Humberside, Glasgow, north-east England, north-west region, Cardiff city council, west midlands and east midlands. We are now beginning to achieve the balanced approach that had been our policy ambition at the start. Whether it is a question of private or public provision, we tightly monitor standards of accommodation, because that is a particular issue.

Following my hon. Friend's meeting with my hon. Friend the Minister of State, a close conversation is now taking place between the officials of the National Asylum Support Service, the Yorkshire and Humberside consortium and North East Lincolnshire council to try to establish the precise situation. However, it is clear from what my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby said both to my hon. Friend the Minister of State and in this debate that there are serious concerns about the effectiveness of that dialogue and the process by which Grimsby was proposed to be considered by the consortium.

I am not this morning able to give my hon. Friend the clear answers that he has sought, but I can say—I briefed myself on the matter immediately before the debate, so as to have the most up-to-date information—that conversations are actively taking place to try to clarify the situation. I hope that we can be clearer than thus far. I understand that NASS has dispersed only a limited number of people to Grimsby—no more than 10 as at the end of March; and, provisional figures suggest, not more than another 10 by mid-April. It may be of interest to the Chamber that the languages that are especially relevant in Grimsby—because language has been the basis of the cluster—are Albanian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Polish and English. That may be of use to my hon. Friend when considering how best to proceed with the matter.

My hon. Friend mentioned local speculation about Springfield Hall. Given that we were focusing on Grimsby as a cluster area, the policy has been to look for further accommodation and to invite bids from both private and public consortiums to provide it. Springfield Hall has been offered to NASS by one of our private accommodation providers, and NASS has consulted the regional consortium, but, as my hon. Friend accurately said, that cannot proceed unless planning permission is agreed in the normal way. The planning process will be honoured in every particular, as my hon. Friend would want.

My hon. Friend raised an interesting point about the chronological relationship between the offer to NASS of a particular form of accommodation and the planning process. I accept that we need to address that chronological issue, and I assure him that we will do so in policy terms. However, it is the old chicken-and-egg story: if there is to be accommodation, public or private, in a particular locality, that requires planning permission and to be accepted by NASS within the contractual arrangements. It may be that the chronological process is not perfectly established, but I know from my other responsibilities in the Home Office that it is difficult to get such issues exactly right. For example, when locating secure accommodation, the Home Office may view a location as desirable, but it is then for the local planning authority to take its decisions in the proper way. It is not always possible correctly to establish such matters.

Before concluding, I should say that there is also a range of systems of Government support, both in education—I am delighted to see my right hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards in her seat today, because she has pioneered the establishment of a proper system of support for education for asylum seekers throughout the country—and in health. Of course, all such resources would be available to Grimsby.

To return to my hon. Friend's fundamental point, he asked for explanations, assurances and removals, and we have heard clearly what he has said. My hon. Friend the Minister of State heard it at the private meeting held last week; I have heard it and will ensure that his case is passed on in the clear way that he has put it today. We are now explicitly holding conversations to try to disinter the basis of the misunderstanding that he described, and I can tell him directly that we accept his fundamental point that there must be a proper relationship between the local authority and NASS to produce a system that works. That is what we want, and I hope that we can achieve that. That conversation is now taking place.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising such issues and, in particular, for making it clear that it was not a NIMBY anti-asylum seeker, anti-racial point and that Grimsby is ready to play its part in the process. I want to put right the failures that he has described and we are working actively to that end.

## London Borough of Sutton (School Places)

1.29 pm

**Mr. Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): I am pleased to have secured the debate. The London borough of Sutton is right to be proud of its schools. Class sizes are lower than the national average; £130 more than the national average is spent on each pupil and there is a wide range of schools to choose from. One local school is ranked 13th out of 3,873 in England's GCSE league tables, while another is ranked 21st. However, Sutton has become a victim of its own success.

Sutton's schools are extremely popular because of their high quality and diversity. Decisions such as the Greenwich judgment and the Rotherham case mean that Sutton's schools now attract many pupils from outside the borough. I shall be brief, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) wishes to contribute to the debate, but I want to explain why popularity causes such a problem to my constituents who, understandably, wonder why they pay their council tax for a high quality of education, but then cannot get places for their children at the school for which their taxes pay.

In April, I wrote to the London borough of Sutton asking whether it was providing enough secondary school places for year 6 pupils in September 2001. It said that statistically it was, and that there were currently 2,003 pupils in year 6 in Sutton and that 2,483 places were available this September for year 7—a theoretical surplus of 480 or 20 per cent. However, the reality is no. Last year, 747 out-of-borough pupils were in year 7. Of those pupils, 428 attended selective schools that had only 662 places, making up 65 per cent. of the pupils attending selective schools in the borough, so only 35 per cent. of pupils were from inside the borough.

A total of 318 out-of-borough pupils attended community or voluntary aided comprehensives, which is 18 per cent. of the non-selective places. Therefore, out-of-borough pupils account for 30 per cent. of all places so we can expect there to be 267 in-borough pupils without places in local schools this September, a deficit of 10 per cent. of the places needed. That is before taking into account the desire of local parents to send their children to a particular type of school. One aspect about which the area can boast is a wide variety of different schools. There are 14 local education authority schools, of which five are selective, nine are comprehensive, two are Catholic, five are mixed, five are boys only and four are girls only.

While such a choice should be good for local parents, when there is a shortage of places it becomes a further restriction. If a child does not pass the selective entrance exams, is not Catholic, is female and her parents wish her to attend a single sex school, only one school in the borough matches such criteria. When there are not enough places for local children, the likelihood that the child will get into the school that the parents wish for that child reduces sharply even if they manage to get him into one of the borough schools at all.

The reason for the court decisions was to stop children being unable to attend the school across the road because they happen to live just outside the borough that runs the school. I agree that that is sensible. If the standard of schools were similar between adjacent boroughs, the court decisions would not cause any particular problems as pupils from within Sutton would attend nearby schools in adjacent boroughs at a similar rate as pupils who come into Sutton from outside. However, when a borough's schools are especially popular and successful, that is not the case. Surplus places are available in adjacent boroughs, such as 9 per cent. in Croydon and Kingston and 15 per cent. in Merton, but places at those schools are not so popular, so the flow of pupils to outside the borough is far lower than the flow into Sutton.

While Sutton does not have to fork out for the additional pupils in terms of the direct amounts spent on each pupil per year, additional pupils have a knock-on effect on what happens to the local council's resources. LEAs have a statutory duty to provide sufficient schools for the children living in their borough. Therefore, even though the reason why there are not enough school places in the borough is that pupils are coming in from outside the borough, the LEA is still required, in effect, to sell off council assets to increase the capacity of the schools for displaced local pupils. The local authority estimates that Overton Grange secondary school, which had to be built recently to accommodate pupils who could not find places at borough schools, cost £4 million to £5 million, which had to be raised through selling off assets. If there were not as many pupils coming in from outside the borough, however, there would never have been a need to provide that school, as places could have been provided for in the existing borough schools. The cost to Sutton council and local people is therefore £4 million to £5 million.

I received a letter from Sutton borough council, dated 3 April, which states:

> "Sutton has carried out a major expansion of secondary provision since 1997 to cater for this demand. Compared to September 1996, there are an additional 361 places available, with an increase in the corresponding year 6 being only 163. There will be a further expansion of 92 places for September 2002, making a total of 2,575 year 7 places available.
>
> Unfortunately this has not allowed all parents the school of their choice, and in some cases, any Sutton secondary school. This is mainly because Sutton schools, selective and non-selective are so popular. Whenever new places are added, they are taken up in full by pupils, a significant number being from out of the borough."

It continues:

> "The borough only has finance to expand its schools so far there are also planning issues for further expanding schools".

Sutton has also told me that it has experienced problems in seeking planning permission for extensions at Carshalton boys school and Carshalton girls school.

The borough is a victim of its own success—it is legally bound to provide school places, but it is so popular that demand will always exceed supply. Many constituents have approached me about this matter. How is the local council to explain to taxpayers the increasing amount spent on local education when they cannot get their own children into the schools that their council tax is being spent on? My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam has been approached by an even greater number of constituents, and meetings

have taken place in his constituency on the subject. I have had 34 different cases drawn to my attention in the past 12 months, and have written to the LEA and the Minister on numerous occasions. In her most recent response, the Minister wrote:

"Our admissions legislation requires admission authorities in an area to consult each other over their admission arrangements, including neighbouring Local Education Authorities. And School Organisation Plans (SOPs) in which Authorities set out where there is a need to reduce or add places in their area, have to be copied to neighbouring Authorities."

I am afraid to say that copying plans to a neighbouring authority, especially if it is well pleased that Sutton borough is educating children and it is not, is a procedure that is hardly likely to generate a positive response.

The Government's approach seems to be to try to place responsibility for local problems solely on the LEA's back, although the LEA cannot do anything about the system within which it is operating. As the Minister will know, my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) raised that issue in a debate in 1998. He asked what would be done to solve the problem, and was told by the then Minister for School Standards, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), that the problem would be solved when the School Standards and Framework Bill became law, as it would

"give an additional responsibility to individual LEAs to plan the places in their locality, devolving power to local levels so that they can more readily respond to the needs of local people, and parents in particular." —[*Official Report*, 20 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 928.]

Three years later, however, the only effect that that has had in Sutton is to devolve the responsibility to the LEA without providing a solution. So far this year, there have been 263 appeals about secondary school application decisions. The number of appeals has been rising each year since 1998, when the Act was apparently going to solve the problem. Can the Minister explain how, over the past three years, the legislation has helped boroughs such as mine, which have popular schools?

In the letter that I received from the Minister yesterday, she informed me that the Government had no plans to reverse the Greenwich judgment and that they believe that it is not sensible that children should be prevented from attending their nearest school merely because they happen to live in another borough. I have already stated that I agree with them about that. However, it is not sensible that local people should see their council's assets being sold off to build schools to which their children are frequently unable to gain a place.

The Government appear determined to keep the Greenwich judgment. If that is the case, they must find a way to make it work. That is their responsibility, rather than that of local authorities. Their last attempt to make it work seems to have failed. During the debate about what became the 1998 Act, the Minister said that the Government must face the challenge of providing for parental preference with a fair, open and transparent admissions framework, and that the Act would achieve that end. However, many of my constituents have complained that they feel that the system is unfair, not open, and about as clear as mud. Therefore, the Government appear still to be faced with the challenge, and I want to know how the Minister intends to tackle it.

**Mr. Roger Gale (in the Chair)**: By leave of the hon. Gentleman and the Minister, I call the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow).

1.41 pm

**Mr. Paul Burstow** (Sutton and Cheam): I wish to contribute briefly to the debate in the hope that the Minister will be able to address the concerns of several of my constituents who, like those of my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake), have been experiencing difficulties in obtaining places in Sutton's schools, despite being residents of the borough. I am, therefore, grateful to my hon. Friend for securing the debate, and for giving me the opportunity to speak.

As my hon. Friend said, Sutton faces a problem with regard to school places. The cause of the problem is not failure. On the contrary, it has been caused by the success of Sutton's education provision. It has a group of popular and well-regarded schools, to which parents in Sutton and beyond are attracted. The group includes both selective and non-selective schools. As well as a successful group of schools, Sutton has a well-regarded local education authority, which has sustained its investment in education at least in line with the standard spending assessment over the past few years, and which has met all of its obligations in respect of the funding of matched funding initiatives. Recently, it received a positive evaluation from Ofsted.

The problem is that one in three of Sutton's school places is taken by children who live outside the borough. That would be fine, if it were one of the local authorities that has surplus school places. My hon. Friend listed several such authorities, such as Kingston and Surrey, but Sutton is not one of them. Consequently, now, several months into the process of allocating places for transfer to high school, 93 children in Sutton have not secured a school place. I checked that figure with the LEA earlier today. Nineteen of those children live in Worcester Park, where residents have felt under considerable pressure as a result of the way that the system has let them down.

Sutton has tried to build its way out of the problem. Substantial additional capital resources have been invested in its schools: new buildings and classrooms have been constructed, and a new secondary school, Overton Grange, has been built. However, although investment in schools and raising educational standards is welcome, they cannot solve the problem. The LEA cannot simply build its way out of the problem. There are, for instance, limits with regard to planning. Glenthorn is a school that has land that could be expanded upon. However, if it were expanded, that would cause anxiety among many of my constituents who live nearby, as the school is on the border of Merton and it already admits many Merton children. Expansion would, therefore, be likely to benefit not only Sutton children who cannot at present secure places at Sutton schools, but also, under the terms of the Greenwich judgment, Merton children. As a result, investment was made for the benefit not so much of Sutton but of others.

*[Mr. Paul Burstow]*

One cause of Sutton's problems is the operation of the Greenwich judgment. My hon. Friend and I have often raised that issue over the past four years, and in various ways, not least during consideration of the School Standards and Framework Bill. It has the perverse effect of displacing Sutton children from Sutton schools in favour of out-of-borough children. The Government have made it clear that they are not prepared to pass legislation to remove the judgment and its current effects, and I believe that is also the position taken by the Opposition Front Bench. Certainly, that is my understanding from earlier debates.

I ask the Minister, in considering the representations that my hon. Friend and I are making today and have made over the years, to reconsider how the judgment works in areas such as Sutton. Could some flexibility be introduced into the system around admission arrangements, not to prevent children from attending popular schools such as those in Sutton but to give Sutton children the real possibility of being able to go to Sutton schools? Would the Minister at least consider a meeting between Sutton officers and her officials to discuss how it works in practice? I am sure that the officials would be delighted to have such discussions.

Parents in my constituency who have experienced the problem tell me that in February people receive a letter explaining whether their child is getting a school of their preference. Many are disappointed in failing to get the school of their choice; some get an offer, but many do not . They receive a letter stating that no school place is available for their children and that they will receive more information later. That leaves the parents and children in limbo. Parents and grandparents sometimes come to my surgeries not necessarily in tears but deeply upset by that news. I have to tell them that I cannot do much to help them because of the way in which the system works. We try to navigate the appeal system to discover what can be done to achieve the outcome that they want.

The news that they do not have a school place is crushing for many children, because they feel that they have been rejected by the system. The issue is not one of selection but one of rejection through the process that allocates school places. They are told that some surplus places exist in boroughs outside theirs and that they should apply to those schools instead. But parents in those boroughs have voted with their feet, rejected those schools and come to Sutton instead.

The success of schools in Sutton should not mean that Sutton children are displaced to other boroughs. My constituents, like my hon. Friend's, require action on this matter. They hope that the Government will recognise that a genuine problem exists that will not simply go away, and want the Government to work with the LEA to find the flexibility that will solve the problem.

1.47 pm

**The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris)**: First, I acknowledge the sincerity with which the hon. Members for Carshalton and Wallington (Mr. Brake) and for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) have spoken.

As Members of Parliament, we all know how important secondary school choice is for parents. The description that the hon. Gentlemen gave of disappointed parents is one we all know from our advice bureaux. It is often the first time that parents feel out of control of delivering for their children. Up to the age of 11 they have been able to deliver for them: they are in their charge, and they can sort out their lives. Suddenly, when their children reach the age of 11, something happens that makes them feel that they have almost lost control of their children's destiny. I understand that well, but there is no easy solution.

Both hon. Gentlemen would probably accept that under whatever system—whether it is the Tories' free schools and selection, or our proposals, under which every parent is guaranteed a first choice—disappointments will happen. The months during which they wait to discover the outcome are necessarily hairy. In my constituency, at the start of May, there are parents whose children do not have places for September.

There is, however, a fundamental difference of opinion between us on the matter. I do not want to give any ground on that, but I wanted to start my speech by acknowledging the achievements of schools, teachers and pupils in Sutton. They are high-performing schools, because of hard-working teachers, a local authority that supports them well and a learning and supportive community.

I am also grateful for the comments of the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington about class sizes and achievement. I am sure that he is pleased that, compared with four years ago when 37 per cent. of infants in his constituency were in classes of more than 30, only 125 are now in such classes. That has contributed to the rising standards that we have seen in the borough and elsewhere. I want to place on the record the fact that we have not refused any request from Sutton for money to provide places for children who do not have them. The hon. Gentleman did not imply that, but much was said about the capital that had been put in, and I want to make it clear that we have coughed up the money every time since 1997 that the boroughs have come to us to say that they were short of places. As was acknowledged, we have allocated £10.2 million to provide extra secondary and primary places, too.

The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam seemed to view the situation in Sutton differently from the Government. Sutton schools are good; that is why parents want to send their children there. I probably should not say this, but my experience is that parents want a good secondary school place regardless of which borough it is in. If both hon. Gentlemen represented boroughs where schools were poor, they would not have parents queuing to say, "I defend my right to send my child to a school in my borough, despite the fact that it's performing poorly." All schools perform well in Sutton, and parents are probably saying, "I want a Sutton school for my child because I'm a Sutton citizen." However, if we explore the matter further, the issue will have more to do with Sutton schools being good than with their location.

In my constituency, we have both highly and poorly performing schools and a greater difference of performance than in Sutton. My constituency neighbours Solihull, and parents there want good

schools, either in Birmingham or Solihull, rather than the right to go to a Solihull or Birmingham school. If they had to choose between sending their children to an under-performing school one side of the boundary and a high-performing school on the other, I know which they would choose. For the Government, the solution is to stop putting parents in the position of having to choose between high-performing and under-performing schools. That will take time, and I will not bore hon. Members by listing the measures that we have introduced to overcome the problem.

I do not wish to accuse schools in neighbouring areas of under-performing, but let us suppose that I said, "Fair cop, all right, I give in. I will ensure that every Sutton child may have a place in a Sutton school." That would mean that other children would have to go to under-performing schools in other boroughs. Whereas it is the task of the hon. Gentlemen to advance that argument, I hope that they will acknowledge that, as a Government, we could never rest on that solution. Some children will end up going to schools that are apparently unpopular.

The long-term dig on the problem is to ensure that we raise standards in schools throughout the borough so that parents do not mind where their children go. I suspect that if the hon. Gentlemen were in a borough surrounded by other boroughs with well performing schools, they would hear no complaints about children going outside the borough for their education. The argument is one of quality of education. Where we have diversity in quality of education—not the rich diversity in provision, which I applaud—parents will do anything in their power to get their child into a well-performing school, and look to the admissions arrangements to help. I can see how the hon. Gentleman's constituents have ended up believing that, if the admissions arrangements ensured their children a place in Sutton, they would get a high-performing school. However, that is not the answer.

It is not just a question of a school on the other side of the road. The nearest school for some of my constituents is in Solihull, although it might be three quarters of a mile away. The boundary makes sense for the local authority, but it is not always easy. Although it is difficult for some authorities, parents should be able exercise a preference for a school in the locality where they live. The over-subscription criteria that we apply must be fair, just, honest and open.

It would not be fair of me to go into too much detail and it may be a touch petty, but an increasingly large percentage of funding comes to schools from national Government rather than local government. If hon. Members rely too heavily on the argument that Sutton parents have paid for Sutton schools, they get into the argument that essentially the nation's taxpayers increasingly pay for the nation's schools.

**Mr. Brake:** On that specific point, I did not say that Sutton residents paid in the entirety for Overton Grange school. However, I spoke to the authority an hour or so ago and was told that there was a shortfall of £4 million to £5 million that had to be funded by the local authority for a school that would not have been needed had there not been such a significant number of out-of-borough pupils in Sutton.

**Ms Morris:** I am happy to accept the hon. Gentleman's explanation of the financial arrangements. That will not be the first time that a local authority has used its own resources to contribute to capital or revenue. I am sure that he would equally accept in return that, for good or ill, an increasing percentage of both revenue and capital comes from national funding.

I turn now to the core of the matter, which is how one deals with the admission system. There is an obligation on Sutton to ensure that there are sufficient places for children in its borough. It does not have to promise that all those places can be found in the borough. It should share that information with other boroughs and acknowledge that there is an inflow and outflow from schools. That makes it more challenging for local authorities. It would be simple if a borough had the responsibility to provide only for its own children, but I do not think that that would enhance parental preference nationally. It might be a better deal for Sutton parents because they would get the good Sutton schools, but nationally, if we are trying to ensure that parents are not left with the real dilemma that both hon. Members described of not getting their first preference, building walls around boroughs and saying that the schools within them are first and foremost for the children who live there is not a way forward.

We must ensure when we run over subscription criteria that we do so as clearly and accountably as possible. The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington referred to the good Ofsted report that Sutton has just received. One of the things that Ofsted praised was Sutton's admissions arrangements. Although, without examining the details, and I suspect that they are not perfect because nothing is, the Department has no evidence that its admissions system is poor or is failing. I too spoke to the local authority in preparation for the debate. It said that it was at about the same stage as it was this time last year in the allocation of places. It is not more worried than it was then. It expects that by September every child will have a place. I suspect that when one looks at that in total numbers, the number of parents who get their first preference will be roughly similar to the figures across the nation.

We must always look for ways to improve. I looked through the correspondence from the hon. Gentleman. I noted that if one lives in an area, particularly a London borough, where one has to look at schools outside the borough to secure a place, one needs clear access to information about where there are places. I thought that we could both go back to Sutton and neighbouring boroughs and give some assurances to parents about that.

This is one of the issues in Sutton. It is born out of the success of the schools. To ask a Government to change a system where we are doing what we can to give as many parents their first choice of school, regardless of where they live, might satisfy Sutton parents in the short term, but it would not guarantee parental preference in the long term. The real challenge for us all is to make every school an improving or a good school so that parental preference means that—

*It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.*

# Westminster Hall

*Thursday 3 May 2001*

[MRS. SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

## Border Controls

*[Relevant documents: First Report of the Home Affairs Committee, Session 2000-01, HC 163; and the Government's response thereto, HC 375.]*

2.30 pm

*Motion made, and Question proposed,* That the sitting be now adjourned—[*Mr. Dowd.*]

**Mr. Robin Corbett** (Birmingham, Erdington): The report that we are debating is well timed, as asylum and immigration have zoomed almost to the top of the political agenda in the past few months, not only here but elsewhere in the European Union and as far afield as Australia. I had a conversation in the House with the Home Affairs Minister of Australia about the matter, and although it comes from a different source in that country, that shows the scale of the problem.

My colleagues and I took part in discussions on the issue in Brussels, Rome and Stockholm, as well as in those places that we visited in the course of our inquiries, including Budapest. The statistics are stark. The estimated number of illegal immigrants coming into the European Union has risen from 40,000 in 1993 to 500,000 last year. That is an astonishing increase. Of those who apply for asylum in the EU, one in six apply in the United Kingdom. We are seventh out of 15 in the European league table for the number of asylum applications per head of population. As we note in the report, family and language links are important for those who decide to apply for asylum here.

We said early on in the report—it hardly needs saying, but I shall say it anyway—that it is right that there should be a proper, wide public debate about immigration and asylum and the policies that surround the subject. Paragraph 22 of the report states:

"We acknowledge that such debate should be conducted in a sensitive fashion, and we note that the United Kingdom has a long and honourable record in providing refuge for those genuinely fleeing persecution."

I am pleased to note that the invitation was picked up by *The Sun* in a series of articles. I commend the general tone and content of those articles, and the balanced way in which the newspaper reported conflicting and opposing views. In an opinion piece on Tuesday 1 May, under the heading "Asylum facts", it wrote:

"The debate over illegal asylum seekers in this country is far more complicated than many think."

That is a fair statement, and I hope that it will encourage readers of *The Sun* and everyone else to accept that as the starting point for the debate.

Having handed out the bouquet, I shall now deliver the brickbat. On 1 February, when reporting the results of our inquiry into border controls, the *Daily Mail* said that the report branded Britain as

"a soft touch for bogus asylum seekers".

No phrase like that appears in the report. The newspaper continued:

"The report by the influential committee is a huge embarrassment for the Government, even though its findings were watered down by the Labour majority."

That comment is totally untrue: it was sucked out of someone's finger. I wrote to the editor the same day, but I did not see the letter printed in any of the next day's editions, stating that those statements were both "tendentious and wrong". I added:

"The unanimous all-party report contains a balanced assessment of the realities of mass migration and records the measures which have been taken to deter illegal entrants—including greater resources for the Immigration Service, civil penalties and quicker decision-making on asylum applications. To say that the Committee has branded Britain "a soft touch for bogus asylum seekers" is a complete misrepresentation and does not contribute at all to a sensible debate about these complex issues, against the background of the UK's long and honourable tradition of giving asylum to those genuinely escaping persecution."

I am sorry that the *Daily Mail* did not—as far as I could tell—see its way to publishing that letter, given the prominence given to its attempt to deal with the report the previous day.

There were three important images behind our report. The first was an X-ray photograph taken by a scanning machine of some people outlined in the back of a lorry, sitting on crates of bananas. It came from a brochure about scanning equipment and it demonstrated vividly the conditions that people are prepared to tolerate to come to this country. However, it also showed how technology could be used to deter and detect those people.

Throughout the inquiry, we asked about the use of scanners and other modern technology. Until last Wednesday, we were led to believe that they could be used by Customs and Excise only in the detection of drugs, tobacco and explosives. Although the scanners show up the presence of human beings, we were told that they could not be used specifically for that purpose because of the health risks involved. We were not totally convinced of that, since I had been told by one of the manufacturers of the devices that they are in place on many of the borders of the United States, and they are also used to screen visitors to the White House. I could not believe that anybody in the United States would take risks with people's health in those circumstances.

I am glad to say that my disappointment was overcome by an announcement made in the House last Wednesday. I want to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. Even if we were slightly disappointed in the Government's response to the part of our report that deals with scanners, we were delighted last week when it was announced that £9 million had been made available to buy five X-ray scanners to help to detect and deter illegal immigrants at points of entry to the UK. Some of the scanners will be deployed in France to try to detect people and prevent them from boarding trains and ferries crossing the straits of Dover, and that highlights an important conclusion of our report, the most effective recommendation of which is that border controls should be applied when people board the vehicles bringing them to England—the ferry, the train or the plane—rather than on arrival in the United Kingdom.

*[Mr. Robin Corbett]*

There have been some very welcome developments with the French. I will say quite openly, because we have said it in the report and elsewhere, that members of the Committee were bitterly disappointed when we visited the port of Calais and found it to be almost totally insecure. Indeed, on the way from a meeting with the president of the local chamber and other dignitaries, who were explaining all that they were going to do to secure the port, we passed a group of three or four obvious asylum seekers making their way towards the ferry, probably in the hope of jumping on the back of a lorry. That was taking place under the eyes of the authorities, if the authorities had had their eyes trained on it.

It is good to know that steps have been and are being taken at Calais. They are long overdue, but very welcome none the less. I also welcome the increased co-operation through, for example, the introduction of controls in the Gare du Nord to screen those boarding the Eurostar to Waterloo. It has taken a long time, but it illustrates the point that we can only move as fast as we can persuade somebody else to move. That is one of the frustrations of our job, on all levels, because it is obvious what needs to be done, but lots of bureaucracy has to be gone through.

The second poignant image from our inquiry was that of a huge warehouse, which had been used during the construction of the channel tunnel, in featureless countryside just outside Calais on a grey day. That is the Sangatte centre, used by the Red Cross to offer a temporary home to hundreds of people, many of them young single males wanting to come to this country. Desperate people from all over the world are drawn to that place as a jumping-off point for a hazardous crossing of the channel by one means or another. The absurdity of that struck us throughout our year-long inquiry. Everyone knows why those people are there and that they will repeatedly attempt to smuggle themselves aboard a lorry and on to a ferry to make their way to the United Kingdom, but in the past, little or nothing has been done to try to deter them.

That does no one any good, but it highlights another aspect of the matter, which I mentioned when I began the debate. No single action by this country can deal with the issue; it is something for the whole EU to tackle. Encouraging progress has been made and the United Kingdom can take certain action, because of our island nature, but the problem is certainly Europe-wide and in many senses worldwide. The relative simplicity of international travel in a world where there are still too many despotic and tyrannical regimes makes it easier for people to take the hard decision to leave their home country for safety or a better way of life.

The third image is of a port that we visited in the south of Spain, Algeciras, the landing point after crossing the straits, which can be seen all the way across the water on a clear day. The vehicles from the ferries are routinely stopped and searched and we were present when the rear engine panel on a coach was opened. I am sure that the incident was not staged. There before our very eyes, snuggled under the engine and, I should think, half baked to death, was an illegal immigrant. A machine for detecting heartbeats was in use in a building for vehicles to be driven through, and that had alerted the officials to his presence. That incident showed the superiority of some countries over us in the use of technology to deal with these issues.

Perhaps the worst image, which we all still remember—and in a sense the worse for being an imagined one—is that of the 58 Chinese people found dead in the back of a lorry in Dover last June. We met one of the immigration officers who were on duty on the night the dreadful discovery was made. I suppose that the event and the publicity that it received all over the world focused attention here and throughout Europe on the pressures of migration and highlighted the networks of people smugglers who make a living out of that appalling, evil trade.

**Mr. David Winnick** (Walsall, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the biggest problems facing Britain and our European partners concerns how effectively we can deal with criminal gangs, such as drugs-related gangs, who show no concern or compassion for their victims? If those people are able to enter Britain illegally, no doubt every pressure will be exerted on them, or on their relatives back home, to obtain money. The evil criminal gangsters should be exposed in every way. The media would be doing a positive job if they contributed to that.

**Mr. Corbett:** My hon. Friend is right. An example from this end of the country concerns four members of the same family, engaged in a small way in farming and a major way in haulage, who have recently been jailed after being convicted of smuggling illegal immigrants into this country. Hon. Members will recall that raids were recently made in Southampton. Although I suppose that it is silly to expect criminals to have consciences, one of the astounding aspects of the matter is that people could knowingly do such a thing—deliberately and for gain break the law and subject people to all kinds of misery.

We have evidence that some people smuggled into the country illegally in this way are sold into what is akin to the slave trade. They dare not go to the authorities, they are paid very low wages and they live in the most dreadful conditions. I hope that the Minister will tell us more about that. I believe that there are plans to create a team—I have forgotten its name—that will work its way along the travel routes to find the "Mr. Bigs" behind this evil business. Other measures can be taken, and I shall mention them in a moment.

The lorry in which those Chinese people were found dead in Dover was opened not because there were legions of officers on duty that night with nothing to do, but on the basis of intelligence. With all but a handful of the 4,000 or so lorries a day coming through Dover, never mind the millions of travellers coming through major airports such as Heathrow, there are no problems at all. It would be a waste of resources to create systems to check all those movements. They are not the ones that we should be bothered about. We should concentrate on those that give cause for concern. That means the gathering and analysis of up-to-date intelligence. Another point that we make strongly in the report is that such intelligence should be shared among the agencies that operate separately at the borders, although I acknowledge immediately that co-operation in that area is increasing.

Those points are worth remembering, especially by those who think that there are easy and instant answers. There are not. "Send them back, dead or alive" is not a solution; life is not that simple.

The report addressed five or six major issues. We wanted to find out why demand for asylum in the United Kingdom had risen and how it compared with what has happened in other European countries, and to evaluate the effectiveness of controls at UK borders by the responsible agencies. We examined whether border controls would be enhanced by the creation of a single border agency, as exists in other countries, and we wanted to see whether there were more efficient ways in which the UK could meet its international obligations to those coming here to apply for asylum. We were especially interested in investment in modern technology.

We found no radical solutions, and certainly no simple ones that could, by themselves, deal with this complex issue. As for the effectiveness of border controls, the agencies are well organised and increasing in number. We learned that not only from the governors, as it were, but from the rank and file immigration and Customs and Excise officers, who had been through some lean times and who welcomed the new investment and the extra colleagues who were to join them in their important work. However, in some areas, modern technology, as long as it works, would be of immense assistance to the people who are doing this extremely difficult job. Everywhere that we went in the UK, we were deeply impressed by the commitment of those carrying out those duties. They were completely immersed in what they were doing, and that was reflected in their morale—one could almost feel the bubbles in the air. The situation was enhanced by the recognition that new investment was on the way in the shape of extra people and better equipment.

We concentrated on border controls to deter and detect illegal immigration. However, that quickly led us to examine the work of Customs and Excise, particularly that relating to tobacco and drug smuggling, and, to a lesser extent, that of the police. Some lessons can be learned from that. It is worth recalling that, in the case of the Chinese found in the lorry in Dover, it happened to be customs who stopped the lorry. They had little or no idea of what was in the back when they did—no one in his wildest dreams could have anticipated what they found. We suggest that a single border agency should be developed in the longer term. While that is being considered, however, agencies at the ports of entry must have increased scope to work closely and effectively, which they are doing at present.

I want quickly to illustrate one of the issues. Someone in the immigration service—I think that it was at Dover—told me, "Yes, of course we should share intelligence, but we've got to have confidence in the person in the other service with whom we're sharing it." People do not want to feel that they are simply scattering information on the wind. A lot will depend on the relationships between people on the ground. They must respect each other's different skills and experiences and, on that basis, feel that others can be trusted with sensitive information. We welcome the Government's moves to give some immigration officers extra powers, in particular those announced on 25 April. That should help.

As to why demand for asylum in the United Kingdom has risen, there are some obvious pull factors. We had an empire. When I was a little lad at school—I am going back into deep history—we had little scented cards for something called Empire day. We used to pay a penny for them, and the money would go into a fund to help children in other parts of the empire. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) will not remember this, but when we looked at a map of the world, many parts of it were coloured pink, which meant that we owned them, as it were. I am not making light of the issue, because those links are important. In many countries, we left our language behind. We are proud of the fact that English is the language of the net, and we must not be surprised if it then becomes a pull factor, because many people in the world speak English.

The other factor that we must recognise is strong family links. People who flee their countries to apply for asylum and illegal immigrants who are seeking a better way of life will, if they have family links and speak the language, find this country much more attractive than one whose language they do not speak and which they might have difficulties learning.

**Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The Chairman of the Committee makes a good point. Does he follow it through to the same conclusions as I do? First, people who start their asylum-seeking journey from within the old empire, the new Commonwealth or those parts of the English-speaking world which formerly had links with Britain, might well want to end up here, irrespective of where they go first. Therefore, it is not reasonable to say that they must always limit their aspirations to an application in the first country in which they arrive, or the third country under the Dublin convention. Secondly, is it not reasonable to assume that Britain might have to accept a relatively greater burden because of the greater number of countries that have links to us rather than to other European Union states?

**Mr. Corbett:** I am not sure about the last point. A lot will depend on the state of the economy and the jobs market. Last September, my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office, the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), tried to open up a sensible debate on the subject, and the responsible Minister in Spain told us that his country was 200,000 people—200,000 heads and pairs of hands—short for the jobs that needed doing in agriculture and construction. There is a real debate to be had about that.

On the hon. Gentleman's first point, the Committee came to the conclusion that it wanted the asylum application made in the first safe country, certainly as regards the EU. However, the application need not be for that country. If someone leaves Afghanistan for Pakistan and wants to apply for asylum in the United Kingdom for family reasons, we do not see why his asylum application should not be dealt with in Pakistan. Issues follow on from that. Pakistan is not the only country that has turned down such applications. We have tried to say that the EU, and others outside it, should stand ready to assist countries that border states from which large numbers of people flee for their lives. At the moment, the policy forces people to use people smugglers and cross half the planet in conditions that

*[Mr. Corbett]*

pose great risks to themselves and their families. That does not make sense, which is why we want agreement in the European Union on the implementation of a common policy on the subject. I think that my hon. Friend the Minister will say that things are on the move on that score.

There has been some evidence of what is known as "asylum shopping", when people weigh up what is good and bad and which country is best. I recall a story that everyone from Romania who landed in the UK and applied for asylum was immediately given £800. I do not know where the figure came from, but presumably someone involved in people smuggling put the story round to develop the business. Such legends are in no one's interests.

**Mr. Charles Wardle** (Bexhill and Battle): The pressure on immigration into this country, especially the great volume of asylum applicants, does not come from former Commonwealth countries, those that the hon. Gentleman described as the old empire when he mentioned Queen Victoria's birthday, Empire day.

**Mr. Corbett:** Yes, the hon. Gentleman is right. Countries with evil regimes and civil wars top the table—Iran and Afghanistan spring immediately to mind. No one would claim that Iraq was democratic. Applications from Sri Lanka have increased because of its continuing civil war. The United Kingdom is not without links to most of those countries, although they may go back a bit. Such countries are bound to top the table, which is what makes it difficult to predict numbers. Increasing numbers of people will want to leave their homelands and go somewhere safer with more respect for human rights, if their countries have civil unrest, civil war and vile regimes that deny human rights and worse, as in Iran.

We considered the effectiveness of current controls at UK borders, against the background that the number of illegal immigrants estimated to have come into the UK has more than doubled, rising from about 10,000 in 1995 to more than 20,000 in 1999. The number of clandestine entrants more than tripled, increasing from 5,000 in 1997 to more than 15,000 two years later. Three quarters of illegal immigrants now arrive in a clandestine way.

In a sense, that is no surprise, but it makes another point about the UK. One might have thought that our borders were easier to defend than those of our EU partners with land borders. However, that is not the case, because some people are willing to take money and smuggle people in in the back of lorries. The majority of people in jail in France for such offences are United Kingdom citizens, mainly minor criminals from Kent and that part of the country. That is food for thought for everyone in the Chamber. People used to get under, over and all around the iron curtain when it was in place. It is virtually impossible totally to seal a border, but one must obviously take a stab at it.

We know from the amount of tobacco—let alone drugs—being smuggled of the effort involved. Some years ago, my colleagues and I went on a trip to the United States and witnessed the efforts being made there to deter drug smuggling; everything short of nuclear weapons was used. We discovered on that trip that when the papers report that customs have been successful in seizing heroin with a street value of £20 million, it is viewed by some as a sign not of success but of failure, because customs, by and large, get hold of about the same percentage of the stuff coming in, so the bigger the haul, the bigger the amount being smuggled.

We must get smarter at solving the problem of drugs and tobacco smuggling, and of the smuggling of people, putting controls in place at the ports from which people embark to come to the United Kingdom and on the long and winding road used by people-smugglers from the other side of the world.

As the figures, when they are available, will show, one effect of tightening the controls at Dover and Calais will be to displace some of that traffic to Zeebrugge and Harwich, for example. That is bound to happen. I spoke to an airline liaison officer who had spent three or four weeks in Budapest on a voluntary basis trying to get airlines to tighten their procedures for verifying passports and travel documents. He had a telephone call from Bucharest, where he had been previously, saying, "You did good work here, but now you have turned your back. It is as bad as it was before you came here." People are not playing around; there is lots of money to be made from smuggling.

A single border control agency has been discussed. Someone driving off a ferry in Portsmouth, for example, can be stopped and searched by three separate officials—Customs, immigration and police—and we heard stories of people who had that experience, although not at Portsmouth. The division of agencies risks wasting resources because of duplication, gaps in communications and so on. The Government do not accept the proposal, but our recommendation for a single frontier force was designed to overcome the inefficiencies of three separate agencies operating at ports, not to create a new body for its own sake, but to show that cost savings could be achieved by such a unification and put to better use across the board. Kent police, for example, put forward the idea of a single force but the police border control budgets are spread over 50 separate forces, so they will show less significant savings.

On the use of modern technology, I was pleased with the Home Secretary's announcement last week of an extra £9 million. It is a good feeling, especially as the Government's response to that part of the Committee's report was less enthusiastic than we would have liked. We felt that we had a substantial point, which has now been acknowledged by the Home Secretary. That was gracious of him, and I hope that the Minister will convey our thanks to him. I hope that my hon. Friend will acknowledge the help of our reports in getting the money from the Treasury when she speaks to her colleagues in that Department. I am proud that there was a positive and quick response to our report. I hope that that is a good sign that the work of Select Committees across the board will be taken a little more seriously than in the past and that the Government not only listen, but understand and respond to suggestions made by those important Committees.

There was a little surprise in the report. None of the evidence from the Home Office told us about the three separate pieces of research on asylum claims. Will the Minister say how they are progressing and when she

expects reports on them to be published? It would also be helpful if she could say whether the new scanners announced last week by the Home Secretary will be operated by joint immigration and customs teams or by one service at a time. That is important because, apart from detecting illegal immigrants, the scanners should act as a visible deterrent. The mere existence of scanning equipment at airports deters some people. We also very much welcome the announcement about the promised mobile fingerprint equipment, although perhaps more for the detection and removal of people who are already in the country illegally rather than at ports of entry.

I pay tribute to the members of the Home Affairs Committee, because the report could, frankly, have been split along party lines. We avoided that, but not by fudging the issues, all of which were debated openly and at some length. We were lucky enough to be able to agree on a form of words to which we could all sign up, which is important. I do not pretend that we can always do that, but one of the system's strengths is that, when agreement is possible, it gives a report much more weight that it would otherwise have.

We have no doubt that the UK has, as I said, a long and honourable record of offering asylum to people seeking to flee for their lives from persecution in their home countries. Nothing should be done to take away from that, but effective steps can be taken the better to deter illegal immigrants and people who use the asylum system without just cause because it is seen as a convenient way of getting their feet on UK soil. I understand that that is not known until cases are investigated.

That is why we especially welcome the effort being made to review, revise or replace—I am not sure which—the Dublin convention. There is agreement all round that the convention—let me put this kindly—does not work as it was originally intended to when it was agreed and signed. It was supposed to facilitate the return of those whose asylum claims were refused, but that has not proved to be the case. I think that, somewhere in the evidence, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said that there were many times when he could not fully understand what the Dublin convention was about. Work is being done to clarify and revise it, which is welcome.

The Committee's view is that it is important for us to consider asylum alongside the need for each EU member state to have a clear and stated immigration policy. In other words, they should set out the classes of immigrants, with the relevant skills and experiences, whom they are prepared to admit for settlement in their countries. It came as a surprise to learn, for example, that the Italian Government had got round to doing that only in the past two years. That is part of the jigsaw. Another part is the general agreement, certainly in this country, that EU development aid is not sensibly or effectively applied. We would like a much more coherent use of that in the countries from which most illegal immigrants and asylum seekers come—a key to which is giving people more and better reasons to stay in their homeland, particularly where there is a prospect of improving the economy. It bears repetition to say that there is a huge head of steam in the European Union to achieve agreement on common policies on immigration and asylum and all the procedures around that.

I attended a meeting in Stockholm of those who chair home affairs and justice committees in the member states of the European Union and was astounded at the strength of support on that issue. Indeed, people wanted to go further up the road than any of us here would want in having the European Union rather than national Governments implement those policies. I assure the Committee that I did not go anywhere near the end of that road.

This is likely to be the last time that I speak in Parliament, if what we all expect to happen on 7 June happens. We call the first speech that we make in the House a maiden speech, and I was trying to find a way of describing the last speech that we make. That was leading me into some politically incorrect terms, which I shall avoid.

I should like to end by thanking my colleagues on the Home Affairs Committee for their help with the report. As I said, it had serious potential to divide us but we managed to avoid that. I also thank the Clerk and his staff; Angus McIntosh, our special adviser; the Minister; my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary; officers at all levels in the various services of the immigration and nationality directorate; the immigration service; Customs and Excise; the National Criminal Intelligence Service; the Association of Chief Police Officers, and all the other bodies.

It has been a deep honour to chair the Home Affairs Committee. We have worked well together and done a first-class job of work on the report—and on other reports. I do not single out that Select Committee as special; all Select Committees are productive. However, the inquiries on which we have been engaged have had a real influence on the outcomes and on the Government's decisions. I am pleased and privileged to have been associated with that.

3.13 pm

**Mr. Michael Howard** (Folkestone and Hythe): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett). I wish him well in his retirement. He can look back on his career with much satisfaction, particularly in regard to his work as Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee. I congratulate him and the Committee on the report, which sheds much light on a difficult and important area of public policy and makes many extremely useful and well-judged recommendations, with most of which I agree. I do not agree with all of them, however—or with all of its judgments.

To be reasonably brief, I shall confine my remarks to the areas on which I am not in complete agreement. I shall start with what is almost an incidental, throw-away judgment made quite early in the report, at paragraph 18, where the Committee considers what it calls the "pull factors" relating to asylum. It states:

"Even those"—

that is, those pull factors—

"which can be affected by policy decisions within the UK cannot be changed in a short time."

That sentence can be understood in several ways, at least one of which is not true. History demonstrates that it is not true. When I was privileged to have responsibility

*[Mr. Michael Howard]*

for such matters, action was taken that had a dramatic impact on the number of asylum seekers. In 1995, the number of people seeking asylum in the United Kingdom was 43,965. In 1996, the last full year of the Conservative Government, the number fell by approximately 40 per cent. to 29,640. If the comparisons are made on a month-by-month basis, which is actually more accurate, the numbers fell by 50 per cent.

The decrease was directly the result of legislation for which I was responsible and which the previous Government brought forward, and the associated benefit changes introduced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), who was then the Secretary of State for Social Security. Last year's figure for asylum seekers was 76,000.

Those figures give the lie to those who, like the Liberal Democrats—the Government do not take this view—say that nothing can be done to influence the number of asylum seekers. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) shakes his head. I refer him to an article in my local newspaper, the *Folkestone Herald*, which was written by his leader just a few weeks ago. It says that nothing can be done to influence the number of people who apply for asylum in the United Kingdom. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to rise to defend his leader, I am happy to give him the opportunity to do so.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** The right hon. and learned Gentleman made a claim about the reduction of numbers at the end of the Conservative Administration. His claim is correct, and I do not disagree with it. However, he has not proved that there is a direct link between such a reduction and the policy decisions and legislation that is passed in this country. Research has been referred to in the debate; I know of no research that shows that connection. It seems simplistic to say that what we do in this country is a greater relevant factor in determining the pull or the lack of it than factors outside this country over which we have little control.

**Mr. Howard:** With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, that is a ludicrous point. The change in the number of applications followed directly on the changes in the law that we introduced. One does not need to carry out research to see the connection; it is there for all to see.

If one goes to Sangatte, as I did the other day, and talks to the people there who are waiting to enter this country illegally, it becomes clear beyond doubt that people choose the country in which they apply for asylum. I was told at Sangatte that the choice is based largely on the amount of money and the type of accommodation that they expect to get in the country in which they apply for asylum. There is a direct link between those factors and the numbers that apply. It is true that if the Government make changes in policy, as we did, the numbers will decline.

It was not only in the numbers applying that the previous Government had a good record. The number of applications decided rose by 50 per cent., and the backlog fell by 10,000. We were making real progress in bringing the problem under control. However, that is not the whole story, as the Minister will doubtless be quick to point out. Shortly before the 1997 general election, the courts did what, alas, they so often do: they intervened to sabotage the policy.

**Mr. Hughes:** They upheld the law.

**Mr. Howard:** I will tell the hon. Gentleman exactly what happened. The courts held that because our legislation had not expressly and specifically repealed certain sections of the National Assistance Act 1948—an Act that had largely fallen into disrepute in the light of the rise in the national social security system, which had been introduced in the intervening period to deal with benefit problems—they still applied. That, of course, brought in new responsibilities for local authorities, which had not been the intention of Parliament, and largely sabotaged the policy that we had introduced.

That matter could easily have been put right. All that was needed was a one-sentence Bill making it clear that the National Assistance Act 1948 should not apply. That was the previous Government's original intention, and that is what I would have endeavoured to do had I returned to the Home Office after the election. It is something that the present Government could easily have done. I believe that, had that been done, there would not have been the exponential increase in the number of asylum seekers that has since taken place.

The present Government did nothing for three years. They then introduced the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, and I wished them well with that Act. I hoped that it would succeed, but alas, it has completely failed. The Home Secretary told the Home Affairs Committee that the Government had inherited collapse and chaos, which is what they always say, but that is far from the truth. On the contrary, they inherited a situation in which the problem had been brought under control. There had been a hiccup because of the intervention of the courts, but that could easily and quickly have been put right.

That is one of the false alibis on which the Government rely in that context. The other is the Dublin convention. We should understand the intention behind the Dublin convention and what the present difficulties are. The Dublin convention was agreed in 1990, against an entirely different background in relation to asylum. Asylum was not the problem in 1990 that it has since become. However, we should not be too critical of the authors of the Dublin convention. The Home Secretary, in his evidence to the Committee said:

"This is an area where I am convinced we would benefit by a greater degree of co-operation with our EU partners and by there being a greater degree of commonality between the approach which each EU partner adopts".

That was the whole purpose of the Dublin convention. Indeed, in the context of that convention, the Committee's recommendation 21 states:

"The basic principle should be that asylum applications should be made in the first EU country reached. Any subsequent EU country to which the applicant travels should have the right to insist that the application for asylum be made in the previous country, except in those cases where the applicant has valid grounds, such as a visa or immediate family already settled, for making the application in the subsequent country."

That, too, is exactly what the Dublin convention provides for. So what the Home Secretary and the Committee now say should happen is what the Dublin convention set out to do.

**Mr. Martin Linton** (Battersea): I am glad of the opportunity to put questions to the right hon. and learned Gentleman on the subject, since he was so intimately involved in drawing up the Dublin convention.

**Mr. Howard:** No, I was not. That was in 1990.

**Mr. Linton:** I mean that the right hon. and learned Gentleman was involved in administering it. Although it states that asylum applications should be dealt with in the first country of arrival, it fails to establish a method by which to prove what that country is. People arriving in Italy or France can subsequently enter the UK and refuse to say where they entered the Schengen area, leaving this country's immigration authorities with the impossible task of proving it. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that that is a major flaw of the Dublin convention?

**Mr. Howard:** Let me make it clear that I had nothing to do with the drafting of the convention, which was agreed in 1990, or with its administration, because it did not come into force until after the 1997 general election. With great respect to the hon. Gentleman, how could the Dublin convention possibly deal with the issues that he raised?

Of course it is difficult when people arrive in this country and refuse to say where they first entered the EU or where they should have applied for asylum. How can a convention deal with people's behaviour in that respect? The convention laid down the principles that ought to govern the way in which people apply for asylum in their respective countries. No one would disagree that the convention is not working properly. As Mr. Boys Smith told the Select Committee:

"We wish it were quicker and slicker".

and so do I. It should work more effectively; it should achieve what it was intended to achieve; and it should do what the Home Secretary and the Select Committee say it should do. If the convention were working properly, it would reflect their aspirations.

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): It might complete the equation if I remind the Chamber that during the passage of the Immigration and Asylum Act in 1996, the Opposition home affairs spokesman, the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson), said:

"all of us who have been involved for the past two months and more in Committee know that the Dublin convention makes sense"—[*Official Report*, 21 February 1996; Vol. 272, c. 447.]

It was not a matter of party dispute then, and it should not be now.

**Mr. Howard:** I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for bringing that to my attention. It reinforces everything that I have said.

When the convention came into force in the summer of 1997—under the present Government—and it became clear that it was not working as intended, the Government, who had nearly four years to do so, should have built on their supposedly excellent and wonderfully close working relationships with their EU partners and co-operated to ensure that it did so.

I am aware that there is a presumption against purely partisan attacks in this Chamber, but we must discuss these serious matters robustly, and I must point out that part of the Home Secretary's evidence to the Home Affairs Committee was particularly disreputable. It was a pretty shoddy attempt to rewrite history in respect of the so-called "gentleman's agreement" between the United Kingdom and France that obtained under the previous Government. It allowed us to return quickly to France people applying for asylum at the Channel ports who had obviously come from France. That significant factor made a difference in the number of people who stayed to apply for asylum in this country.

In evidence to the Home Affairs Committee, the Home Secretary on page 61 of volume II, said:

"Yes. We used to be able to do that"—

return people to France—

"under a gentleman's agreement which was in existence, and that gentleman's agreement still exists in respect of immigration—people who have been refused leave on an immigration basis and who do not claim asylum. Although it was not perfect, it worked pretty well. The extraordinary thing is that Dublin, which was signed up to by the previous administration in 1990, came into force in October 1997 and as night follows day, sadly, led to the abolition of that gentleman's agreement, and it has made matters worse. That is where we are. I have looked at whether we can re-establish that gentleman's agreement by doing other things, but if you see it from France's point of view, they say, 'Well, the United Kingdom agreed Dublin, we have all signed up to it, we have all ratified it.'"

Nothing in the Dublin convention prevented the continuation of that agreement, which could, and should, have continued after the convention came into force.

**The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche)** *rose*—

**Mr. Howard:** The Minister would be well advised to wait before intervening.

In the Home Secretary's next answer to the Committee Chairman, he made it crystal clear that there was no reason for the agreement not to continue. After he had said that France would mention that we all signed up to Dublin, the Chairman asked the Home Secretary:

"So did Germany and Spain presumably?"

The Home Secretary replied:

"There is a bilateral agreement between Germany and Denmark by which people are returned across the border, but it is infinitely easier to do that at a border crossing than it is across the Channel."

Germany and Denmark are both signatories of the Dublin convention, and are bound by it in the same way as the United Kingdom and France. If the fact that they are both signatories does not mean that they cannot return people to each other, the Dublin convention cannot be a basis for preventing the previous agreement between the United Kingdom and France from continuing to operate in the same way as that between Germany and Denmark.

**Mrs. Roche:** Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that part of the agreement—when he

*[Mrs. Roche]*

was Home Secretary, I think—between the previous Conservative Government and the French Government was that the gentleman's agreement would last only until the Dublin convention came into force?

**Mr. Howard:** That is not my understanding, but if the Minister could show me some document to that effect, I would like to see it.

The sequence of answers that I have read out makes it clear that there is no reason for such an agreement not to co-exist with the Dublin convention. If they co-exist between Germany and Denmark, they may do so between the United Kingdom and France.

Further on in the Home Secretary's evidence, he went into great detail about the closeness of his relationship with his opposite numbers in France. At the top of page 63 of volume II of the evidence, a list of French Ministers' names is trotted out, and the frequency of their meetings with those Ministers is lovingly embellished. Undoubtedly, they were wonderful meals out; I like to think that I had good relations with my French opposite numbers over equally excellent meals. The difference was that my relationship produced an agreement between the two countries that worked and enabled us to return to France those who should have applied for asylum in France, but who wished to do so in the United Kingdom.

I have made my two principal points, but I should like to make two or three more short points before I sit down. First, I want to comment on one of the Government's exercises in spin, which I was sorry to see had been wholly accepted by the Committee Chairman. He referred to the position of the United Kingdom in relation to other members of the European Union and the number of asylum seekers per head of population of the receiving country. That is an entirely new measuring device; it is an entirely new piece of spin devised by the Government.

I cannot see any greater reason for measuring asylum by reference to the numbers per head of the receiving population than by reference to the acreage of the receiving country or the number of take-aways it has. It is a completely irrelevant criterion. The point is simply which country has the greatest number of applications. Last year, for the very first time, there were more applications for asylum in the United Kingdom than in any other EU member state.

**Mr. Corbett:** I do not want to get in the way of the right hon. and learned Gentleman's argument, but paragraph 8 on page viii shows that the Refugee Council suggested measuring the number of asylum applicants against head of population. If he thinks about the matter, he will realise that it is possible to get a wholly disproportionate picture of a small country with a tiny population, and a massive misrepresentation of the real position. That is why we recorded the measurement.

**Mr. Howard:** I am happy to accept the attribution of this new method of measurement to the Refugee Council, but I do not accept the second part of the hon. Gentleman's intervention. The truth is simple. Not until last year was the United Kingdom the country in which more applications for asylum were made than any other European country. In view of the geography of the UK in relation to the rest of the European Union, the countries of origin of asylum seekers and the fact that most of them have to travel through other EU member states before they reach the UK, that is extraordinary. One would not expect more people to apply for asylum in the UK than anywhere else unless the pull factors were such as to cause them to do so—and that is precisely what is happening.

I hope that the Minister can give me the up-to-date information that I asked for in a written question some time ago, which she told me she would answer as soon as possible. How many illegal entrants to this country have been apprehended this year at the Eurotunnel terminal at Cheriton in my constituency? I have been told unofficially—I should like to hear the Minister's comments on this—that before the end of April, the number stood at 1,650. That is quite astonishing. I am told that the number who were apprehended there in March exceeded the total of those apprehended last year.

The hon. Member for Erdington, the Select Committee Chairman, talked about how, when one avenue is blocked off, people find others. There is a good deal of evidence that Eurotunnel freight trains are now being used because it has become more difficult to use the ferries. One problem of key significance is the failure of SNCF to erect proper security fences at the Eurotunnel terminal at Sangatte. Eurotunnel is improving the fencing for which it is responsible, but some of the fencing is the responsibility of SNCF, a French nationalised industry.

The Minister has told me that she will raise with the French Government the failure of SNCF to make good the promise that it made as long ago as June last year to see to the security fencing in that part of the Sangatte terminal for which it is responsible. SNCF has done nothing about that. I hope that the Minister will tell us what action she has taken to get her French colleagues to force this French nationalised industry to accept its responsibilities in the matter.

**Several hon. Members** *rose—*

**Mr. Peter Pike (in the Chair):** Order. Before I call the next Member, I should say that I know two things for certain—I have to bring this sitting to a close at 5.30 pm and I have three Front-Bench Members to call. I am unsure of how many other Members wish to speak, but I would like to be able to call all those who do, and I hope that hon. Members will take that into account when making their speeches.

3.37 pm

**Mr. Martin Linton** (Battersea): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) on what should perhaps be called his valedictory speech. I imagine that to be the opposite of "maiden", and I would hate to try to find another word. I pay tribute to his work as Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee. The inquiry that resulted in the report under discussion was the largest that took place during his chairmanship, and it is a fitting tribute to his approach to the job that he succeeded, on this sensitive and difficult subject, in achieving unanimity on the recommendations.

I preface my comments about the report and the Government's response to it by commending the approach of my hon. Friend the Minister of State, and that of the Secretary of State, on the issue of asylum. Their approach has the interests of genuine refugees at heart, but is tempered by the realisation that one can help such refugees only if one prevents asylum from being exploited as an alternative to ordinary immigration. If asylum is used in that way, that casts doubt on the veracity of genuine asylum seekers. It discredits them in the eyes of people in this country and undermines the welcome that this country should be giving to those who are genuinely fleeing torture and persecution in their country.

One of the paradoxes that make this subject so difficult is that, in order to help genuine refugees, one has to subject them to tougher tests, relative indignities such as dispersal to other parts of the United Kingdom and the voucher system. Such measures are part of defending the integrity of the asylum system itself and preventing it from being discredited.

We are all familiar with the difficulties that have been put in the way of genuine asylum seekers in the past—I am familiar with them from my constituency surgery, where they have been an issue right from the moment that I was elected to the House. Asylum seekers are prevented from working for at least six months; they are often prevented from travelling, because they do not have travel documents; and they often have no access to their relatives—even if those relatives are dying in another country, they cannot go and visit them or attend their funerals. They often have no access to education, benefits or services that the rest of us take for granted. Worst of all, they suffer from the terrible uncertainty of not knowing, sometimes for years, whether they will be given the right to settle permanently in this country.

I know, from many graphic examples in my own constituency, how difficult that uncertainty can be for asylum seekers. Genuine asylum seekers are kept in suspense and uncertainty for years. One's heart goes out to them.

We should be aware of the work that the Government have done to try to tackle that situation. They have tripled the staff of the immigration and nationality directorate. Last year, the backlog was cut by a third—it may have increased again, but I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will supply the figures. Under the new system, asylum cases are being dealt with within six months. Indeed, it is taking only four weeks at the Oakington centre. They have taken action against migrant smugglers, and an extra £6.3 million has been made available this year. They are fining lorry drivers who carry stowaways; about 4,650 stowaways have been found so far. They have replaced benefits with vouchers plus cash and introduced an asylum dispersal system. They have increased the number of staff in the enforcement agency and thus its effectiveness; about 9,000 people were removed from the country last year. By any standard, the Government have done much to improve the system.

I was interested to hear the contribution of the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). He was Home Secretary in the previous Government and was able to point to a 50 per cent. reduction in asylum seekers in 1996. However, that was a temporary phenomenon. That shows how one can make a different point by choosing a different time, because the whole of the Tory Government's time in office showed a tenfold increase in the number of asylum seekers. I am sure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman would not want that to be seen as the result of his Government's policies, but he cannot have it both ways. Whatever temporary effect those measures may have had, the end result was a tenfold increase.

The introduction to the report includes a list of "pull factors". I suggest that the right hon. and learned Gentleman pays a little more attention to the sixth and seventh factors, which were slow decision-making and the lack of an enforcement procedure. I have no doubt that those were the two most important pull factors, certainly the most important of those that were under the Government's control, because by the end of the last Government's time in office it was clear that many people applying for asylum knew that their cases would never be agreed but believed that it would take six or seven years for a decision to be reached. I know of many people who, in 199?, had been waiting since 1990 or 1991 for their asylum cases to be heard by the Home Office. That delay had a simple cause: there were too few staff at Lunar house, the Croydon headquarters of the immigration service, to handle the number of people claiming asylum.

I know from Lord Dubbs, my predecessor as Member for Battersea, that in the 1980s, long before I became a Member of the House, it was thought to be the deliberate policy of the then Government to keep staffing levels at Lunar house low so that the staff could not deal with the case load, in the belief that it would put a brake on immigration. In a way, that policy worked because it delayed the process. With asylum, however, it has the opposite effect. People claiming asylum are already in the country, and taking longer to deal with their claims is of benefit to them—especially non-genuine claimants—because they spend those years working here, which is all that they want. Add to that the unofficial amnesty allowed—I nearly said declared—by the previous Government in the early 1990s, which was intended to cope with the fact that so many people were waiting for asylum interviews, but which had the effect of encouraging more people to come because they knew that their friends or relations who had already come to the UK to apply for asylum had been given an amnesty, and they reasoned that they, too, would be allowed to stay.

Many of the previous Government's decisions contributed to the problem, most of all the decision taken in their dying months to lay off a large number of staff at Lunar house, in the belief that they would be surplus to requirements as a result of the new computer system—a laughable notion in retrospect, as it lengthened the queues and encouraged even more people to come to this country to seek asylum. That is why it is so important that this Government have taken firm action by tripling the staff of the immigration service, so that we can deal with asylum claims in a reasonable and humane time and genuine asylum seekers do not have to be kept in limbo for years.

I hope that the Minister has found the report helpful, as the Government response was not as positive as I and other Committee members had hoped. Too many issues raised were answered with "we are already doing that", "we are already thinking about doing that" or "we remain unpersuaded".

*[Mr. Martin Linton]*

I do not have time to go through all the cases in which the Government are either already doing something or thinking about doing it. I am glad that they were doing all those things unbeknownst to us—perhaps even unbeknownst to themselves—and that they did not need our prompting. However, we like to think that some of our ideas have speeded up the process and have got them to think about an issue.

I shall concentrate on the two issues for which the report uses the wonderful phrase, "they remain unpersuaded". One is the single frontier force, mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Erdington. The Government remain "unpersuaded" that it is useful to have a single frontier force instead of the three agencies that currently operate. My hon. Friend mentioned the case that a member of the Dover harbour board cited. I refer to it, because it illustrates so graphically why a single force is necessary.

A family in an Escort van were on an innocent day trip in Dover—I think that their only crime was that the van was white. Immigration officers stopped the van to check the family's passports. Two minutes later, they were stopped by Kent police ports unit and asked to unpack the entire van and to load it again, and were then told that they could go. Ten yards down the road they were stopped by customs, who also asked them to unpack the van, again found nothing and told them to load it up.

Looked at from the customers' point of view, how can it be right that someone can be searched three times within the space of 50 yards by three different Government agencies? How can we defend that on the ground that we cannot prove that a single frontier force will improve the efficiency of the service? It seems obvious that a single frontier force will be better for customers.

I am glad that the report goes on to say that the issue might benefit from further consideration, and that the Committee looks to the relevant Departments to take the matter forward. I hate to say this, but our experience of customs and the immigration service is that, like all arms of the civil service, they will be reluctant to take this forward because it will mean surrendering part of their independence. However, the work of the joint entry clearance unit and the National Criminal Intelligence Service shows that co-operation between Government agencies that are concerned with the same function can be fruitful and effective.

I draw the Minister's attention to paragraph 26 of the Government's reply, which concentrates on clandestine entry. In the course of one paragraph, the following agencies involved in the job of catching clandestine immigrants across the channel are mentioned: Police aux Frontieres—PAF; the IND intelligence section; the facilitation support unit; the NCIS; the National Crime Squad; and OCRIEST, which is a French acronym. I shall not spell them all out, and most of those present will probably know what they are. However, the fact that so many organisations must work together on the simple job of checking clandestine immigration across the channel surely shows that we need more co-ordination between the different agencies on our side.

The other issue on which the Government have not been persuaded is entitlement cards. I recognise that that is a difficult and sensitive issue; indeed, it was one on which the Committee found it difficult to agree, although we did in the end. I want briefly to go through the reasons that the Government gave for not having even a review of the subject. First, they said:

"The suggested range of Government services that would be accessed by the proposed entitlement cards is so great that the cards would need a large data storage capacity that would require encryption technology such as integrated circuits (chips) or optical stripes."

I have never seen a better example of the technique of blinding Committees with science. The argument is not that the entitlement card is unnecessary, but that it is so necessary that we cannot introduce it—an argument that is surely worthy of Sir Humphrey.

The Government's second argument was that the

"entitlement card would carry the potential for considerable fraud."

That is another clever argument. We are suggesting an anti-fraud device, and the response is that the anti-fraud device itself could be subject to fraud, so we should not try it. We must base the discussion on our intention, which was to find a device that will help us deal with fraud. Of course, cards by themselves can be subject to fraud, as we have seen with credit cards. However, cards represent information on databases, which cannot be tampered with. Once one can call up that information, such a card becomes an effective anti-fraud device.

The Government's third argument related to civil liberties, and we considered it carefully. They said that the cards

"would risk being seen as a compulsory identity card."

They accepted that it would be a voluntary card, which would need to be produced only when people wanted to access Government services. However, they said that it risked being perceived by the public as a compulsory card. That, of course, is the classic thin-end-of-the-wedge argument, which implies that although there is nothing wrong with our suggestion, people might see something wrong with it.

**Mr. Winnick:** The Committee managed to find suitable words to make the report unanimous, but my hon. Friend knows that I have the deepest reservations about an entitlement card. Moreover, he minimises the dangers of the card becoming an identity card. Does he accept that ethnic minority organisations have many reservations, although he might not agree with them? Those groups feel that, even though someone from an ethnic minority was lawfully entitled to live in this country, he or she would need to produce a card to demonstrate that.

There are dangers. Although it may be the view of a minority of one on the Committee, I welcome the Home Office's rejection of our recommendation.

**Mr. Linton:** I certainly referred to—and happily emphasised—the great doubts that my hon. Friend and, indeed, all of us had about some aspects of the entitlement card. The most dangerous possibility is that ethnic minorities would see it as a discriminatory measure against them or that it would be seen as leading to a compulsory identity card. All that I can say is that,

as far as I know, no member of the Committee had that in mind. As with all thin-end-of-the-wedge arguments, we must deal either with perception or with someone with a sledge hammer who intends to push the wedge in. If no one is trying to do that, it is unfair to draw attention to what might happen as an argument against what is being proposed. Like my hon. Friend, I never want to see a time when people are stopped in the street in this country and asked for proof of their identity. However, I do not agree that giving people an opportunity to have a way of demonstrating what they are entitled to when they want to access services is in any way comparable with that. At the same time, I do not want to take away from the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend, which are entirely legitimate.

The fourth argument against entitlement cards was that of cost. We do not need to dwell on that, because it is an argument put forward against any reform, and I do not think that the measure would be particularly costly.

I was very interested to hear the opinion of the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe on the Dublin convention. It is encouraging that, as the Government response explains, a draft proposal, which was promised for this spring, will take the place of the Dublin convention. We are now at the beginning of May, and I had thought that spring was largely over, even if we have not had one. Its publication was promised for sometime during the Swedish presidency, which takes us up to the end of June. I hope that a proposal is issued soon, and that it does not take us as long to go from proposal to law as it did in the case of the Dublin convention, because as the right hon. and learned Gentleman correctly observed, the Dublin convention was prepared in the late 1980s and signed in 1990, but did not become effective until 1997. If it took that long for it to be amended, the process would finish long after the amendments were needed.

The Committee's essential point was that, in principle, asylum applications should be dealt with in the first country within the EU. That is enshrined in the Dublin convention. In the Schengen area, where there are no immigration or customs controls, it is impossible to return people passing from one country to another to the country from which they have just come. They have to be returned to the country that they originally entered, and nobody except the people in question knows which country that was, and they will not reveal that fact.

The whole Dublin convention can be turned into a dead letter because of a fundamental flaw in the drafting. It does not entitle countries as of right to say, "You have just come from France, which is a safe country. If you wanted to apply for asylum, you should have done so there." The convention simply states that, if it can be proved through which country the person entered the EU, that country can be asked if it will accept the person back, which is a completely different proposition. I should be interested to hear the views of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on that fundamental issue.

We now have the issue not only of genuine and non-genuine asylum seekers and refugees in Europe, but of those who are genuine asylum seekers in that they are fleeing persecution of the worst kind, but are economic migrants in that they have chosen not to exercise their right to claim asylum in several countries—sometimes six or 12 countries—before they reach the country of their choice. That issue is very different from that of whether or not asylum seekers are genuine.

The question is the extent to which such asylum seekers should be able to choose their destination. The Committee's view was that it is important for the Government to put money into the neighbouring countries that shoulder the greatest burden of asylum seekers and refugees. We also recommended that Britain take refugees directly from trouble spots such as Kosovo where it is necessary, on a multilateral basis, according to which they would be shared among all European countries.

It is not necessarily a good idea for people to be able to go from country to country seeking asylum, far away from the country from which they are fleeing. We do not yet have a clear statement of the Government's view on that matter. I appreciate that the issue is thorny and needs to be discussed at a multilateral level in the EU and the United Nations. It involves redrawing not only the Dublin convention, but possibly the 1951 Geneva convention. A question lies unasked at the heart of the issue, and I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend the Minister's reply.

4.4 pm

**Mr. Charles Wardle** (Bexhill and Battle): First, I commend the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) on his brazenness in seeking to gloss over the recent chaos at Lunar house by saying that it was the result of pre-1997 staff cuts. He has shown a degree of hutzpah. If he reads the Public Accounts Committee report on the subject, he will find that the responsibility for implementing the changes in information technology lay with the Minister and her colleagues. It is extraordinary that, at the same time as those changes were implemented, some physical changes were made in the layout of the office space and accommodation in Croydon.

I cannot resist saying a little in response to what the hon. Gentleman said about asylum shopping. The Geneva convention is clear on the subject, as he suggested. What matters is the first safe country that an applicant reaches. Much of the confusion that has dragged the principles of the Dublin convention into disrepute has been because people want to duck the issue. If an immigration officer or someone dealing with an asylum applicant at the port of control at least establishes the previous safe country in which the applicant was present, the applicant must be returned to that country in the absence of better information. Some may feel that that threatens to put into action an undesirable chain of events, but it is the only way to enforce the principle of the convention.

I am aware of time limits, so I say immediately to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) that I sympathised with him when he talked about his valedictory speech in this place. I have made a few of them recently. I made one on 30 March because I thought that a general election was imminent, but now I am making a speech today. Before walking into the Chamber this afternoon, I checked next week's Adjournment debates and discovered that this is not my valedictory speech either.

In passing, I think that I am right to say that you and I, Mr. Pike, made our maiden speeches on the same day. Another hon. Member who did so on the same day in

*[Mr. Charles Wardle]*

the summer of 1983 was a Mr. Dave Nellist. He had the office next to mine and, well as I came to know him in the following few years, I did not imagine that he and I would have something in common, but we do: we both wound up without our Whips. When I received the fax from the Opposition Chief Whip, I do not think that even he thought that I had so much in common with Mr. Dave Nellist that I would back a militant tendency candidate in the next general election.

I congratulate the Select Committee Chairman and his colleagues on raising an important topic and dealing with it effectively. There is a great deal of public concern and much media attention, and there are some real problems. The social pressures that exist, especially in inner cities, have spread further afield with the dispersal of asylum seekers. As I have said time and again in broadcasts on the subject over many years, we should never forget that the first people to feel the tensions and pressures of growing immigration numbers are British-born and bred ethnic minorities in inner cities, not people living in leafy suburbs. In inner cities in such circumstances, there has been and will be pressure on local authority housing, general practitioner lists, school places and so on. Tensions are likely to rise there.

I agree with those who have already spoken that this must be an open, constructive and level-headed debate, without anyone playing the race card. To do so would be highly regrettable. Whether it is done deliberately, or inadvertently in the excitement before a general election, it is to be deplored.

The report has made a valuable contribution to the debate and I am grateful for the opportunity to make a few observations; I am not trying to come up with a comprehensive list. The Committee Chairman, the hon. Member for Erdington, referred to the "pull factors" listed in the report. Much research has been done on the subject, especially by European Commission Ministers, notably from Germany, for understandable reasons, given the immigration pressures that that country has faced. The idea behind much of the research is that if enough aid is given and there is enough direct investment in the source countries to create stable conditions of economic prosperity, the desire to move out and move on will eventually abate. That theory is fine, but the emphasis should be on "eventually" because it will take generations for things to settle. No one should be confused about that.

No one would disagree that the three "push factors" in the report are valid: fleeing persecution or simply getting out of the way of civil strife, whether or not it is targeted at a particular family; wanting to find work; and wanting to join family members. However, there is a broader reason that needs to be understood when considering what control measures to take: people want what they perceive as a better life in the west. Often, people who are, or have been, in work in their own countries are trying to save money to pay racketeers in whatever part of the world they live so that they can move on. People can see what life is like in other countries on television and the internet; now that the iron curtain has gone, there is the visible evidence of affluent tourists from the west who go to eastern Europe, for example, and that desire has grown. People want what they have heard about in the west for themselves, and no one can criticise them for that.

The desire of people to better themselves, however understandable, is not a reason to relent on implementing immigration controls. That must never be; the two concepts must be separated. Three of the big four reasons that pull people along the path of economic migration, and in some cases asylum shopping, are the English language, which is most important; the perception about social security, to which the report alludes; and, possibly, United Kingdom asylum law. The big attraction, however, is not so much our asylum law as the fact that the queue is there and if people get to the back of that queue they can stay. That is a bee in my bonnet and I am unashamed about repeating it before the Minister.

Another "pull factor" that is not mentioned in the report is north America, as I know from my experience at the Home Office. Many economic migrants get it into their heads that the United Kingdom, where English is spoken, is a stepping stone to north America—to Canada or the United States.

Not long ago, a Russian immigration officer said to me, "You ain't seen nothing yet. People are on the move in tidal proportions." There is no time in the debate to go into the fortress Europe arguments, but the report mentions international co-operation to exercise some measure of fair but firm control on such movements. No one would dispute that co-operation with our EU partners is a good thing. The EU policy of harmonisation, the member states that have signed the Schengen agreement and the bilateral co-operation with the French should all be borne in mind.

It is also worth considering what happens in practice. No matter what statements come out of Councils of Ministers or what conclusions are made by joint working parties of officials, the plain fact is that co-operation does not always occur in practice. While that is not a reason to give up on cross-border liaison and joint working, it is worth bearing in mind that to many—possibly all—member states, home priorities come first. I said earlier that Germany faced a huge scale of immigration—it all comes down to a question of geography. It is not surprising that Italy, faced with the increased influx of "clandestini" from across the Adriatic, is not too worried when a little encouragement is given for people to move on. The same applies in Austria and in France. One has to ask for what possible purpose the French transit camps on the channel coast exist. There is only one possibility. People who arrive in them intending to travel across the channel into this country to apply for asylum should be—but I am sure am not—told there and then by the French authorities that, under the Geneva convention, they should apply in the first safe country they reach and therefore should not contemplate coming here. We need to co-operate with French intelligence on clandestine entry but, as we have heard, co-operation often founders when it comes to returning manifestly unfounded asylum applicants across the channel to the first known safe EU country they reached.

Because of pressures of time, I shall not dwell on the Dublin convention. The report places emphasis on advance controls at the point of departure for the United Kingdom—juxtaposed controls, as they are

described—and refers to stringent application of carriers' liability. Carriers' liability has never been a popular topic of legislation; it was not popular when it first came into force with airlines, with the channel ferries, or subsequently with Eurostar. It is, however, essential to legislate on that. It was sensible and practical to introduce measures to penalise lorry drivers; it may not have been pleasant to enforce it, but it was right to do so.

In considering those controls and the system of immigration control in this country, which has not changed since 1971, it is worth bearing in mind that control pivots on a stamp in the passport—which is why border controls, the headline subject of our debate, are so important. If a third country national's passport is not checked at the port of entry and he or she is subsequently arrested and questioned under the enforcement procedures, he or she could say, "Well, I came through a port of entry last week but nobody stamped my passport." There is no way of proving that that is not the case because the person could have got rid of the ferry ticket, for example.

The issue of overstayers gets forgotten when one focuses solely on border controls, but a huge amount of pressure in terms of illegal immigration is also created by people who are welcomed here as visitors for a maximum of six months and who then overstay. The theory held by successive Governments since at least 1971 on overstaying is that it is similarly controlled by the stamp in the passport.

We must not forget the accident of our island geography, which presents a natural advantage that we should not sweep aside. Although enforcement can and should be pursued, controls at the port of entry remain one of the biggest deterrents—even allowing for the increase in clandestine arrivals. I come back to the bee in my bonnet and say that that should be combined with the removal of the queue, which requires a brave stand against the Treasury. I say that to the Minister, as I said it to predecessors in her job. I have said it to the Home Secretary time and again, and to his predecessors. The Treasury must understand that sometimes money has to be spent to save a lot more money and, in the process, to create a climate of fairness and decency in which one can tackle difficult problems.

I agree with the recommendation in the report that the border control working group should remove obstacles to improve joint data collection and sharing. However, I am wary of the proposal to merge the work of immigration officers, police and, from the Treasury side, customs into a single frontier force without first addressing the important subject of training for those people. I hope that the Minister agrees. Some people who sweep through the EU channel when they arrive at a port of entry to this country might think that there is not a lot to an immigration officer's job. There is a heck of a lot to that job. Some fine men and women work hard in that job, exercising sophisticated judgment based on their experience. I am sure that the people from customs have rules to follow, but it is terribly important not to assume that immigration officers' responsibilities can be shared at the drop of a hat. For a long time, those who processed asylum applications had their own special training as well.

There is a plea in the report for more modern equipment. I disagree slightly with the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) about that matter. I have long respected his views; we have not always agreed, but we have had many discussions about the subject and have a common interest. I understand his concern about identity cards, but I do not share it. If everyone carried an identity card—if the libertarian arguments and the arguments to which the hon. Member for Battersea alluded were set aside—one would have to ask why anyone would not want to carry a card.

The problem with identity cards—this might please the hon. Member for Walsall, North—is that more money must be spent on the technology before we rush down that road. The Minister knows what progress has been made with hand prints, thumb prints, voice prints and all the rest of the technology that can be used to verify identity. A few years ago, one of the biggest problems for immigration officers at ports of entry, particularly on the channel coast, was forged French ID cards. They are not difficult to forge and require secondary verification. My feedback is that that is still a problem. I come back to the question of Treasury funding and, dare I say it, the asylum queue that acts as a lure—in this country, at any rate.

I mentioned the first safe country principle. Another simple, pivotal principle in the Geneva convention is that a successful applicant must have a well-founded fear of persecution. That should remain the case. Siren voices say that the convention is not working, that the problems today are too large and that we should scrap the convention. I disagree with them. The problem today is the number of people on the move, and it will not be solved by tinkering with the Geneva convention. It is a separate, parallel problem but, in seeking to deal with it in a firm but fair and humane way, it is important to keep in place and focus upon the cardinal principles of the Geneva convention.

One should always welcome media attention, but immigration and border controls is an issue that has been confused by media attention. The public, perhaps understandably, does not always know what is going on. That is why the report is so important. If there is sufficient Government funding and a tough resolve to say to our EU partners, "Look, if somebody transited your country first, at the very least they come back to you", there is a better chance of holding the line.

Finally, EU enlargement will inevitably add to the problems. That may influence EU priorities and the desire to look afresh at the subject. We may decide to change a policy of zero immigration with a few minor exceptions, and allow people in in larger numbers. If that happens, the UK needs to fight its corner. There will always be pressure within the EU for us to make further concessions in the name of harmonisation, and they should be resisted unless they are in the UK's interests. The public deserve to understand that, with enlargement and closer harmonisation of the policies, a price that this country will pay for closer EU integration is that the larger problems in other EU member states will be passed over in part to this country. Concessions should also be resisted for those reasons. That is why we should not lose sight of our island, and why we should not be afraid to insist on our own control priorities, even if that means resisting further EU harmonisation.

4.27 pm

**Mrs. Janet Dean** (Burton): I join others in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett), not only on his speech today but on the way in which he has controlled the Home Affairs Committee for over a year. He has been a fair Chairman. We should also mention the years of dedicated service that he has given to the House. I thought of calling his speech his "retiring speech", but he has never been retiring.

The subject of immigration and borders is important, and it sometimes dominates media headlines, as hon. Members have said. One could mistakenly believe that we are the only country that has seen increased numbers of illegal entrants. I reiterate that the Select Committee was told by the Refugee Council that EU countries, with 6.2 per cent. of the world's population, take 4 per cent. of the world's refugees. While, among EU countries, the UK was second to Germany for the total number of entrants— that may be where I and the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) differ, as he talked about asylum seekers—we were only ninth for the number of entrants in proportion to the population. That is important because, as other Members have said, the number of entrants has a greater impact on a small country.

However, there is understandable concern about the dramatic increase in asylum applications in recent years. The Committee looked at how illegal entrants could be deterred and detected. The inquiry lasted nearly a year, during which time there were some developments, including the implementation of civil penalty provisions, followed by the action taken by P&O Stena Line to increase security measures at Calais and Zeebrugge. As other Members have mentioned, the tragic death of 58 Chinese people in a container lorry, some months after we began the inquiry, served to emphasise the desperate measures that people will take to flee their country and the despicable trade in human life.

As the Home Affairs Committee Chairman said, the Committee was shocked to see the hundreds of people at the Red Cross centre at Sangatte. We were disturbed to hear that the numbers housed there have increased since our visit. We shall probably always remember the smell from the chemical toilets, which cannot be sensed on our television screens. As the report states:

> "We found the situation there disturbing on three grounds: the conditions in which they are living... the fact that they are just waiting to enter the UK illegally and their lack of any legal status in France."

Circumstances in Sangatte emphasised the need to revise the Dublin convention and for European nations to work together to deal with the problem. I am pleased that the Government agree and that they are working within the EU to develop an alternative to the Dublin convention.

Members have mentioned that establishing where someone first entered the EU is the key difficulty. It is easy to discover that someone was last in France before entering the UK, but not to ascertain first entry to the EU. I welcome the Government's recent attempts to tackle such problems—tripling the staff of the immigration service last year, speeding up assistance, increased funds to fight organised crime and the introduction of a mobile fingerprint unit. I particularly welcome the extra money provided for X-ray scanners to detect illegal entrants.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erdington mentioned that members of the Select Committee were bemused to receive contradictory advice on the possible use of X-ray equipment for detecting human beings. It was said to be safe, but could not be used by the immigration service. The change in that position is welcome.

We must address the problem of illegal entry in different ways, not least by examining the "pull factor", which draws people to Britain. The report recognises that perceptions may be more significant than reality in attracting people to seek asylum. A recent television programme showed Romanians who had been told that asylum seekers were given £800 a month in the UK. People here also believe that asylum seekers receive more money than they do, which causes further friction. It is a sensitive subject and it can stir up considerable concern.

Together with our European colleagues, we must ensure that when conflict arises, people are helped to remain close to their own countries. People should not feel the need to trek across the world at great risk to themselves and their families. We must also ensure that the United Kingdom continues to give asylum to those genuinely escaping persecution.

4.33 pm

**Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I am happy to participate in the debate, to which this forum is ideally suited. Whatever our differences of emphasis, we have so far had—and are likely to continue to have—a reasoned and intelligent debate on the basis of good work by colleagues. It has led to a common view across the parties on a highly controversial issue of public interest.

I thank the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) and join others in thanking the Select Committee for its work. I, and others with responsibility for home affairs in the House, have benefited from it. I wish him and the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle) well in their now somewhat deferred retirement. I feel slightly older than I am because while they were talking about when they entered the House, I realised that I came here before almost every Member in this Chamber, with the exception of the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), the former Home Secretary.

The debate is, rightly, centred on border controls, but hon. Members have stepped back before dealing with that specific issue. We have had three debates on the subject in the past couple of weeks—two in European Standing Committee and now this one. The Minister has certainly been earning her pay for duties in the House recently.

There were no border controls until Napoleonic times—200 years ago. People travelled around Europe and the world without passports. Now we have controls. There is a perfectly reasonable, free-market argument that things might be better controlled if there were none, although before the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe gets excited, I should point out that neither I nor my party has adopted it.

I have always taken a view which sometimes, arguably, puts me in a slightly less eurocentric corner of my party, and with the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle: we should take advantage of our island status for the time being. It gives us additional opportunity for control, and I have always said, on the difficult issues of managing immigration generally rather than asylum in particular, that we should reserve and not sign away our rights. At the moment, we should not be party to a common European Union policy that means no frontiers between us and the rest of the EU. That would not be pragmatic. The difficulties experienced by other countries outweigh the advantages of dropping that form of control.

The report was initiated to examine the number of illegal immigrants that we have and the pattern of such immigration, and to remind us that there are always two categories of people seeking to come here. The other category is those who are exercising their asylum rights under the convention. We should always keep the categories separate, as the Minister and I publicly agreed recently, and have a separate debate about immigration policy. I think that there is now agreement that the two categories are interrelated, but we need to keep separate their definitions, rules and processes.

This morning, I attended an event to help the Christian Council for Racial Justice to launch a report and a pre-election leaflet entitled "Bonus not Bogus", which deals with the myths about asylum seekers. The Church seeks to counter those. No figures in that report or elsewhere suggest a crisis—only a challenge.

I understand the point made by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe that one relevant consideration is how many people come here, whether as immigrants, visitors—including those from other EU countries—or asylum seekers. It is also relevant, however, to talk about how we can cope with the numbers given our wealth, population and historical links. There has been a failure, which I do not attribute to any past or present Minister in this debate, adequately to deal with the number of people who required their admission to be certified and agreed to. For significant periods over the past 10 years, the backlog has grown.

The more extreme press has reported a crisis simply because of the number of people waiting to enter the country. Huge numbers enter and leave all the time and from all over the world. Most immigrants come, perfectly lawfully, from other EU countries. A crisis has been perceived only because there has been a great queue of people waiting to have claims processed.

As the Minister knows, exactly the same situation arose when the passport system suddenly did not work. Every year, thousands of people apply for passports. That became a crisis only when the processing system stopped working. As soon as it started working again, the crisis went away. I hope that we can agree that we should not find the numbers anything more than a challenge. Yes, they are higher than they have been, but it should not be beyond the capability of the fourth most successful economy in the world to deal with them. Compared with Ireland, and relative to head of population, we have had half as many people. We are only 10th in the European league table relative to population, but about 75th in the world relative to our wealth.

I reflect on the places that I have been to. You have visited some of them too, Mr. Pike, as have other colleagues. I have been to Palestine, southern and central Africa and Kosovo; huge numbers of people are being dealt with by much poorer countries. They just get on with it. That is why I endorse the part of the report that recommends assisting, via the Foreign Office and the Department for International Development, countries that must deal with many people just outside their frontiers who seek refuge.

There is an important distinction to be drawn between asylum and immigration. Asylum applicants must be treated without discrimination under the convention. They have to be dealt with individually and then treated fairly on the individual merits of the case. It is interesting how monthly figures show that, as the hon. Member for Erdington pointed out, the league table of countries varies considerably from one year to the next. At the moment, it is headed by Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and Somalia; a year or two ago it was headed by countries in southern Europe. At the time of the most violent conflicts in Sierra Leone, the table was headed by Sierra Leoneans, and at the worst times in Sri Lanka, by Sri Lankans. That is why the push factors are just as important, if not more so, than the actual or alleged pull factors.

We cannot discriminate on the ground of the nationality of the asylum seeker, but it is proper to do so for the purposes of immigration—for all sorts of historical reasons. We discriminate in favour of EU applicants. We have a discriminatory policy towards people who have Commonwealth and other links. That is a perfectly proper basis for an immigration policy, on which we are now building. The Government are right to move in that direction. We should now have a sensible debate with our European partners about how we meet our economic shortages and the needs gap.

We must be careful that we do not allow into the country only those with high academic qualifications. We are not short of people at that end of the market. Yes, we are short of people in the IT industries, but we are equally short of people in some of the most low-paid and less-skilled jobs. The example that I have given before is of cleaners in our public services. People who come here also work in the catering industry. The best car wash within striking distance of the House, for those who need it, is at Elephant and Castle and is entirely run by Kosovans. They do a brilliant job at very good rates and work furiously well. We must understand that it is proper to discriminate in immigration policy, but not in asylum policy. Having done so, we still need a border control system, and therefore need to consider how we deal with it.

An interesting debate, quite rightly prompted by the Select Committee report and taken up by the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe and others, is how one deals with the simple process of the person leaving his country and going somewhere else. Once this great fury of a debate has begun to settle, I hope that people will be able to come to this country as economic migrants without having to pretend to be something that they are not. People often pretend to be asylum seekers because that is how they think that they will succeed.

*[Mr. Simon Hughes]*

We then must ensure that the asylum seeker can get here lawfully too. As the Minister knows, I argue that, currently, they cannot do so. They cannot leave any of the countries that we know about and arrive in the UK lawfully to claim asylum; they have to enter the country illegally. There are sensible and obvious ways of dealing with that problem. One is to allow British missions around the world to deal with the applications. Another is to allow EU missions or agencies around the world to act on our behalf and to deal with applications at the nearest safe place outside the country from which the people are fleeing—or alleging that they need to flee. I am in favour of a system that tries to process applications as near as possible to people's homes; that seems intelligent. However, that leads us to a more difficult question.

Effectively, under the present system, people are entitled to put their case only at the place where they land, yet the accident of travel may land people in places with which they have no linguistic or family links, and no ties. I often cite the example of those who fled from the civil war in Sierra Leone to French-speaking neighbouring countries in west Africa such as Ivory Coast. They were not in those countries because they wanted to be there. When they came to leave, they found that, because of the historic links between the French-speaking countries of the former French empire and France, the only European flights available went to Paris. Despite landing in Paris, all their links were with the UK, since our links with Sierra Leone are strong.

We must have a system that reasonably allows people to express the wish to go to the place to which they are logically attached and with which they have links, irrespective of where they are when they make their applications. I welcome European Union discussions on the matter, and I hope that, when reflecting on the economic issues, we remember natural links and linguistic, historical and family ties. The nature of the historic link means that Britain may take more people from some countries such as Sri Lanka, Pakistan and African Commonwealth countries than from others.

Although it was mentioned only once and not pejoratively, we should remember that a so-called fortress Europe would be extremely dangerous and unhealthy. To her credit, the Minister made the same point. Europe is successful not because it is populated only by generations of Europeans; EU member states are successful not because they are populated only by people from those countries whose families span 17 generations. The mixture and sharing that Europe has accommodated makes us what we are.

On the push-pull factors, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe and I had our usual exchange. I do not doubt that what we do here has an influence, but I do not believe that the evidence that he cited in support of his view, which he said had been communicated to him by people who are waiting for asylum, is the overwhelming or even the predominant view. For example, I do not believe that having to wait a very long time for cases to be processed is as much of a pull factor as others have argued. However, under the old system, which I criticised, cases were so delayed and there were so many chances of appeal and re-appeal that it became a nonsense. That system worked to the advantage of some good lawyers, and of many far worse or pretend lawyers. That certainly needed to be dealt with.

I do not believe that a voucher, as opposed to a benefits, system acts as a pull factor. Indeed, it works to the contrary. If the Minister is still in office when her review is concluded, I hope that she will remember that a benefits system is cheaper and fairer than the voucher system. Some things act as incentives. For instance, those who think that they will never be caught break the rules, and those who believe that they can slip through the net and earn money will do so. They are just as much push factors because of the criminals who try to exploit immigrants. Those are the same criminals who, 10 or 20 years ago, were exploiting drugs; who, 10 years previously, had an interest in pornography; and who, 10 years before that, were interested in armed robbery. They go wherever the pickings are to be found, and need to be dealt with strongly.

**Mr. Howard:** I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would tell us how the problem will be resolved by his party's recent commitment to a review of the dispersal system.

**Mr. Hughes:** I can answer that. The review of the dispersal system is a marginal issue. As I am sure the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows, the current dispersal system often sends people to places that are unprepared for them, with the result that they do not stay.

I can give an example that I know to be factual because I was there. I was in Newcastle when a Czech family arrived under the dispersal system—driven in a taxi from the station to a housing estate. The house was boarded up and there was nobody to receive the newcomers or anybody of the same nationality available. They were settled in, but they had no community and no likelihood of assimilation. They are not likely to stay there for long. As the Government have said in one of the responses, regional centres should meet people's language, health and educational needs. I have always supported the introduction of reception centres and reception—not detention—arrangements that provide support in appropriate locations around the country. The review would not force people to go to places from which they were bound to return, but would send them to places where there were known to be back-up facilities that worked.

We also need to address the question of how to set up permitted routes for asylum and for economic migration. We need to do better on both and to be clearer on both and, so far as is possible, to adopt a common European approach.

In any system that the House controls, there must be better police intelligence, better services intelligence at home and abroad and better technology. Criminals must be dealt with increasingly severely. That is done by Interpol, Europol and other agencies, and our Ministers need to approach them.

The interesting and provocative matter, on which the Select Committee and the Government did not agree, is that of whether immigration, Customs and Excise and

the police should be integrated. I subscribe to the view that they should be. I have not yet reached the stage where I am so committed that that will appear in an immediately forthcoming manifesto, but I am persuaded. I am persuaded for all the reasons that the report gives, and for one other. That is that, for perfectly understandable reasons, different incentives drive different agencies, especially Customs and Excise and the police. The police want to catch the people; Customs and Excise wants, to catch the goods. Customs and Excise wants, to stop the loss to the economy; the police want to stop people breaking the law. They are often in conflict.

I have been told clearly by both agencies that people often slip out of the loop because of the agencies' rival aspirations. One agency wants to score its points at the expense of the other. The illustration given in the report and quoted by the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) about the triple stop is a silly but practical one. I am sure that we would do better by integrating those agencies, and the only reason why we are not going down that road is what I might call institutional conservatism—the Government are being led by their civil servants. People will always say, "No thank you, we want things to stay as they are." It will take a strong Government to say that we can and should do better than that.

**Mr. Wardle:** Institutional conservatism is about the only kind of conservatism that I would rail against. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, a few years ago, several complaints against immigration officers about searches at ports of entry turned out to concern those conducted by customs officials? People confused the two agencies. Does that not highlight the need, at the very least, to be cautious and to ensure training across the board before any change?

**Mr. Hughes:** I have had experience of the first point, and agree with the hon. Gentleman. I also agree that, as a minimum, training is needed. However, I urge this Government, and whoever might form the next one, not to be conservative about the issue. I understand the resistance, but all the evidence points to the fact that shared, unified services work better, and I think that we should go down that road.

I will not duck the next issue, because it is a real one. All parties must face up to the problem of how we get people to go when they are told that they cannot stay. Many people are there one minute but not the next once they are told that they have to go. The system lets them slip through the net. That is unfair on those who go through the process, whose cases are adjudicated on and who are told that they can stay.

I have three suggestions. I do not have a perfect solution, but I want to show that we have at least addressed the issues. First, there is merit in ensuring that everything is clearly explained to people when they arrive. The process for telling them what will happen at the end of their time should be much more clearly explained. There should also be regional centres to which they are required to report.

Secondly, there might be an argument for a financial incentive—not for asylum seekers, but for others. That was suggested by the Select Committee, and it is worth considering. Thirdly, technology could play a part. There is a vague European notion of European citizenship mark 2, which is for those who do not have a permanent right of abode in EU countries, but have the right to remain for a limited period. People with limited rights to be in this country might have to be clocked in so that we can check whether they have clocked out. I do not believe that we cannot pray in aid technology, at least to give us a better assessment of when people cross the line between being here lawfully and being here illegally.

We are not yet ready for the entitlement card system, and the Government put the case in that regard. There is a big debate about the issue. Having entitlement cards for one lot of people and not another would raise issues of discrimination. There is a proper debate to be had, but we are not ready for it.

I welcome this debate and the fact that we are conducting it in relatively measured terms, despite the hoo-hah and the bruhaha of recent weeks.

4.56 pm

**Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): I welcome the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I want, at the outset, to congratulate the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) on three counts. I congratulate him first on the drafting and publication of the report; secondly, on his chairmanship of the Home Affairs Committee; and, thirdly, on his 23 years' service in the House—he spent five years as the hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead and 18 years representing the people of Birmingham, Erdington. Last year, I had the pleasure of going to Egypt with the hon. Gentleman, his wife, Val, and several other hon. Members, and I hope that he and his wife greatly enjoy the next phase of their lives.

It is important that we have a good debate. The subject of asylum and illegal immigration attracts twin evils. The first is the attempt by the advocates of political correctness to deny debate, which is wrong. The second, which is equally wrong, is the tendency for inflammatory exchanges to take place. As recommendation 19 of the Select Committee's report rightly emphasises, we have a proud and honourable tradition of not only accepting, but welcoming people who are fleeing genuine persecution. We should celebrate and continue that tradition, and countenance nothing that flies in the face of it. One can genuinely say that all the contributions to the debate have reflected the priority that we attach to that principle.

Many hon. Members have drawn attention to some of the pull factors on which the report focused, and which have played a significant role in the substantial increase in applications for asylum in the past 10 years and in the scale of illegal immigration. I do not want to focus on those factors at length, but the Committee was right to draw attention to family, cultural and historical links; the English language; and the availability—or the skewed perception of the availability—of social welfare benefits, to which the hon. Member for Erdington, rightly referred. Other factors that might be considered are the generous interpretation of asylum law in this country; the absence of a requirement for the production of identity cards or the demonstration of one's nationality; the lack of an efficient removal system for people who are refused asylum; access to public

*[Mr. John Bercow]*

services, such as free health, education and housing; slow decision making in asylum cases; the scope for living in the country without documentation; and the general economic prosperity that we are fortunate to enjoy in our islands.

A related debate involves the level of immigration and the purposes for which flexibility might be required in our immigration procedures. It is important to distinguish between the debate about flexibility in immigration law and policy, and the phenomenon that we are principally discussing, which is large-scale abuse of the asylum system and our immigration laws. That abuse is perpetrated not merely by individuals who come to our country, but by the connivance of organised gangs that operate on a massive scale, make vast profits and employ thoroughly disreputable and even evil methods in pursuit of their trade.

From time to time, we have all talked about the various methods by which people enter the country. It is a commonplace and a truism that when we tackle a method through the pursuit of a certain policy, it is safely to be expected that the criminals who tend to be at least up with us, if not a step ahead, will opt for alternative routes. We should not underestimate the enemy, as these people are sophisticated and have extremely good communications, extensive resources and an absolute determination to defeat the forces of order.

I draw attention to one regrettable anomaly. European Union and European Economic Area passengers have to be admitted with the shortest delays, yet it is the documents of those countries that have most often been forged. Sixty-one per cent. of the 4,225 forgeries found at ports from 1 October 1999 to 30 June 2000 were of such documents. The British passport was the most frequently forged. Methods of entry can change in response to enforcement action. For example, the effect of a £2,000 fine on airline and ferry operators for each passenger with inadequate documentation is that people now hide in lorries instead.

The absence of effective decision making and enforcement must necessarily explain, at least in part, the large number of people now coming to our islands who should not do so. I shall give a snapshot by referring to the 57 per cent. rise in Lithuanian asylum seekers in the first six months of 2000.

To the credit of the Committee, the report focused on no fewer than 22 findings and recommendations, to which the Government replied at the end of March. The Government claimed to be implementing some of the recommendations, appeared not to have decided in favour of others, and objected—predictably but unconvincingly—to some of the most damning criticisms. One such criticism is the inefficiency of the system. The Committee highlighted the major pull factors, and the Government's response to the report stated that they were undertaking three studies on why asylum seekers are attracted to the UK.

One major factor must surely be the inefficiency of our asylum system and the long delays in the consideration of applications. The current average time taken to initial decision is 14 months. In those circumstances, it is no wonder that figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees show that the UK received more asylum seekers than any European country in 2000. It had 97,860 applications, including dependants, as opposed to Germany in second place with 78,760.

In February 2000, the Minister said that the Government were committed to getting rid of the backlog by April 2001. However, in a written answer on 5 February 2001—column 440W of *Hansard*—she defined removal of the backlog as a reduction to 25,000. At the end of March 2001, the figure was 33,390, so the Government have palpably missed their target.

The report mentions the Red Cross holding centre at Sangatte, and the Committee stated that it was clear that the hundreds waiting in and around it were simply waiting for the opportunity to enter the UK illegally. That point was acknowledged by the Minister on 22 March. Approximately 25,000 people have passed through the centre in the past 18 months. The fact that the Government do not even keep proper records has made matters difficult. Ministers admit that they have no idea how many failed asylum seekers remain in the country; some estimates suggest at least 200,000. In the past two years, there have been 150,000 arrivals, excluding dependants, but only 15,000 removals, all of which would necessarily have been from previous years. In 1999, enforcement action was taken against 22,880 people, but only 6,410 were removed.

The Committee—much to the credit of the hon. Member for Erdington and his colleagues—was right to conclude in paragraph 69 that

"the Home Office has been dilatory in enforcing the removal of people whose asylum claims have been refused and others who have gained illegal entry to the UK. This in itself has"—

manifestly and incontrovertibly—

"attracted more people to the UK...The target of 30,000 removals in 2001-02—a ten-fold increase"—

admittedly including dependants—

"over the 1999 figure—seems a very ambitious goal."

We shall have to see what the Government's response is to that, but the figures thus far show that the UK has become a soft touch for asylum seekers, and that the Government have failed effectively to deal with genuine refugees.

It is no good for the Minister to look quizzical or hurt by the criticism. The Home Office's figures show that only one fifth of failed asylum seekers who are eligible for removal are being removed. I emphasise again that Britain should be a safe haven for genuine refugees, but the Government's shambolic policies have made us a soft touch for racketeers who traffic in human beings and misery. It is horrifying that the Immigration Service Union, whose members work at the sharp end, says that perhaps only a dozen people who do not want to leave the country are being forcibly removed per month. In the circumstances, it is scarcely surprising that since 1997 asylum applications have risen from 32,500 to 76,035—a rise of 134 per cent.

**Mrs. Roche:** Will the hon. Gentleman accept my assurance that the Immigration Service Union, with which I have regular meetings, has assured me that that remark was taken completely out of context and that it recognises the Home Office figures?

**Mr. Bercow:** I will not accept that here and now. I do not dispute the Minister's veracity, but I am suspicious

of her interpretation of the remark. It is on the record for everyone to study, and I believe that it is persuasive because it reflects the reality of the situation.

The Government justifiably talk about the juxtaposition of immigration controls, but there is nothing new about that. The Home Secretary has repeatedly sought to spin the situation; that point was made effectively in relation to the Dublin convention by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) during his incisive input. Significant problems have resulted from the policy of civil penalties against, for example, lorry drivers. The Government should not simply ignore them. Many people who have been penalised have had bogus asylum seekers in their trucks unbeknown to them, and it is wrong for them to be penalised in such a way.

The extension of civil penalties to rail freight in March has been a disaster. The Minister will have received representations about that. [*Interruption.*] It is no good her chuntering from a sedentary position in an expression of disapproval of anyone who happens to take a different view. Those points have been made by the commercial sector and people who feel that they are being unfairly held responsible for errors that are not their own.

There is an important debate about entitlement cards, which the hon. Member for Battersea (Mr. Linton) dealt with sensitively. I am grotesquely embarrassed to express sympathy with the point of view articulated by the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick). That is deeply uncomfortable and unedifying for me, and I hope that I do not have to repeat it, but he has legitimate concerns. The Government have clearly not accepted the fact that such cards should be introduced. The Minister will have heard the opinions that have been expressed, and I hope that the Government will continue to reflect on the arguments, as they will on the case for a single frontier police force.

This has been a long debate, but I shall focus briefly on several vital steps that could help to overcome some of the worst excesses of the abuse of our asylum and immigration procedures. The Conservative party wants such steps to be taken but, regrettably, the Government have eschewed taking them since they came to office, so we all want to hear the Minister's response.

First, we need greater use of reception centres. In Germany and France it is normal practice for asylum seekers to be housed in designated reception centres. There is nothing inhumane or uncivilised about such an approach. When we gave refuge in this country to the Ugandan Asians and the Vietnamese boat people, we housed them in reception centres while longer-term arrangements were properly organised. Such an arrangement is not only civilised, but more straightforward than a complicated voucher and dispersal scheme.

By ensuring that the centres are secure, we can also guarantee that people seeking to evade immigration control are kept in one place and are unable to disappear into the wider community. Those whose claims are refused can be speedily removed from the country. That is why we propose that all new applicants for asylum—whether port or in-country applicants—should be retained in reception centres until their cases have been determined. Conservatives believe that that would have a significant deterrent effect, and we appear to be joined in that view—

**Mrs. Roche:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr. Bercow:** No, the hon. Lady will have an opportunity for a full response in a minute.

**Mrs. Roche:** Frit.

**Mr. Bercow:** I have never been frit about anything; I am not frit now; and I will not be frit in future. If the hon. Lady wants me to give way, I will, but it will take me longer to conclude my speech.

**Mrs. Roche:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman and agree that he can take longer to conclude.

I am genuinely interested in the issue of detaining asylum seekers in reception centres until their case is determined. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that they should be detained there until they are removed if they receive a negative decision on their application?

**Mr. Bercow:** That would certainly be the expectation in developing the policy. There is no uncertainty about our motives, but I shall not be diverted in any way—I am sure that that was not the hon. Lady's intention—from the invocation of support for Conservative party policy. Professor Guy Goodwin-Gill, professor of international refugee law at Oxford university, shares our analysis. As he told the Select Committee:

"I have no doubt in my own mind that those who come without reason or refugee related reasons would indeed be deterred by a process that reached defensible decisions quickly."

John Tincey, spokesman for the Immigration Service Union, made similar remarks:

"If people discovered that after spending £5,000 or so with a gang all they got was a month in a reception camp for their money, then that news would quickly get back."

He is right and many members of the public think so, too. The Government should consider the possibility that he who works hard at the coalface and has acquired distinct expertise has a good point.

We shall take action to speed up asylum decisions and appeals. A report commissioned by the Home Office from the consultants Vantage Point identified huge and unnecessary delays in the system. An asylum seeker who arrives in Dover or at Heathrow is interviewed at length by an immigration officer, who then has to refer the case to the immigration and nationality directorate of the Home Office in Croydon for the papers to be reviewed and a decision made. It is an exceptionally long-winded process, and a much more streamlined operation is required.

We will amend the law to deter applications by people who have come from a country that is obviously safe. It is bizarre to receive applications from countries that have been accepted as candidates for membership of the European Union. How can we simultaneously accept that a country has the rule of law and good government that would qualify it to join the EU and believe that its citizens are suffering systematic persecution? A future Conservative Government will draw up a list of countries enjoying the rule of law from which we will not

*[Mr. Bercow]*

ordinarily accept asylum applications. The presumption of the law will be that a claim is unfounded if an applicant has travelled directly from, or begun his journey in, a safe country.

We shall signal to our European partners that we expect them to take seriously their obligations under the Dublin convention. Those obligations are on the record. People have signed up to them. They should be implemented fully and rigorously. When people have been refused asylum they should be removed from this country without delay. What is the point of spending all this time and money on assessing whether asylum seekers have a genuine case, when nothing is done with those who do not and when in the meantime those with bogus claims learn how to disappear into the melting pot of society?

The Government's ill-advised and poorly implemented dispersal policy has exacerbated an already serious situation. The next Conservative Government will set up a removals agency with the sole mission of ensuring that people who are supposed to leave the country do so at once. That will take a burden off the police and simplify the process of removals. The removals agency will be largely composed of immigration service staff assigned permanently to removals duties.

**Mr. Corbett:** I have a word of caution to offer the hon. Gentleman. Most of the asylum applications at the moment come from people from countries that cannot remotely be described as safe: Afghanistan, Iran and Iraq to name just three. He might want to consider whether a future Conservative Government would contemplate forcibly returning people to those countries when it is almost certain that they would either go to prison or lose their lives.

**Mr. Bercow:** The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly reasonable point but I emphasised at the outset, and I welcome the opportunity to repeat now, that if people are at risk of death, torture, being maimed or having their human rights trodden upon, we do not propose that they should be deprived of a safe haven here. We are concerned about the people who are seeking a better standard of living. I do not blame them for doing so, but those whom we cannot reasonably be expected to accommodate should be returned. That seems a perfectly reasonable proposition and one with which the vast majority of people would concur.

Today's system is neither fair, nor firm nor efficient. It is weak and arbitrary. As a result, it is losing public support. A democracy that sets rules and does not enforce them loses the respect of its own citizens, and understandably so. Some people are untroubled by the present situation. My hon. Friends and I are not among them. There are those who would prefer not to talk about it. We think that they are wrong and we intend to do so. A tolerant, welcoming society is right, but a weak society that is prey to abuse is rightly and roundly rejected by our fellow citizens. The asylum crisis is serious. We cannot allow British democracy, the rule of law and the protection of our citizens to be undermined. We need a firm, fair, robust and efficacious policy. Under this Government there is none such. The Conservative party intends to provide it.

5.17 pm

**The Minister of State, Home Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche):** This has been a good debate, and for the large part extremely thoughtful. Our deliberations have been full of good humour. It shows that we can quite properly debate these important but sensitive issues.

I should like to thank the hon. Members for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) and others for their warm tributes to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett). They commended his excellent chairmanship of the Home Affairs Committee and his long service to the House. The fact that tributes have come from both sides and in the warmest possible terms shows not only the high regard but the great affection in which he is held by us all.

**Mr. Gerald Howarth** (Aldershot): I apologise for intervening at a late hour, but I have been in the Standing Committee on the International Criminal Court Bill. As a member of the Select Committee throughout this Parliament, I should like to add my words of tribute to those that the Minister has already paid to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett). He has been a splendid, good natured and skilful Chairman.

**Mrs. Roche:** On my hon. Friend's behalf—if I may be so presumptuous—I thank the hon. Gentleman. It is a great pleasure to respond to the debate, because I am a former member of the Home Affairs Committee, having had the pleasure of serving on it when I first came to Parliament. I feel a little like a poacher turned gamekeeper, but I shall do my best. In the short time available, I shall try to respond to several of the points that have been made.

In response to my hon. Friends the Members for Erdington and for Battersea (Mr. Linton) and the hon. Members for Buckingham and for Southwark, North and Bermondsey, I must emphasise that we should distinguish between asylum and migration. The refugee convention was never meant to be a migratory instrument, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees agrees. That is why my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, in response to the European debate and to the global consultation initiated by UNHCR, set out in major speeches—in Lisbon last year and London this year—how the convention should operate in the modern age, and how we can establish resettlement programmes to help the poorer countries that are supporting many refugees.

As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Erdington, we have responded in detail to some of his points, but I want to reassure him on a couple of others. He asked whether there would be joint use of equipment. Yes, the new equipment will be joint use. It

is fair to say that the X-ray machines and the money that has been secured is a good example of how Select Committees can influence Government. We not only listened, but acted. Minds were influenced by the report, which is a tribute to the Committee. We have also listened to the Committee's views on research, and have acted on its recommendations, although we had realised that there was a lack of research.

My hon. Friend asked about fingerprinting, which was also mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Burton (Mrs. Dean). That is important, which is why the new mobile system is up and running. My hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) cannot, alas, be with us now; he had to go to an urgent constituency engagement, but he sent me a note with his usual courtesy. Along with my hon. Friend the Member for Burton and the hon. Members for Buckingham and for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Wardle), he rightly referred to the evil trade in people smuggling and trafficking. We make a distinction between smuggling and trafficking—between the transport of people and the dreadful trade of trafficking children and women for prostitution. We are determined to do everything possible to crack down on both.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) made an interesting speech, particularly about the figures. I have them here, and the number of asylum applications in the two months of May and June 1996 decreased, but then the figures started to rise.

**Mr. Howard:** The figures went down and then, as I explained, the courts intervened to sabotage the policy, so they increased again.

**Mrs. Roche:** No, that has nothing to do with the figures. They reflect, as do those for elsewhere in Europe, the rising number of applications over the years. As my hon. Friend the Member for Battersea said, the Tory record shows that there was a ten fold increase in the number of asylum seekers in the early years of the Conservative Government, very much reflecting what was happening in Europe and the rest of the world. I listened closely to the comments of the right hon. and learned Gentleman about the Dublin convention, and I understand the gloss that he puts on it. However, there is absolutely no doubt that the Dublin convention was fatally flawed, and that the previous Government, of whom he was a member, signed up to it.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked an important question about SNCF and fencing. He knows that I take a close personal interest in that matter. I understand that SNCF has now secured the funds and drawn up plans for securing that particular site, and I undertake to let him know when that will occur.

My hon. Friend the Member for Battersea and the hon. Member for Buckingham asked about processing. The record of the previous Government for asylum processing was deplorable. They brought in a computer system that was going to do everything but make the tea—if my memory serves me correctly, a computer system that the Public Accounts Committee said was overly ambitious and seriously flawed. They laid off staff at the same time and then wondered why the backlog had increased—absolutely amazing.

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle used the term "chutzpah", which is one of my favourite words. An example of chutzpah is the story of the man who murdered his parents and then, in his plea of mitigation to the court as to why he should not be sentenced to life imprisonment, said that he was an orphan. It is chutzpah on the part of members of the previous Government to deny their responsibility.

It is because we have put enormous resources into the immigration and nationality directorate—nearly £2 billion will be spent during the next four years—that the asylum backlog is at a 10-year record low. It is now down to working levels. On 1 May, I had the great pleasure of visiting the asylum caseworkers to thank them for their hard work. In the last financial year, 130,000 decisions were taken. That is a remarkable achievement, and I give credit to them.

I also want to give credit to the immigration service. I was pleased by the comments of the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle, because he knows about the immense efforts of immigration officers. I take issue with the hon. Member for Buckingham: the immigration service has achieved remarkable levels of removals—the highest ever. We still have ambitious targets and there is much to be done, but we have done much better than a Conservative Government would have done, and he should understand that.

**Mr. Howard:** Will the hon. Lady indulge me once more?

**Mrs. Roche:** I have two minutes left, but yes.

**Mr. Howard:** May I associate myself with everything that has been said by way of tribute to the immigration officers? Will the hon. Lady now give me the figures for those apprehended at the Eurotunnel terminals at Cheriton?

**Mrs. Roche:** I am unable to provide the exact figures at the moment, but I undertake to give them to the hon. and learned Gentleman as soon as possible.

I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Buckingham about removal. Presumably, they were an early insight into the Conservative manifesto. What they show is a woeful misunderstanding of removal. The expensive, possibly illegal, proposal for detention centres that will keep people until removal, when we know that for some—

**Mr. Bercow:** Nonsense.

**Mrs. Roche:** I commend to the hon. Gentleman an excellent report on the subject produced by my hon. Friend the Member for Erdington. I am sure that a copy will be sent to him. It shows that it is very difficult to remove some people. The hon. Gentleman might want to reflect again on his proposals.

*[Mrs. Roche]*

The discussions about co-operation between agencies and the entitlement card were interesting. The Government have commented on those matters, and we will reflect very carefully on what has been said today. The issues that we discussed are important, and we have had an interesting and good debate. It is important to do several things. We must respond to the UNHCR—

*It being half-past Five o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.*

# Written Answers to Questions

*Monday 23 April 2001*

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### A/F Protein Inc.

**Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) if *(a)* he and *(b)* officials met representatives of A/F Protein Inc. of Waltham, Massachussets, USA; [157756]

(2) what representations *(a)* he and *(b)* officials have received from representatives of A/F Protein Inc. of Waltham, Massachussets; and what his response was. [157794]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** So far as I am aware, no meetings have taken place and no representations have been received.

### Departmental Policies (Eccles)

**Mr. Ian Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Eccles constituency, the effects on Eccles of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158062]

**Mr. Caborn:** This Department does not maintain statistical information at constituency level.

My hon. Friend's constituents, like many others throughout Greater Manchester, have benefited from my Department's Employment Rights policies which include national minimum wage, working time directive, part time working regulations and improved maternity leave.

In addition, Eccles is eligible for Enterprise Grant Scheme funding.

In the North West region, my Department's policies have contributed to growth in employment by 107,000 and a fall in unemployment by 63,000; reductions in youth unemployment by 75 per cent. and long term unemployment by 54 per cent.

### Departmental Policies (Cannock Chase)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Cannock Chase constituency, the effects on Cannock Chase of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158064]

**Mr. Caborn:** In the period in question, the following offers of assistance have been made to businesses in the Cannock Chase local authority district.

(1) Six offers of Regional Selective Assistance totalling £244,000. These offers have brought forward fixed capital investment of £2.48 million for projects which will create 80 jobs.

(2) Three offers of Enterprise Grant have been made since the scheme was introduced on 1 March 2000. These offers involve grant of £124,000 and fixed capital investment of £889,500.

(3) An offer of £45,000 assistance under the Smart (innovation grant) scheme towards a feasibility project involving total costs of £87,453.

(4) 919 businesses have been assisted by Business Link Staffordshire—75 having received advice from the International Trade Team, of these over 30 have commissioned reports via British Embassies and Consulates in order to obtain tailored information to assist in the development of overseas business. Eight companies have benefited from direct financial support under the Export Voucher Scheme which provides them with a contribution towards using professional outside support in aspects of overseas trade. In addition 20 companies regularly use the Export Documentation Service from the Chamber of Commerce.

The DTI-funded West Midlands Regional Supply Office (RSO) has assisted 128 companies in the Cannock Chase area since 1997. The RSO is now incorporated into the RDA, Advantage West Midlands.

The Inward Investment Directorate of Advantage West Midlands reports the following:

since 1997 there have been 14 investments into the Cannock Chase local authority area, creating 306 new jobs and safeguarding a further 2,359;

there have been two inward investments this year safeguarding 294 jobs;

in total there are 25 overseas owned companies in Cannock Chase employing 2,886.

### Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158554]

**Mr. Byers:** None.

### Kyoto Protocol

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take action under Article 20 of the World Trade Organisation in respect of the use of trade constraints to protect the environment following the decision of the United States Administration to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol on climate change. [158428]

**Mr. Caborn:** The Government do not believe that trade sanctions would be a helpful way of tackling the United States on its approach to climate change. We are keen to maintain a constructive dialogue with the US since it is important that they remain engaged in global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

### Post Offices

**Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* Crown post offices and *(b)* sub-post offices (i) closed and (ii) opened in each year from 1979 to the last year for which figures are available. [158303]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** The information requested is set out in the table. Separate figures for openings and closures are not available, but the table shows closure figures net of openings for each year.

| Year Ending | Crown Offices | Sub Post Offices | Total | Closures in Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 31 March 1978 | 1,579 | 21,342 | 22,921 | — |
| 31 March 1979 | 1,580 | 21,213 | 22,793 | 128 |
| 31 March 1980 | 1,583 | 21,056 | 22,639 | 154 |
| 31 March 1981 | 1,581 | 20,894 | 22,475 | 164 |
| 31 March 1982 | 1,573 | 20,832 | 22,405 | 70 |
| 31 March 1983 | 1,567 | 20,734 | 22,301 | 104 |
| 31 March 1984 | 1,559 | 20,499 | 22,058 | 243 |
| 31 March 1985 | 1,553 | 20,110 | 21,663 | 395 |
| 31 March 1986 | 1,509 | 19,796 | 21,305 | 358 |
| 31 March 1987 | 1,503 | 19,708 | 21,211 | 94 |
| 31 March 1988 | 1,499 | 19,572 | 21,071 | 140 |
| 31 March 1989 | 1,493 | 19,537 | 21,030 | 41 |
| 31 March 1990 | 1,339 | 19,532 | 20,871 | 159 |
| 31 March 1991 | 1,167 | 19,471 | 20,638 | 233 |
| 31 March 1992 | 1,019 | 19,141 | 20,160 | 478 |
| 31 March 1993 | 917 | 19,041 | 19,958 | 202 |
| 31 March 1994 | 800 | 18,982 | 19,782 | 176 |
| 31 March 1995 | 699 | 18,908 | 19,607 | 175 |
| 31 March 1996 | 653 | 18,761 | 19,414 | 193 |
| 31 March 1997 | 606 | 18,645 | 19,251 | 163 |
| 31 March 1998 | 601 | 18,407 | 19,008 | 243 |
| 31 March 1999 | 600 | 18,175 | 18,775 | 233 |
| 31 March 2000 | 598 | 17,795 | 18,393 | 382 |

**Mr. Page:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post offices closed between 1 April 2000 and 31 March. [158341]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** Full year figures for the year 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001 are not yet available from the Post Office Network.

### North West Development Agency

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many major companies have located their sites in the North West Region since the formation of the North West Development Agency; and if he will make a statement. [158401]

**Mr. Caborn:** My Department does not collect information about companies locating in particular regions. An answer to your specific question would therefore be purely anecdotal and inevitably unrepresentative of the true picture.

However, the North West Development Agency records investments made by overseas owned companies. Since the Agency's formation, there have been 52 investments in the North West region which have each created or safeguarded 100 or more jobs.

### Cheltenham Gold Cup

**Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the loss to the economy of Gloucestershire of the postponement and cancellation of the Cheltenham Gold Cup Festival. [158345]

**Mr. Caborn:** The Government are aware that the cancellation of high profile events, such as the Cheltenham Gold Cup in the south west which generate millions of pound in revenue in normal years, is contributing to the financial difficulties of businesses affected by Foot and Mouth disease (FMD).

The Government are constantly monitoring the financial impact of FMD in the country, and has already announced a range of measures to assist businesses through immediate financial difficulties. These measures including rate relief, deferment of taxes, and extensions to the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme.

### Departmental Performance Targets

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the attainment of the performance targets set for his Department in the Comprehensive Spending Review published in December 1998. [158533]

**Mr. Byers:** Information on the Department's progress against the Public Service Agreement Targets set as part of the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review has recently been published in the Department's annual Expenditure Plans Report for 2001–02, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House. (Cm 5112, March 2001).

### Competitiveness Council

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will publish the report of the Competitiveness Council. [158532]

**Mr. Byers:** The terms of reference for the Competitiveness Council were to advise the Secretary of State. This it has done without producing a report.

### Departmental Policies (Plymouth)

**Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency, *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency and *(c)* South-West Devon constituency, the effects on the Plymouth unitary authority area of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158027]

**Mr. Caborn:** The Department has provided the following support for businesses in *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency, *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency and *(c)* the part of South-West Devon constituency in the Plymouth unitary authority area, since May 1997.

*Regional Selective Assistance (RSA)*

RSA is a capital investment grant linked to the creation or safeguarding of jobs in designated areas of need (the Assisted Areas). The following RSA grant offers have been made to businesses in the Plymouth unitary authority area:

*(a)* Seven offers totalling £2.01 million made to businesses in the Plymouth, Sutton constituency, to support projects with total capital expenditure of £19.8 million, and to create and safeguard a total of 1,211 jobs.

*(b)* Twenty offers totalling £10.16 million have been made to businesses in the Devonport constituency, to support projects with total capital expenditure of £83.2 million, and to create and safeguard a total of 3,183 jobs.

*(c)* One RSA grant offer of £0.24 million has been made to a business in the Plymouth unitary authority area of South-West Devon constituency, to support a project with capital expenditure of £1.3 million, and to create 55 new jobs.

*Enterprise Grants*

The Enterprise Grants scheme is a simplified scheme that was introduced in April 2000 to help small firms undertake fixed capital investment projects. Two offers totalling £42,000 have been made to firms in the Plymouth, Devonport constituency.

*Smart*

Smart awards are designed to help small firms with the introduction of new products and processes. Seven Smart awards totalling £343,437 have been made to firms in the Plymouth, Devonport constituency.

*Business Link*

PROSPER Business Link has provided services to small businesses in the Truro and St. Austell constituency since 1997. These include general and specialised advice to help businesses grow, export development counselling, ICT advice, and a full range of specialist information. From April 2001 these services will be provided by the Small Business Service operating through a franchise awarded to a PROSPER led partnership. This new service will be more customer focused ensuring that services are driven by local need.

### Ilisu Dam

**Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to be able to publish the Environmental Impact Assessment report on the Ilisu hydro-electric project in Turkey. [158780]

**Mr. Byers:** We have not yet received a copy of the Environmental Impact Assessment Report. When we do, I intend to make the report public.

### Property Market

**Jane Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will assess the effect of the operation of the property market on small independent retailers; and if he will make a statement. [157242]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** I have been asked to reply.

I am aware of my hon. Friend's concern about the position of small businesses competing for premises with larger, more established businesses. While direct intervention could create difficulties for the retail markets, we are concerned about the quality of information and advice that is available to occupiers of small business premises. We are currently working with the Small Business Service to ensure that better information is available.

The issue of advice for small businesses arose in the course of our review of the property industry's Code of Practice on Commercial Property Leases, along with more general issues about the degree of choice and flexibility in the commercial property market. Representatives of landlords, occupiers and the professional bodies undertook to address these concerns, but have failed to reach consensus on the key issues. We are disappointed at this lack of agreement, and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning is now considering future options.

### Civil Aircraft Projects

**Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much Government aid has been granted by his Department, and its predecessor, in support of civil aircraft projects since 1971, excluding Airbus projects; and if he will set out the amounts *(a)* granted in respect of each project and *(b)* recovered by way of sales and licensing levies. [157377]

**Mr. Alan Johnson** *[pursuant to reply, 6 April 2001, c. 306W]:* Unfortunately two of the figures given in the original answer are incorrect. These should read:

*£ million*

| | *(a)* | *(b)* |
|---|---|---|
| To Rolls-Royce for the Trent 600/900 in 2001 .. | 250 | — |
| To Rolls-Royce for the Trent aeroengine in 1997 | 200 | 7.7 |

Not yet due

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158127]

**Dr. Reid:** The Government are committed to equality of opportunity and to increasing the diversity of those appointed to public bodies. There are no such limits in this Department.

### Police Ombudsman

**Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what funding has been made available to the Police Ombudsman's Office for education and publicity purposes; and if he will make a statement. [157798]

**Mr. Ingram:** The Ombudsman's budget for this financial year currently stands at £4.7 million; to what, and how that budget is allocated is a matter for the Ombudsman to decide.

### Plastic Baton Rounds

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what date he was informed of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council statement on the comparative injury potential of the L547 baton round with the L21A1 baton round issued on 21 August; and what steps he took to bring this to the attention of each of the bodies engaged in finding an alternative to the plastic baton round. [158052]

**Mr. Ingram:** The development of the new baton round (the L21A1) was the result of extensive research and included a report by the Defence Scientific Advisory Council on the comparative injury potential of the L547 baton round and the L21A1 baton round. Ministers became aware of the report shortly after it was completed

and, confirming as it does the greater safety of the new round over the old one, it was a key factor in the decision to introduce the new round for operational use from 1 June.

Each of the organisations currently represented on the "Alternatives to Baton Rounds" project was either represented on the Baton Rounds Steering Group or were briefed at an early stage.

## Police Officers

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will indicate for each rank for each of the police sub-divisions of *(a)* Coleraine and *(b)* Limavady the number of officers in post on (i) 1 January 2000, (ii) 1 January 2001 and (iii) 1 April 2001. [157834]

**Mr. Ingram:** The table provides the information requested. It should be noted that manpower figures for 1 January 2000 are not readily available therefore the nearest possible date of 17 February has been used.

| | *17 February 2000* | *2 January 2001* | *2 April 2001* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Coleraine* | | | |
| C/SUPT | — | — | 1 |
| SUPT | 1 | 1 | — |
| C/INSP | 1 | 1 | — |
| INSP | 4 | 3 | 6 |
| SGT | 20 | 18 | 23 |
| CON | 100 | 97 | 104 |
| TOTAL | 126 | 120 | 134 |
| FTR | 49 | 45 | 44 |
| PTR | 36 | 36 | 36 |
| *Limavady* | | | |
| C/SUPT | — | — | — |
| SUPT | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| C/INSP | 1 | 1 | — |
| INSP | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| SGT | 14 | 15 | 14 |
| CON | 49 | 52 | 49 |
| TOTAL | 69 | 73 | 68 |
| FTR | 37 | 32 | 31 |
| PTR | 8 | 8 | 7 |

## RUC

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will indicate for each month since 1 January 1999 *(a)* the number of RUC officers in post at each rank, *(b)* the number who retired at each rank in each month and *(c)* his projection of *(a)* and *(b)* until the end of June. [157885]

**Mr. Ingram:** The tables show *(a)* the number of RUC officers in post at each rank for each month since 1 January 1999 and projected figures until the end of June 2001 and *(b)* the number of RUC officers who retired at each rank in each month since 1 January 1999 and projected figures until the end of June 2001.

*Table A: Actual strength breakdown by rank*

| | *CC* | *DCC* | *ACC* | *Ch Supt* | *Supt* | *Ch Insp* | *Insp* | *Sergt* | *Con* | *Total* | *R Con FT* | *R Con PT* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 31 December 1998 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 120 | 169 | 482 | 1,399 | 6,237 | 8,456 | 2,936 | 1,238 |
| 31 January 1999 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 121 | 168 | 486 | 1,392 | 6,315 | 8,531 | 2,884 | 1,230 |
| 28 February 1999 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 122 | 168 | 490 | 1,401 | 6,290 | 8,520 | 2,874 | 1,226 |
| 31 March 1999 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 121 | 168 | 489 | 1,398 | 6,271 | 8,496 | 2,862 | 1,217 |
| 30 April 1999 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 121 | 167 | 489 | 1,398 | 6,247 | 8,471 | 2,858 | 1,212 |
| 31 May 1999 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 121 | 167 | 487 | 1,397 | 6,234 | 8,455 | 2,850 | 1,209 |
| 30 June 1999 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 40 | 121 | 167 | 491 | 1,407 | 6,254 | 8,490 | 2,823 | 1,204 |
| 31 July 1999 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 40 | 121 | 168 | 490 | 1,408 | 6,242 | 8,479 | 2,813 | 1,200 |
| 31 August 1999 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 121 | 168 | 489 | 1,405 | 6,282 | 8,514 | 2,775 | 1,194 |
| 30 September 1999 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 120 | 171 | 495 | 1,398 | 6,268 | 8,501 | 2,762 | 1,188 |
| 31 October 1999 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 120 | 169 | 499 | 1,406 | 6,245 | 8,488 | 2,753 | 1,181 |
| 30 November 1999 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 119 | 168 | 499 | 1,395 | 6,225 | 8,455 | 2,727 | 1,176 |
| 31 December 1999 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 40 | 119 | 167 | 499 | 1,396 | 6,214 | 8,445 | 2,719 | 1,174 |
| 31 January 2000 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 120 | 168 | 496 | 1,395 | 6,195 | 8,423 | 2,708 | 1,169 |
| 29 February 2000 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 121 | 172 | 495 | 1,394 | 6,182 | 8,413 | 2,698 | 1,157 |
| 31 March 2000 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 123 | 170 | 498 | 1,390 | 6,163 | 8,393 | 2,688 | 1,152 |
| 30 April 2000 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 123 | 171 | 499 | 1,396 | 6,177 | 8,415 | 2,668 | 1,145 |
| 31 May 2000 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 123 | 170 | 498 | 1,394 | 6,159 | 8,393 | 2,654 | 1,140 |
| 30 June 2000 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 123 | 169 | 498 | 1,397 | 6,138 | 8,374 | 2,643 | 1,137 |
| 31 July 2000 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 122 | 168 | 498 | 1,400 | 6,115 | 8,352 | 2,623 | 1,131 |
| 31 August 2000 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 39 | 121 | 168 | 498 | 1,397 | 6,104 | 8,337 | 2,606 | 1,121 |
| 30 September 2000 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 40 | 122 | 168 | 494 | 1,394 | 6,090 | 8,318 | 2,593 | 1,118 |
| 31 October 2000 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 40 | 122 | 168 | 496 | 1,389 | 6,078 | 8,303 | 2,579 | 1,112 |
| 30 November 2000 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 40 | 121 | 168 | 492 | 1,378 | 6,037 | 8,245 | 2,567 | 1,106 |
| 31 December 2000 | 1 | 1 | 7 | 40 | 122 | 169 | 493 | 1,382 | 6,053 | 8,268 | 2,555 | 1,097 |
| 31 January 2001 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 33 | 107 | 162 | 456 | 1,334 | 5,938 | 8,038 | 2,530 | 1,089 |
| 28 February 2001 | 1 | 1 | 6 | 36 | 93 | 157 | 442 | 1,299 | 5,878 | 7,913 | 2,514 | 1,083 |
| 31 March 2001 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 33 | 91 | 150 | 433 | 1,278 | 5,819 | 7,810 | 2,496 | 1,073 |
| 30 April 2001 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 39 | 72 | 135 | 412 | 1,211 | 5,632 | 7,506 | 2,461 | 1,071 |
| 30 May 2001 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 38 | 68 | 130 | 400 | 1,187 | 5,586 | 7,414 | 2,434 | 1,071 |
| 30 June 2001 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 37 | 67 | 130 | 397 | 1,174 | 5,553 | 7,363 | 2,427 | 1,071 |

*Note:*

Actual strength does not include police personnel on secondment.

*Table B: Number of leavers in each rank by month*

| Year/date | Acc | Ch Supt | Supt | Ch Insp | Insp | Sergt | Con | S/T Aux/Con | R Con FT | R Con PT | Grand total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *1999* | | | | | | | | | | | |
| January | — | — | — | 1 | — | 5 | 9 | 1 | 52 | 6 | 74 |
| February | — | — | — | — | 1 | 2 | 7 | — | 10 | 4 | 24 |
| March | — | 1 | 1 | — | 2 | 3 | 17 | — | 12 | 10 | 46 |
| April | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 5 | 12 | — | 4 | 4 | 27 |
| May | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 4 | 9 | — | 11 | 4 | 30 |
| June | — | — | 1 | — | 1 | 2 | 16 | 1 | 26 | 5 | 52 |
| July | — | — | — | — | — | 2 | 9 | — | 10 | 3 | 24 |
| August | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | 4 | 13 | — | 38 | 7 | 64 |
| September | — | — | — | — | — | 5 | 10 | — | 12 | 6 | 33 |
| October | — | — | — | — | — | 1 | 9 | — | 9 | 8 | 27 |
| November | — | — | 1 | 1 | — | 3 | 10 | — | 27 | 4 | 46 |
| December | — | — | — | — | — | 5 | 12 | — | 9 | 6 | 32 |
| *2000* | | | | | | | | | | | |
| January | — | 1 | — | — | — | 3 | 12 | — | 11 | 6 | 33 |
| February | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | 7 | — | 9 | 5 | 24 |
| March | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | 18 | — | 15 | 10 | 46 |
| April | — | — | — | — | — | 3 | 14 | 1 | 20 | 9 | 47 |
| May | — | — | — | 2 | 1 | 6 | 14 | 1 | 12 | 1 | 37 |
| June | — | — | — | — | 3 | 4 | 11 | 1 | 12 | 5 | 36 |
| July | — | 1 | — | 1 | — | — | 18 | — | 20 | 7 | 47 |
| August | — | — | 1 | — | — | 2 | 15 | — | 15 | 7 | 40 |
| September | — | — | — | — | 2 | 3 | 11 | — | 15 | 2 | 33 |
| October | — | — | — | — | — | — | 9 | — | 12 | 7 | 28 |
| November | 1 | — | 1 | — | 2 | 2 | 17 | — | 13 | 7 | 43 |
| December | — | — | — | — | 1 | 2 | 10 | — | 15 | 12 | 40 |
| *2001* | | | | | | | | | | | |
| January | — | 7 | 16 | 9 | 35 | 58 | 105 | — | 22 | 9 | 261 |
| February | — | 5 | 7 | 8 | 19 | 28 | 56 | 1 | 16 | 4 | 144 |
| March | 2 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 10 | 19 | 56 | 2 | 20 | 5 | 127 |
| April | 1 | 5 | 12 | 11 | 22 | 72 | 178 | — | 35 | 2 | 338 |
| May | — | 1 | 4 | 5 | 15 | 27 | 65 | — | 27 | — | 144 |
| June | — | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 13 | 33 | — | 7 | — | 59 |

*Note:*
Leavers include all cessation reasons eg medical retirement, voluntary early retirement, resigned etc., however the figures for April, May and June 2001 are projections based on known severance figures and do not take account of normal and medical wastage not yet notified.

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will publish a table in the *Official Report* to show how many *(a)* inquiries were made about joining the RUC and *(b)* applications were received for each intake to the RUC broken down by gender; and what was the (i) gender and (ii) religious breakdown of each intake in each of the last five years. [156585]

**Mr. Ingram:** The tables show the breakdown of applications for recruitment to the Royal Ulster Constabulary from 1996 to the last recruitment campaign in December 1998 and the corresponding number of successful applicants. The total number of inquiries received for each campaign are not available.

*Applications/acceptances to RUC from 1996–98 by gender and community background—Regulars*

| | CB1 | | | CB2 | | | CB3 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | M | F | T | M | F | T | M | F | T | Total |
| *Applications* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Comp E 1996 | 983 | 588 | 1,571 | 236 | 133 | 369 | 129 | 26 | 155 | 2,095 |
| Comp F 1996 | 1,312 | 742 | 2,054 | 261 | 145 | 406 | 242 | 27 | 269 | 2,729 |
| Comp G 1997 | 1,368 | 804 | 2,172 | 253 | 159 | 412 | 188 | 25 | 213 | 2,797 |
| Comp H 1998 | 1,332 | 802 | 2,134 | 270 | 161 | 431 | 228 | 32 | 260 | 2,825 |
| Comp I 1998 | 1,414 | 898 | 2,312 | 470 | 280 | 750 | 246 | 51 | 297 | 3,359 |
| *Acceptances* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Comp E 1996 | 103 | 22 | 125 | 10 | 3 | 13 | 5 | 0 | 5 | 143 |
| Comp F 1996 | 75 | 19 | 94 | 13 | 1 | 14 | 14 | 0 | 14 | 122 |
| Comp G 1997 | 79 | 17 | 96 | 13 | 2 | 15 | 9 | 0 | 9 | 120 |
| Comp H 1998 | 80 | 45 | 125 | 9 | 3 | 12 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 144 |
| Comp I 1998 | 72 | 38 | 110 | 9 | 9 | 18 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 133 |

*Full-time reserves*

| Year | CB1 M | CB1 F | CB1 T | CB2 M | CB2 F | CB2 T | CB3 M | CB3 F | CB3 T | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Applications* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Comp C 1996 | 654 | 421 | 1,075 | 154 | 101 | 255 | 90 | 11 | 101 | 1,431 |
| Comp D 1997 | 753 | 402 | 1,155 | 109 | 75 | 184 | 113 | 22 | 135 | 1,474 |
| Comp E 1997 | 376 | 236 | 612 | 60 | 46 | 106 | 43 | 12 | 55 | 773 |
| Comp F 1997 | 709 | 423 | 1,132 | 119 | 78 | 197 | 104 | 24 | 128 | 1,457 |
| *Acceptances* | | | | | | | | | | |
| Comp C 1996 | 66 | 63 | 129 | 14 | 10 | 24 | 7 | 1 | 8 | 161 |
| Comp D 1997 | 19 | 5 | 24 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 29 |
| Comp E 1997 | 25 | 4 | 29 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 35 |
| Comp F 1997 | 31 | 19 | 50 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 58 |

*Notes:*
CB1—Perceived Protestant
CB2—Perceived Roman Catholic
CB3—Others

### Coleraine Police Station

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made with the building of the new police station in Coleraine; when he estimates the remaining contracts will be let; and when the new station will be completed. [157893]

**Mr. Ingram:** All remaining contracts and tenders relating to the new Royal Ulster Constabulary station at Coleraine have now been awarded. Building works are expected to start by early May 2001 with a contract period of 27 months.

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the RUC contract for accommodation at the Ministry of Defence buildings at Laurel Hill, Coleraine expires; and what steps have been taken to extend that contract until the new police station in Coleraine is ready for occupation. [157883]

**Mr. Ingram:** The Royal Ulster Constabulary operational and support personnel located at Laurel Hill MOD base are currently being relocated back to Coleraine Royal Ulster Constabulary station and this is expected to be completed by the end of April 2001 at which time the leasing arrangements with the MOD will be terminated.

### Foot and Mouth (Police Patrols)

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many extra police officers, in each rank and in total, have been deployed to control the traffic at the disinfection points of vehicles entering and leaving Northern Ireland from the Irish Republic, since the outbreak of foot and mouth disease began. [157884]

**Mr. Ingram:** No police officers have been specifically deployed to control traffic at disinfection points. However, the Royal Ulster Constabulary liaises daily with and responds to requests from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and other Government officials to attend where required. Attendance has varied as has been deemed necessary.

Fixed and rolling vehicle checkpoints have been set up throughout the province and, as part of normal duties, police patrols have been operating vehicle checkpoints with instructions to stop/check any persons or vehicles appearing to be involved with the transport of animals or animal products.

### Terrorism

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 30 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 135W, on terrorism, what his estimate is of *(a)* the cost of creating statistics on numbers of individuals who have been notified they are at risk as a result of personal files or information discovered in the possession of paramilitaries and *(b)* the cost of counting the files maintained at RUC headquarters. [154638]

**Mr. Ingram:** The manual records used by the Royal Ulster Constabulary are held on an individual basis so as to ensure that appropriate action is taken in respect of each person who comes under threat. To date there has not been a statistical need to collate this information in a single database. The information requested is therefore not readily available and to undertake a specific scoping study to evaluate the need and cost of setting up such a database would incur a disproportionate cost.

### Ministerial Meetings

**Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many ministerial meetings with hon. Members have been cancelled by Ministers since 1 January. [155242]

**Dr. Reid:** Two meetings between NIO Ministers and hon. Members have been cancelled since 1 January, these meetings were rescheduled and have subsequently taken place.

### Economy

**Ms Kelly:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Minister for Enterprise in the Northern Ireland Assembly about the number of *(a)* business start ups and *(b)* amount of inward investment in each parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland since the signing of the Belfast Agreement; and if he will make a statement. [151046]

**Dr. Reid:** Since taking up office as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland I have had a number of discussions with Sir Reg Empey about economic matters. Those discussions covered a number of issues, including how the Government can assist companies in Northern Ireland

and how we can work together to develop the Northern Ireland economy. I expect to have further discussions with Sir Reg Empey in the coming months.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Departmental Policies (Don Valley)

**Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to Don Valley constituency, the effects on Doncaster of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [153519]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** Since May 1997 my Department has introduced and developed a variety of initiatives which will impact on my hon. Friend's constituency and which promote our objectives of access, excellence, education, and creativity and employment. We have published our strategies to take this forward in "Tomorrow's Tourism" and "A Sporting Future for All", which was recently followed up by the Government's Plan for Sport. We have tackled the issue of social inclusion taking forward the recommendations of Policy Action Team 10 on Arts and Sport and developing social inclusion policies across all our areas which is recognised within the most recent progress report "Building on PAT10".

We have given more support to the cultural and sporting infrastructure. The Spending Review 2000 secured a doubling of the budget for sport and the largest ever increase for the arts: an increase of 80 per cent. from £186 million in 1997–98 to £336 million in 2003–04. In taking forward our aim to develop the educational potential of culture and sport £40 million has been allocated to developing Creative Partnerships; we have established through lottery funding the £30 million National Foundation for Youth Music; and secured an additional £130 million for primary schools sports and arts facilities through the Space for Sport and the Arts programme. With £120 million of central Government and lottery funding we will be providing a school sports co-ordinator in one in four secondary schools to work with local primary and special schools to improve sporting provision and physical education for children in the most deprived areas. We have delivered free access to national museums for children and the over 60s and additional money will be provided to allow this to be extended to everyone in December 2001. We have commissioned a task force which is currently considering the issues facing non-national museums in the regions.

We have made improvements in the way the lottery is spent to ensure a fairer distribution. The introduction of the New Opportunities Fund for spending on health, education and the environment has made a real difference to communities everywhere. For instance it has invested £120 million to support the People's Network, which will enable all 4,300 public libraries to offer free public internet access through UK online learning centres; and a further £50 million to stimulate development of content to support the Network.

We have set up a Regional Cultural Consortium in each of the English regions outside London to champion culture and creativity, including heritage, sport and tourism, and to draw up regional cultural strategies identifying regional objectives and priorities.

We have published a Green Paper, "Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years", setting out how individual creative talent can be given the support it needs from childhood to flourish; how artists and cultural institutions can be freed from bureaucratic controls; and how the freedom to explore and enjoy creativity and culture can be made available to all.

Through their commitment to public service broadcasting, the Government have helped to foster an environment in which a creative, commercially successful broadcasting industry provides a wide range of UK-made, high quality, original programmes catering for all viewers and listeners. We have ensured a secure funding base for the BBC and S4C, while giving them the freedom to develop commercial operations which complement and support their public service remit. We have made clear in the Communications White Paper that public service broadcasting will continue to have a key role to play in the digital future. The Government have introduced free television licences for people aged 75 or over from 1 November last year.

My Department sponsors the British Tourist Authority (BTA) which continues to promote Britain effectively as an attractive tourist destination for overseas visitors. The BTA's successful marketing activities are aimed at bringing benefits to all parts of the UK, including Don Valley.

In delivering these initiatives we aim to make culture and sport inclusive activities, boosting participation and improving the quality of life for all.

*Don Valley*

According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, there have been 66 national lottery awards to Don Valley totalling £741,678.

Seventeen Millennium Award winners have been identified from Don Valley and between them they have received grants totalling £29,306.

Doncaster is part of the South Yorkshire Sports Partnership and, additionally, sits within the South Yorkshire Coalfield Sports Action Zone (SAZ). South Yorkshire Sports Partnership has a Partnership Manager, SAZ Manager and Active Sports Manager.

*Grants offered by English Heritage (EH) in the Doncaster area*

Carstairs Countryside Trust—offered £84,000 for acquisition of Sutton Common Enclosures, a scheduled ancient monument.

Conservation Area Partnership Scheme—Doncaster High Street—£30,000 p.a. for financial years 1997–98 and 1998–99.

Information on the number of beneficiaries of free television licences by constituency is not available, but estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 4,600 people aged 75 or over living in the Don Valley constituency.

There are of course other initiatives in the wider context of the area which may have an effect on the Don Valley constituency. These are:

Yorkshire Arts received £9,288,000 in 2000–2001 from the Arts Council to support arts and cultural activity across its region. In 2001–2002 this will increase to £10,315,832 or by 11 per cent.

Doncaster Community Arts received an award of £9,020 from the National Foundation for Youth Music for a Music Maker Project.

In addition, the Millennium Commission has contributed £34 million to date towards the development and running costs of the Earth Centre.

### Departmental Policies (Gorton)

**Mr. Kaufman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the Manchester, Gorton constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 21 November 2000. [154504]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** Since November 2000 my Department has continued to develop a variety of initiatives which will impact on my right hon. Friend's constituency and which promote our objectives of access, excellence, education, and creativity and employment. We have built on our strategies to take this forward in Tomorrow's Tourism and A Sporting Future for All, which was followed in March by The Government's Plan for Sport. We have tackled the issue of social inclusion taking forward the recommendations of Policy Action Team 10 on Arts and Sport and developing social inclusion policies across all our areas which is recognised within the most recent progress report Building on PAT10 published in February.

A significant increase in funding for the cultural and sporting infrastructure has continued to have a huge influence since November. The Spending Review 2000 secured a doubling of the budget for sport and the largest ever increase for the arts: an increase of 80 per cent. from £186 million in 1997–98 to £336 million in 2003–04. In taking forward our aim to develop the educational potential of culture and sport £40 million has been allocated to developing Creative Partnerships; we have established through lottery funding, the £30 million National Foundation for Youth Music; and secured an additional £130 million for primary schools sports and arts facilities through the Space for Sport and the Arts programme. With £120 million of central Government and Lottery funding we are providing a school sports co-ordinator in one in four secondary schools to work with local primary and special schools to improve sporting provision and physical education for children in the most deprived areas. We have delivered free access to national museums for children, from April this was extended to cover the over 60's at the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry. Additional money will be provided to allow this to be extended to everyone in December 2001. We have commissioned a Task Force which is currently considering the issues facing non-national museums in the regions.

According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, there have been four national lottery awards to Manchester Gorton since November, totalling £108,648. We have made improvements in the way the Lottery is spent to ensure a fairer distribution. The New Opportunities Fund has made a real difference to communities everywhere. For instance it has invested £120 million to support the People's Network, which will enable all 4,300 public libraries to offer free public internet access through UK online learning centres; and a further £50 million to stimulate development of content to support the Network.

The North West Regional Cultural Consortium is working hard to champion culture and creativity, including heritage, sport and tourism throughout the region. Their regional cultural strategy is currently in draft format and is on course to be published in July.

In March, we published a Green Paper "Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years", setting out how individual creative talent can be given the support it needs from childhood to flourish; how artists and cultural institutions can be freed from bureaucratic controls; and how the freedom to explore and enjoy creativity and culture can be made available to all.

Through their commitment to public service broadcasting, the Government have helped to foster an environment in which a creative, commercially successful broadcasting industry provides a wide range of UK-made, high quality, original programmes catering for all viewers and listeners. We have ensured a secure funding base for the BBC and S4C, while giving them the freedom to develop commercial operations which complement and support their public service remit. We have made clear in the Communications White Paper that public service broadcasting will continue to have a key role to play in the digital future. Since November the Government have introduced free television licences for people aged 75. Information on the number of beneficiaries of free television licences by constituency is not available, but estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 4,700 people aged 75 or over living in the Manchester, Gorton constituency.

In the wider context of the region North West Arts Board received £14,061,000 in 2000–01 from the Arts Council to support arts and cultural activity across its region. In 2001–02 this will increase to £15,491,266 or by 10.17 per cent.

### Rugby

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much *(a)* lottery and *(b)* Sports Council money has been used to assess players in switching codes from Rugby League to Rugby Union. [157696]

**Kate Hoey:** I have been assured by Sport England and UK Sport that no lottery or Exchequer funding has been used for this purpose.

### Wembley Stadium

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the latest date is for the opening of the new Wembley stadium. [157314]

**Kate Hoey** *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* The date for the opening of the new Wembley Stadium is a matter for the Football Association and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. to determine.

### Digital Terrestrial Television

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what action his Department is taking to enable television viewers in the Verwood area of Dorset to obtain access to the full range of digital terrestrial television; [158473]

(2) what changes are proposed to the power output of the Rowridge and Salisbury transmitters to enable television viewers in the Verwood area of Dorset to obtain the full range of digital terrestrial television. [158467]

**Janet Anderson:** I understand from the Independent Television Commission (ITC) that the Rowridge transmitter received an upgrade in January as part of the ongoing work to equalise the coverage of digital terrestrial television of all six multiplexes. The Government are working with the ITC, the BBC and the broadcasting industry on how to extend digital services further to achieve the best possible coverage throughout the country.

### Concessionary Television Licences

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 9 April 2001 to the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn) *Official Report*, column 415W, on concessionary television licences, for what reason the proposed amendment is limited to accommodation provided or managed by a local authority, housing association or development corporation. [158679]

**Janet Anderson:** The reason is that the anomaly we are seeking to address applies only to sheltered housing provided or managed by a local authority, a housing association or a development corporation, because only sheltered housing provided or managed in this way qualifies for the Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) concessionary television licence scheme.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 9 April 2001 to the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Mr. Quinn), *Official Report*, column 415W, on concessionary television licences, what the estimated cost to public funds in a full year is of the proposed amendment to the regulations; and how many individuals will benefit. [158678]

**Janet Anderson:** I am unable to provide the information requested. As indicated by my right hon. Friend on 9 April, we are currently consulting with the BBC on the formulation of the proposed amendments to the regulations governing the Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) concessionary scheme. The number of people who will benefit, and the resulting cost, will depend on the precise structure of the new provisions and on the number of housing managers who, in future, make the relevant changes to previously qualifying accommodation. The cost of the ARC scheme is not met from public funds but represents a reduction in television licence fee revenue collected.

### Premier Christian Radio

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when a decision will be announced on the renewal of the licence of Premier Christian Radio. [158410]

**Janet Anderson:** The Radio Authority must ensure that licences are re-advertised adequately ahead of the expiry dates to minimise the risk of any gap in the service to listeners. It announced in October last year that it will advertise at the same time those London-wide services on AM which will not receive automatic renewal as a consequence of their commitment to provide digital radio services on relevant multiplexes. That will either mean advertisement in September 2001 with an award made in the Spring of 2002, or advertisement in March 2002 with an award that autumn, depending on the outcome of applications for a digital multiplex licence which are currently before the Authority. I will let my hon. Friend know which timetable will apply, once this contingent licence award is decided, probably in June of this year.

### Listed Places of Worship

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will extend his grant scheme for listed places of worship beyond March 2003. [158223]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** This Government will be pressing the European Commission for the inclusion of a lower rate of VAT for repairs to buildings that are used as listed places of worship when the reduced VAT rates come up for review in 2003. Depending on the outcome of that review, the situation will be considered again then.

### Discounted TV Licences

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to introduce a discount on television licences for people who are registered deaf. [158400]

**Janet Anderson:** The Government have no such plans. We believe the interests of deaf people are better served by improving their access to television services rather than by the provision of licence fee concessions. This was the view of the independent review panel on the future funding of the BBC, in its report of July 1999. The Government accepted the report's recommendation that there should be substantial increases in the BBC's targets for subtitling on its new digital services, and the BBC is working towards 100 per cent. subtitling on its digital channels by the tenth anniversary of their launch. The Corporation also aims to increase the amount of subtitling on BBC1 and BBC2 from its present level of 67 per cent. to 80 per cent. by 2003–04.

The Government recently announced their intention to increase the target for the provision of subtitling on ITC licensed digital terrestrial television (DTT) services from 50 per cent. of programmes by the tenth anniversary of the start of the service to 80 per cent., and to extend the requirements for subtitling, signing and audio description, which currently apply only to DTT, to digital cable and satellite services when legislation permits.

## WALES

### Departmental Policies

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Meirionnydd Nant Conwy constituency, the effects on Meirionnydd Nant Conwy of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997; [154947]

(2) if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Ceredigion constituency, the effects on Ceredigion of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997; [154945]

(3) if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Ynys Môn constituency, the effects on Ynys Môn of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997; [154941]

(4) if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Caernarfon constituency, the effects on Caernarfon of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154946]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** As these questions were originally addressed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, my response relates to the effects of Government policies and actions on industry and the economy. Such effects are not normally measured by reference to constituencies so it is not practicable to give information in the form requested. However, prior to the transfer of functions to the National Assembly on 1 July 1999, a range of all-Wales policy initiatives and other actions taken by my Department will have impacted on these four constituencies. Details are set out in the Welsh Office Departmental Reports for 1998 (Cm 3915) and 1999 (Cm 4216), copies of which are in the Library.

Caernarfon, Ceredigion, Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and Ynys Môn are included in the area for which the Government secured Objective 1 status at the Berlin European Council in 1999. Subsequently, in the July 2000 spending review, we made available additional funding, outside the Barnett Formula, for the Welsh Structural Funds Programme. So far in Wales, 201 projects with a total value of £148,960,863 have been approved under the Objective 1 programme. To break down the figures to constituency level would involve disproportionate cost. However, a full list of approved projects is available on the Wales European Funding Office website at http://www/wefo.wales.gov.uk. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Our new Assisted Areas map for the UK, which was formally approved by the European Commission in July 2000, also includes Tier 1 coverage for Caernarfon, Ceredigion, Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and Ynys Môn. I have also today made available via the Library copies of the Objective 1 Approved Projects.

## PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

### High Sheriffs

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the President of the Council if she will ensure fair political balance in appointment of High Sheriffs; and what safeguards are in place to check the appointment system is open and fair and not subject to political abuse. [158384]

**Mrs. Beckett:** High Sheriffs have no political role, their functions are largely ceremonial, and they neither disburse nor receive any public funds, other than strictly defined (and modest) expenses for a limited number of formal court attendances. Political affiliation has not therefore been regarded as a relevant consideration in their appointment. Sheriffs are, however, asked to refrain from all active participation in local and national politics during their term of office.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in her Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158105]

**Clare Short:** No age restriction is applied to appointments to public bodies in my Department.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Worcestershire Visit

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 5 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 251W, if he will list the representatives of farming and tourism interests he met on his recent visit to Worcestershire. [158209]

**The Prime Minister:** It is not the normal practice of Government to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

### Constituency Visits

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to invite hon. Members representing rural constituencies to meet him when making visits outside London to discuss foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [158186]

**The Prime Minister:** Future visits will continue to be in accordance with the guidance set out in paragraph 79 of the Ministerial Code.

### Lords Lieutenant

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Prime Minister what powers he has to replace a lord lieutenant. [158361]

**The Prime Minister:** The normal age of retirement for lord lieutenants is 75 although lords lieutenant may retire before that. I believe that, under the Royal Prerogative, it would be possible for the appointment of a lord lieutenant to be ended before retirement, but I am not aware that this has ever been done in recent times.

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Prime Minister what criteria are used to ensure that appointments of lords lieutenant are not political. [158364]

**The Prime Minister:** Lords lieutenant are appointed under current legislation by the Queen on the advice of the Prime Minister of the day, following consultations locally and, where appropriate, with the relevant Secretary of State or First Minister. In four Scottish cities each Lord Provost becomes lord lieutenant by virtue of office. Those appointed as lords lieutenant are people of standing in their local communities, most frequently on account of their record of voluntary activity for the good of the community.

Lords lieutenant are specifically advised that, as Her Majesty's representatives, they should stand aloof from politics in their respective counties or areas and should not, therefore, take part in political activities or hold office

in political party organisations in their counties or areas. Lords lieutenant are also advised that participation in national political activity may risk their position of impartiality locally.

## SOLICITOR-GENERAL

### Malcolm Reddican

**Ms Blears:** To ask the Solicitor-General if he will take steps to ensure that the Crown Prosecution Service provides full disclosure of all the information and evidence concerning the death of Malcolm Reddican to Mr. Reddican's family. [157964]

**The Solicitor-General:** Disclosure of the evidence and all documentation in relation to the case has been requested by, and on behalf of, Mr. Reddican's family. The Crown Prosecution Service has always indicated a willingness to meet with the family and their legal representatives to discuss the case.

However, leading counsel for the Crown was asked to consider the question of disclosure, in particular the Human Rights implications of disclosing all the case papers. He advised that, while the family are entitled to a full debriefing and to reassurance that the murder of Malcolm Reddican was fully investigated and properly prosecuted, the rights of others must nevertheless be balanced against the rights of the family.

Indeed national policy of the Crown Prosecution Service is generally to withhold details of decisions in individual cases, since not to do so would breach confidentiality and might adversely affect the interests and reputations of the parties involved—witnesses, the victim and the suspect. To discuss publicly a decision not to prosecute could amount to a trial of a suspect without the safeguards which criminal proceedings are designed to provide.

### Crown Prosecution Service

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Solicitor-General (1) if he will make it his policy to require the Crown Prosecution Service to include in its annual report statistics relating to the number of cases processed, categorised by specific offence, in respect of cases where *(a)* proceedings are stopped, *(b)* proceedings continue with the original charges and *(c)* proceedings continue with amended charges; [157817]

(2) if he will make it his policy to require the Crown Prosecution Service to include in its annual report statistics relating to the time scales in respect of *(a)* cases in which a decision is taken to stop proceedings and *(b)* cases which proceed to a conclusion. [157818]

**The Solicitor-General:** Some of the information sought by my hon. Friend is already available in supplementary volumes of the annual Home Office publication Criminal Statistics England and Wales, which includes a breakdown of case outcomes by offence type.

In the past, the Crown Prosecution Service has held no records in respect of particular offences, and has been able to publish only aggregate figures on case outcomes. This was because the Service lacked the technical infrastructure required to hold and analyse the vast quantity of data that such records would involve, and because the administrative burden of maintaining manual records was prohibitive. However, there are now two important initiatives within the CPS which promise more detailed and informative case outcomes records for the future.

Firstly, the CPS is conducting a detailed review to ascertain exactly what information on case outcomes is required to manage properly the prosecution process and to account to parliament and to the public for the standard of its work. This review will consider, and make recommendations on, their requirement for detail on the outcome of particular offences and offence types.

Secondly, the Service has a new electronic case management under development, named Compass. This will provide the CPS with the modern technology it needs both to support its core business of reviewing and prosecuting criminal cases, and to make available the management information identified by the review mentioned above.

Of course, no information system can ever be comprehensive. Even with the most sophisticated computer support, a balance must be struck between the data we would like, and the costs of collecting and recording those data.

Wider developments in information management throughout the criminal justice system must also be taken into account. The various criminal justice agencies are working together to develop common systems of data collecting using agreed definitions, with the aim of providing a fully consistent picture of criminal proceedings from the commencement of the case to its conclusion. This project should specify criminal justice information needs for the foreseeable future, and manage the transition to fully automated data collection.

### Departmental Policies (Ribble Valley)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Solicitor-General if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Ribble Valley constituency, the effects on Ribble Valley of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157849]

**The Solicitor-General:** The Ribble Valley constituency falls largely within the geographical area covered by the Crown Prosecution Service office at Burnley. A Trials Unit has very recently been established there to deal with Crown court casework arising in north-east Lancashire. This will enable greater emphasis to be placed on the conduct of more serious cases and is part of an ongoing reorganisation within CPS Lancashire, in line with recommendations of the Glidewell Review.

At Preston police station, a Criminal Justice Unit, staffed jointly by the police and CPS is being piloted. Criminal Justice Units enable the police and prosecutors to work together more effectively.

At the beginning of November 1999, in line with national policy, and in liaison with police and Lancashire Magistrates Courts Service, the Crown Prosecution Service implemented the Narey recommendations throughout Lancashire, following a pilot in north-east Lancashire. All

defendants charged with a criminal offence now make their first appearance before magistrates courts in the area within 48 hours.

The Crown Prosecution Service, together with other agencies, has also helped to draw up an action plan and associated procedures to speed up youth justice, particularly in relation to persistent young offenders. The latest published figures show that Lancashire was one of four areas in the country which achieved the Government's target of 71 days or less between arrest and sentence during the year 2000 as a whole.

Both the Narey changes and the steps on persistent young offenders demonstrate that the Government have successfully speeded up the criminal justice system.

Actions and policies of the Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Serious Fraud Office do not directly affect the Ribble Valley constituency.

### Departmental Policies (Tiverton and Honiton)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Solicitor-General if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Tiverton and Honiton constituency, the effects on Tiverton and Honiton of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157805]

**The Solicitor-General:** The Tiverton and Honiton constituency falls within the geographical area covered by the Devon and Cornwall area of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). In November 1999, in line with national policy, CPS Devon and Cornwall, in liaison with the police and the central Devon magistrates court, introduced procedures based on the Narey proposals. All adult defendants charged with a criminal offence in central Devon should make their first appearance before Exeter, Tiverton or Honiton magistrates courts within eight days. Due to the imminent court rationalisation, Tiverton court is due for closure.

A CPS Crown court unit, based in Exeter, deals with serious crime at Exeter Crown court and Barnstaple Crown court. The CPS has set as a goal the better handling of serious cases in the interests of justice and of victims. From 15 January 2001, a fast-track procedure was adopted which will ensure that offences which must be heard in the Crown court normally come before a judge within eight clear days of their first hearing in the magistrates court.

The CPS, together with other agencies, has been working to speed up youth justice, particularly cases involving persistent young offenders. The time taken for Persistent Youth cases has fallen in the CPS Devon and Cornwall area from 141 days in 1997 to 60 days in 2000. This places Devon and Cornwall at the top of the national league.

All these changes illustrate the Government's successful policy of speeding up the criminal justice system.

On 30 November 2000, the Exeter office of CPS Devon and Cornwall altered its structure so as to fall in line with proposals in the Glidewell Review. This represents a policy of more effective working between the police and prosecutors and will enable the CPS to place greater emphasis on the more serious criminal cases.

Actions and policies of the Treasury Solicitor's Department and the Serious Fraud Office do not directly affect the Tiverton and Honiton constituency.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Departmental Policies (Clwyd, South)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Clwyd, South constituency, the effects on Clwyd, South of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [151909]

**Ms Quin:** As most of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or Wales basis, but no disaggregated further. However farmers in the UK have benefited from this Government's policies to the tune of £1.35 billion since 2 May 1997 in addition to the figure of approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments.

Within this total, the value of agrimonetary compensation amounts to some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively. Hill farmers in Wales will also benefit from the funding which Government are putting into Tir Mynydd, the new support scheme for farmers in less favoured areas.

Farmers in the Clwyd, South constituency will also have available to them all of the schemes available under the Rural Development Programme for Wales, which is backed by funding of around £0.5 billion over the period 2000–06.

### Departmental Policies (Stroud)

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the Stroud constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [152398]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 6 March 2001]:* MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. Information on land use, crop areas, livestock numbers, and labour on holdings in England by Parliamentary constituency has been produced from 1 June 1999 Annual Agricultural and Horticultural Census. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Information from the 1 June 2000 census will be available shortly and also placed in the House Library.

As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis. Farmers in the UK

receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices. The value of direct CAP payments to the average farmer is set out in the table.

*Average subsidies received by full time farm businesses England 1999–2000*

£000

| | Crop subsidies | Livestock subsidies | Agri- environment | Other[1] | Total direct subsidies |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cereals | 34.2 | 2.3 | 1.0 | 0.1 | 37.8 |
| General cropping | 28.8 | 2.4 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 31.8 |
| Horticulture | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.4 |
| Pigs and poultry | 2.2 | 1.4 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| Dairy | 2.8 | 4.9 | 0.8 | 0.0 | 8.5 |
| LFA cattle and sheep | 0.4 | 25.4 | 3.3 | 0.0 | 29.3 |
| Lowland cattle and sheep | 1.7 | 10.6 | 1.8 | 0.2 | 14.1 |
| Mixed | 21.4 | 10.7 | 1.7 | 0.0 | 33.8 |
| All types | 14.8 | 6.4 | 1.2 | 0.1 | 22.5 |

[1] Includes capital grants and any other miscellaneous grants. These reflect a combination of nationally funded and partly match funded schemes.

*Notes:*

1. HLCA payments to hill farmers are included under livestock subsidies.
2. The figures show direct subsidy payments; they do not include allowance for the financial benefit of prices supported above world market levels under CAP.

*Source:*

Farm Business Survey

In addition to CAP direct payments, farmers in the UK are benefiting from £1.35 billion in short term financial relief since 2 May 1997.

This includes £785 million in agrimonetary compensation worth some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively.

Since May 1997 the Government have more than doubled expenditure on agri-environment schemes in England. We now have more than twice as much land covered by Countryside Stewardship agreements and we have increased the funding of organic conversion from £571,000 in 1997–98 to £12 million in 2000–01 and £18 million in 2001–02. Full time hill farmers in England will be in receipt of some £6,360 on average following the introduction of the Hill Farm Allowance Scheme this year. This compares with £4,048 under the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance in 1996–97.

Farmers in Stroud can benefit from schemes available under the England Rural Development Programme, which is backed by funding of £1.6 billion over the period 2000–06. Three of the schemes within this programme—Rural Enterprise, Processing and Marketing, and Vocational Training—have a budget of around £190 million and are being operated on a regional basis; each region has its own allocation. These allocations are set out in the England Rural Development Programme.

Consumers in Stroud will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

## Genetically Modified Organisms

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the level of Government funding is for the application of *(a)* genomics and *(b)* genetic modification to the needs of British agriculture. [153371]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** Funding by MAFF in 2000–01 for genomics research and development is £11 million and for genetic modification research and development, including risks to the agricultural environment from genetic modification, is £3.4 million.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he received a report from the Canadian authorities on the causes of the Advanta seed contamination last year. [153229]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 8 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 345–46W.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish the report his Department has completed on the review of separation distances for GM field trials. [153224]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 8 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 345W.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Government advise the removal of flower heads from current winter and imminent spring trials as a precautionary measure. [153233]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment on 5 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 56–57W.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the GM sugarbeet trials scheduled for this year involve expense on the part of the Government. [153230]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment on 1 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 724W.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has been briefed on the report "Elements of Precaution" from the Royal Society of Canada into genetically modified crops; and if he will make a statement. [153239]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** The report covers various aspects of the regulation of food biotechnology and was written specifically for the Canadian authorities. The recommendations in the report therefore reflect the existing regulatory system in that country. The European Union has a very stringent control regime for GM crops and food, one which gives a clear priority to safeguarding public health and the environment.

**Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with reference to the GM oilseed rape trials being held in the UK for Aventis, what proportion of the seeds produced by each of the trials of a F1 hybrid oilseed rape will be sterile; in which of the trials the barnase gene and barstar gene will be present in the oil seed rape to be grown; if the barnase and barstar genes involve terminator technology; and which of the trials involve seeds which are sterile. [157261]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* GM oilseed rape hybrids produced by Aventis are currently being trialled under the Farm Scale Evaluation programme and for National List and other research purposes. The hybridity system is the same in each case. Each plan carries separate genes that encode for male sterility (barnase) and fertility restoration (barstar) respectively. The seed produced by these plants is viable and therefore terminator technology is not involved. Detailed technical background on this type of oilseed rape is given in a paper by the Advisory Committee on Releases on the Environment entitled "Environmental Risks of Herbicide-Tolerant Oilseed Rape—A Review of the PGS Hybrid Oilseed Rape." This is available at www.environment.detr.gov.uk/acre.

## Civil Servants (Salary Increases)

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the average percentage increase in salaries of non-industrial civil servants, excluding members of the Senior Civil Service, was in his Department for 2000–01. [152800]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 14 March 2001]:* Since 1996 MAFF has had delegated authority for negotiating pay settlements. For the 2000 pay round, the core MAFF settlement included Pesticides Safety Directorate and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate.

MAFF applied performance related awards in 2000–01 which linked pay awards to job performance on an individual basis. It is therefore not possible to provide a single average percentage increase. Pay awards to satisfactory performers were within the range of 3.2 per cent. and 11.75 per cent. The higher awards also included changes to the pay structure and additional payments to the best performers. Unsatisfactory performers received no performance pay award.

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is also responsible for other Executive Agencies with their own negotiating remits. I have asked Chief Executives to respond direct with information on their pay settlements.

*Letter from Steve Edwards to Dr. David Clark, dated March 2001:*

The Minister has asked me to respond to your question on the average percentage increase in salaries of non-industrial civil servants, excluding members of the Senior Civil Service, in his Department for 2000–01.

Since 1996 VLA has had delegated authority for negotiating pay settlements for staff in the Agency excluding members of the Senior Civil Service.

In 2000 the headline pay settlement was 2.5% of the pay bill. Together with the additional funds from staff turnover, staff received performance related increases with an average cost of 4.3%. The increases were not staged. Information on the 2001 payment settlement is not yet available because negotiations are still ongoing.

*Letter from Professor P. I. Stanley to Dr. David Clark, dated March 2001:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply, in respect of the Central Science Laboratory, to your question concerning the average percentage increase in salaries of non-industrial civil servants, excluding members of the senior Civil Service, for 2000–01.

The headline pay settlement was 2.7% on the pay bill and, together with the additional funds from staff turnover, staff in post received performance related increases averaging 4.76%.

*Letter from Peter Greig-Smith to Dr. David Clark, dated March 2001:*

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has asked me to reply to your question regarding the average percentage increase in salaries of non-industrial Civil Servants, excluding members of the Senior Civil Service, for 2000–01. I am replying on behalf of the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS).

The headline pay settlement for CEFAS was 2.82% on the pay bill and, together with the additional funds from staff turnover, staff in post received performance-related increases averaging 4.03%.

## Bovine TB

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures he is introducing to remove dead badger carcases from holdings. [154032]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 16 March 2001]:* The survey of badger carcases for bovine TB, announced on 7 November 2000, included provision for the collection of badger carcases from farms in badger culling trial areas in Cornwall, Devon, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire. These arrangements have been temporarily suspended following the redirection of State Veterinary Service resources to foot and mouth disease control. In its response to the report of the independent Husbandry Panel the Government recognised the need for more practical guidance for farmers on how to dispose of badger carcases. They are considering how this may be met.

## Movement Licences

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if distance of travel is a relevant criterion in assessing the case for granting movement licences to slaughter; and where such movements cover local authority boundaries whether all relevant authorities are consulted by the issuing authority. [154079]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 20 March 2001]:* The legislation put in place to allow livestock movements direct to slaughter does not specify a maximum period or distance, but only allows movement under licence as long as it does not require a scheduled stop.

Where these journeys cross local authority boundaries, the issuing authority is not required to consult other relevant authorities.

### Departmental Policies (Newbury and West Berkshire)

**Mr. Rendel:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Newbury constituency, the effects on Newbury and west Berkshire of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154568]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 20 March 2001]:* MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. Information on land use, crop areas, livestock numbers, and labour on holdings in England by parliamentary constituency has been produced from 1 June 1999 Annual Agricultural and Horticultural Census. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Information from the 1 June 2000 census will be available shortly and also placed in the House Library.

As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis. Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices. The value of direct CAP payments to the average farmer is set out in the table.

*Average subsidies received by full time farm businesses, England 1999–2000*

*£000*

| | *Crop subsidies* | *Livestock subsidies* | *Agri-environment* | *Other*[1] | *Total direct subsidies* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cereals | 34.2 | 2.3 | 1.0 | 0.1 | 37.8 |
| General cropping | 28.8 | 2.4 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 31.8 |
| Horticulture | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.4 |
| Pigs and poultry | 2.2 | 1.4 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| Dairy | 2.8 | 4.9 | 0.8 | 0.0 | 8.5 |
| LFA cattle and sheep | 0.4 | 25.4 | 3.3 | 0.2 | 29.3 |
| Lowland cattle and sheep | 1.7 | 10.6 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 14.1 |
| Mixed | 21.4 | 10.7 | 1.7 | 0.0 | 33.8 |
| All types | 14.8 | 6.4 | 1.2 | 0.1 | 22.5 |

[1] Includes capital grants and any other miscellaneous grants. These reflect a combination of nationally funded and partly match funded schemes.

*Notes:*

1. HLCA payments to hill farms are included under livestock subsidies.
2. The figures show direct subsidy payments; they do not include allowance for the financial benefit of prices supported above world market levels under the CAP.

*Source:*

Farm Business Survey

In addition to CAP direct payments, farmers in the UK are benefiting from £1.35 billion in short term financial relief since 2 May 1997.

This includes £785 million in agrimonetary compensation worth some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively.

Since May 1997 the Government have more than doubled expenditure on agri-environmental schemes in England. We now have more than twice as much land covered by Countryside Stewardship agreements and we have increased the funding of organic conversion from £571,000 in 1997–98 to £12 million in 2000–01 and £18 million in 2001–02. Full time hill farmers in England will be in receipt of some £6,360 on average following the introduction of the Hill Farm Allowance Scheme this year. This compares with £4,048 under the Hillstock Livestock Compensatory Allowance in 1996–97.

Farmers in Newbury can benefit from schemes available under the England Rural Development Programme, which is backed by funding of £1.6 billion over the period 2000–06. Three of the schemes within this programme—Rural Enterprise, Processing and Marketing, and Vocational Training—have a budget of around £190 million and are being operated on a regional basis; each region has its own allocation. These allocations are set out in the England Rural Development Programme.

Consumers in Newbury will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

### Departmental Policies (Lancaster and Wyre)

**Mr. Dawson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Lancaster and Wyre constituency, the effect on Lancaster and Wyre of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154688]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 21 March 2001]:* MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. Information on land use, crop areas, livestock numbers, and labour on holdings in England by parliamentary constituency has been produced from 1 June 1999 Annual Agricultural and Horticultural Census. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Information from the 1 June 2000 census will be available shortly and also placed in the House Library.

As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis. Farmers in the UK received approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices. The value of direct CAP payments to the average farmer is set out in the table.

*Average subsidies received by full-time farm businesses. England 1999–2000*

£000

| | | Of which: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Total direct subsidies* | *Crop subsidies* | *Livestock subsidies* | *Agri-environment* | *Other*[1] |
| Cereals | 37.8 | 34.2 | 2.3 | 1.0 | 0.1 |
| General Cropping | 31.8 | 28.8 | 2.4 | 0.6 | 0.0 |
| Horticulture | 0.4 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Pigs and Poultry | 3.6 | 2.2 | 1.4 | 0.1 | 0.0 |
| Dairy | 8.5 | 2.8 | 4.9 | 0.8 | 0.0 |
| LFA Cattle and Sheep | 29.3 | 0.4 | 25.4 | 3.3 | 0.2 |
| Lowland Cattle and Sheep | 14.1 | 1.7 | 10.6 | 1.8 | 0.0 |
| Mixed | 33.8 | 21.4 | 10.7 | 1.7 | 0.0 |
| All Types | 22.5 | 14.8 | 6.4 | 1.2 | 0.1 |

[1] Includes capital grants and any other miscellaneous grants. These reflect a combination of nationally funded and partly match funded schemes.

*Notes:*

HLCA payments to hill farms are included under livestock subsidies.

The figures show direct subsidy payments; they do not include allowance for the financial benefit of prices supported above world market levels under the CAP.

*Source:*

Farm Business Survey

In addition to CAP direct payments, farmers in the UK are benefiting from £1.35 billion in short-term financial relief since 2 May 1997.

This includes £785 million in agrimonetary compensation worth some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively.

Since May 1997 the Government have more than doubled expenditure on agri-environment schemes in England. We now have more than twice as much land covered by Countryside Stewardship agreements and we have increased the funding of organic conversion from £571,000 in 1997–98 to £12 million in 2000–01 and £18 million in 2001–02. Full-time hill farmers in England will be in receipt of some £6,360 on average following the introduction of the Hill Farm Allowance Scheme this year. This compares with £4,048 under the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance in 1996–97.

Farmers in Lancaster and Wyre can benefit from schemes available under the England Rural Development Programme, which is backed by funding of £1.6 billion over the period 2000–06. Three of the schemes within this programme—Rural Enterprise, Processing and Marketing, and Vocational Training—have a budget of around £190 million and are being operated on a regional basis; each region has its own allocation. These allocations are set out in the England Rural Development Programme.

Consumers in Lancaster and Wyre will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

### Departmental Policies (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Meirionnydd Nant Conwy constituency, the effects on Meirionnydd Nant Conwy of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154987]

**Ms Quin:** As most of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or Wales basis, but not disaggregated further. However farmers in the UK have benefited from this Government's policies to the tune of £1.35 billion since 2 May 1997 in addition to the figure of approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. Within this total, the value of agrimonetary compensation amounts to some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively.

Hill farmers in Wales will also benefit from the funding which Government are putting into Tir Mynydd, the new support scheme for farmers in less favoured areas.

Farmers in the Meirionnydd Nant Conwy constituency will also have available to them all of the schemes available under the Rural Development Programme for Wales, which is backed by funding of around £0.5 billion over the period 2000–06.

### Departmental Policies (Ynys Môn)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Ynys Môn constituency, the effects on Ynys Môn of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154983]

**Ms Quin:** As most of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or Wales basis, but not disaggregated further. However farmers in the UK have benefited from this Government's policies to the tune of £1.35 billion since 2 May 1997 in addition to the figure of approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments.

Within this total, the value of agrimonetary compensation amounts to some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively.

Hill farmers in Wales will also benefit from the funding which Government are putting into Tir Mynydd, the new support scheme for farmers in less favoured areas. Farmers in the Ynys Môn constituency will also have available to them all of the schemes available under the Rural Development Programme for Wales, which is backed by funding of around £0.5 billion over the period 2000–06.

### Departmental Policies (Ceredigion)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Ceredigion constituency, the effects on Ceredigion of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154984]

**Ms Quin:** As most of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or Wales basis, but not disaggregated further. However farmers in the UK have benefited from this Government's policies to the tune of £1.35 billion since 2 May 1997 in addition to the figure of approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. Within this total, the value of agrimonetary compensation amounts to some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively.

Hill farmers in Wales will also benefit from the funding which Government are putting into Tir Mynydd, the new support scheme for farmers in less favoured areas. Farmers in the Ceredigion constituency will also have available to them all of the schemes available under the Rural Development Programme for Wales, which is backed by funding of around £0.5 billion over the period 2000–06.

### Departmental Policies (Caernarfon)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Caernarfon constituency, the effects on Caernarfon of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154982]

**Ms Quin:** As most of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or Wales basis, but not disaggregated further. However, farmers in the UK have benefited from this Government's policies to the tune of £1.35 billion since 2 May 1997 in addition to the figure of approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. Within this total, the value of agrimonetary compensation amounts to some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively.

Hill farmers in Wales will also benefit from the funding which Government are putting into Tir Mynydd, the new support scheme for farmers in less favoured areas. Farmers in the Caernarfon constituency will also have available to them all of the schemes available under the Rural Development Programme for Wales, which is backed by funding of around £0.5 billion over the period 2000–06.

### Departmental Policies (Chichester)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Chichester constituency, the effects on Chichester of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [155282]

**Ms Quin:** MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. Information on land use, crop areas, livestock numbers, and labour on holdings in England by parliamentary constituency has been produced from 1 June 1999 Annual Agricultural and Horticultural Census. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Information from the 1 June 2000 census will be available shortly and also placed in the House Library.

As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis. Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices. The value of direct CAP payments to the average farmer is set out in the table.

*Average subsidies received by full-time farm businesses, England 1999–2000*

£000

| | Crop subsidies | Livestock subsidies | Agri-environment | Other[1] | Total direct subsidies |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cereals | 34.2 | 2.3 | 1.0 | 0.1 | 37.8 |
| General Cropping | 28.8 | 2.4 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 31.8 |
| Horticulture | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.4 |
| Pigs and Poultry | 2.2 | 1.4 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| Dairy | 2.8 | 4.9 | 0.8 | 0.0 | 8.5 |
| LFA Cattle and Sheep | 0.4 | 25.4 | 3.3 | 0.2 | 29.3 |
| Lowland Cattle and Sheep | 1.7 | 10.6 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 14.1 |
| Mixed | 21.4 | 10.7 | 1.7 | 0.0 | 33.8 |
| All types | 14.8 | 6.4 | 1.2 | 0.1 | 22.5 |

[1] Includes capital grants and any other miscellaneous grants. These reflect a combination of nationally funded and partly match funded schemes.

*Notes:*

HLCA payments to hill farms are included under livestock subsidies.

The figures show direct subsidy payments; they do not include allowance for the financial benefit of price supported above world market levels under the CAP.

*Source:*

Farm Business Survey

In addition to CAP direct payments, farmers in the UK are benefiting from £1.35 billion in short term financial relief since 2 May 1997.

This includes £785 million in agrimonetary compensation worth some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively.

Since May 1997 the Government have more than doubled expenditure on agri-environment schemes in England. We now have more than twice as much land covered by Countryside Stewardship agreements and we have increased the funding of organic conversion from £571,000 in 1997–98 to £12 million in 2000–01 and £18 million in 2001–02. Full time hill farmers in England will be in receipt of some £6,360 on average following the introduction of the Hill Farm Allowance Scheme this year. This compares to £4,048 under the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance in 1996–97.

Farmers in Chichester can benefit from schemes available under the England Rural Development Programme, which is backed by funding of £1.6 billion over the period 2000–06. Three of the schemes within this programme—Rural Enterprise, Processing and Marketing, and Vocational Training—have a budget of around £190 million and are being operated on a regional basis; each region has its own allocation. These allocations are set out in the England Rural Development Programme.

Consumers in Chichester will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

### Departmental Policies (North Devon)

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the North Devon constituency, the effects on North Devon of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [155899]

**Ms Quin:** MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. Information on land use, crop areas, livestock numbers, and labour on holdings in England by parliamentary constituency has been produced from 1 June 1999 Annual Agricultural and Horticultural Census. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Information from the 1 June 2000 census will be available shortly and also placed in the House Library.

As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis. Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices. The value of direct CAP payments to the average farmer is set out in the table.

*Average Subsidies received by full time farm businesses, England 1999–2000*

£000

| | Crop subsidies | Livestock subsidies | Agri-environment | Other[1] | Total direct subsidies |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cereals | 34.2 | 2.3 | 1.0 | 0.1 | 37.8 |
| General cropping | 28.8 | 2.4 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 31.8 |
| Horticulture | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.4 |
| Pigs and poultry | 2.2 | 1.4 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| Dairy | 2.8 | 4.9 | 0.8 | 0.0 | 8.5 |
| LFA cattle and sheep | 0.4 | 25.4 | 3.3 | 0.2 | 29.3 |

*Average Subsidies received by full time farm businesses, England 1999–2000*

£000

| | Crop subsidies | Livestock subsidies | Agri-environment | Other[1] | Total direct subsidies |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lowland cattle and sheep | 1.7 | 10.6 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 14.1 |
| Mixed | 21.4 | 10.7 | 1.7 | 0.0 | 33.8 |
| All types | 14.8 | 6.4 | 1.2 | 0.1 | 22.5 |

[1] Includes capital grants and any other miscellaneous grants. These reflect a combination of nationally funded and partly match funded schemes.

*Notes:*

1. HLCA payments to hill farms are included under livestock subsidies.
2. The figures show direct subsidy payments; they do not include allowance for the financial benefit of prices supported above world market levels under the CAP.

*Source:*

Farm Business Survey.

In addition to CAP direct payments, farmers in the UK are benefiting from £1.35 billion in short term financial relief since 2 May 1997.

This includes £785 million in agrimonetary compensation worth some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively.

Since May 1997 the Government have more than doubled expenditure on agri-environment schemes in England. We now have more than twice as much land covered by Countryside Stewardship agreements and we have increased the funding of organic conversion from £571,000 in 1997–98 to £12 million in 2000–01 and £18 million in 2001–02. Full time hill farmers in England will be in receipt of some £6,360 on average following the introduction of the Hill Farm Allowance Scheme this year. This compares to £4,048 under the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance in 1996–97.

Farmers in North Devon can benefit from schemes available under the England Rural Development Programme, which is backed by funding of £1.6 billion over the period 2000–06. Three of the schemes within this programme—Rural Enterprise, Processing and Marketing, and Vocational Training—have a budget of around £190 million and are being operated on a regional basis; each region has its own allocation. These allocations are set out in the England Rural Development Programme.

Consumers in North Devon will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

## Pet Carcases

**Mr. Amess:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy that disposal of pet carcases by cremation should be exempt from the Animal Waste Directive; and if he will make a statement. [156554]

**Ms Quin:** Animal carcase incinerators, including those operated by pet crematoria, were exempted from the provisions of the Waste Incineration Directive on the proviso that controls providing for high environmental standards are included in the EU Animal By-Products Regulation. This Regulation will replace the Animal Waste Directive.

It is the intention of the UK to negotiate controls on animal carcase incinerators that are proportionate to the health and environmental risks, while safeguarding their continued use.

## Fisheries

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will match for the British industry the operating support given to the fishing industries of other EU countries. [156460]

**Mr. Morley:** I announced on 2 April a package of measures designed to meet the needs of the English fishing industry. Measures have similarly been announced by the devolved administrations.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with *(a)* the fishing industry and *(b)* fish processors about the financial state of the industry and their need for public support. [156459]

**Mr. Morley:** I have personally met with representatives of both the fishing industry and the fish processing industry. I am therefore well aware of the position of all parts of the fisheries sector.

I have already made clear that I share the catchers' and processors' wish to see a sustainable industry which is economically profitable and which uses environmentally sustainable practices. The package of aid measures worth £22.5 million in England, which will inter alia provide financial assistance to help restructure the fishing industry and make grants available for innovation in the marketing and processing of fish, makes clear that the Government are ready to support and encourage the industry in pursuing these aims.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals he has for decommissioning British fishing vessels; and when he intends to announce them. [156457]

**Mr. Morley:** I have already announced additional funding worth £6 million to help restructure the fishing industry. We will be consulting closely with the industry about the form that this assistance will take.

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the landing sites for fishing ports in order of value of landings. [157879]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The values of landings of fresh and frozen fish by UK vessels in 1999 at the top 50 UK ports are set out in the table. Corresponding figures for 2000 are not yet available.

*Major ports: value of fresh and frozen fish landed by UK vessels into UK ports during 1999*

| *Port of landing* | *Value (£ million)* |
|---|---|
| Peterhead | 78.8 |
| Fraserburgh | 27.9 |
| Aberdeen | 26.2 |
| Scrabster | 19.6 |
| Newlyn | 17.1 |
| Brixham | 15.8 |
| Mallaig | 14.8 |
| Lerwick | 14.4 |
| Kinlochbervie | 13.2 |
| Plymouth | 10.7 |
| Lochinver | 10.4 |
| Hull | 10.3 |
| Kilkeel | 8.4 |
| Ullapool | 8.0 |
| Grimsby | 7.6 |
| Portavogie | 7.4 |
| Lowestoft | 7.3 |
| Milford Haven | 7.1 |
| Eyemouth | 5.3 |
| Weymouth | 5.0 |
| Whitby | 4.9 |
| Scarborough | 4.3 |
| Fleetwood | 4.2 |
| Bridlington | 4.1 |
| Ardglass | 3.7 |
| Stornoway | 3.6 |
| Kirkcudbright | 3.4 |
| North Shields | 3.2 |
| Troon and Saltcoats | 3.2 |
| Pittenweem | 2.8 |
| Buckie | 2.8 |
| Scalloway | 2.8 |
| Shoreham | 2.6 |
| Oban | 2.5 |
| River Dart | 2.5 |
| Portsmouth | 2.4 |
| Looe | 2.2 |
| Whitehaven | 2.2 |
| Poole | 2.1 |
| Campbeltown | 2.1 |
| Blyth | 2.0 |
| River Fal—Falmouth | 1.9 |
| Wick | 1.9 |
| Lings Lynn | 1.9 |
| Amble | 1.9 |
| Kirkwall | 1.8 |
| Tarbert | 1.8 |
| Macduff | 1.8 |
| Padstow | 1.7 |
| Kyle | 1.6 |
| Total landings, all UK ports | 463.7 |

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate the Government have made of the proportion of the overall EU fisheries resource accounted for by British territorial waters. [153369]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** It is not possible to estimate the UK's share of the total EU fisheries resource occurring in British territorial waters. Fish movements are not determined by international boundaries. They also vary over time according to biological, environmental and other conditions. Furthermore, the ICES scientific assessments on which Total Allowable Catch decisions are based are provided in relation to the level of fish stocks within ICES rectangles. These include areas outside EU waters and do not take account of territorial waters.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policy in respect of the European Parliament's decision on *(a)* abolishing national control over fishing in coastal waters, *(b)* access to the North sea and *(c)* the Shetland and Irish boxes. [153237]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the resolution which the European Parliament adopted on 17 January 2001 in relation to the Commission report on the consultations the Commission conducted throughout the EU in 1998–99 in preparation for the 2002 Review of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP). This resolution is not binding on the Commission and Council. Nor does it call for the abolition of national control over over fishing in national waters but, rather, for maintenance of the status quo if there is any controversy over the future of the six to 12 mile limits. The text of the resolution if available in the Library of the House. As we have consistently made clear, we are confident that the six to 12 mile access restrictions will again be renewed in the forthcoming review of the CFP. We shall be arguing then for these access restrictions to be made permanent.

In the North sea, all the main commercial stocks are now subject to TACs with quotas allocated according to the principle of relative stability, which will continue to apply unless a qualified majority of the Council on the basis of a Commission proposal decides otherwise. There are no signs that this will happen. As a result, we do not expect to see new or increased access to the North sea after 2002.

Restrictions on access to the Irish Box are laid down in the western waters effort regime, which the Commission has confirmed will continue automatically beyond 2002.

The Shetland Box will be rolled over automatically beyond 2002 unless, on the basis of a Commission proposal and acting by qualified majority, the Council decides to make any changes. The Government are currently reviewing the effectiveness of the Box in terms of the objectives originally set for it and a way of clarifying the arguments for its continuation beyond 2002.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of *(a)* fishermen, *(b)* vessels and *(c)* value of catch of the UK fishing fleet is *(a)* English and *(b)* Scottish. [157239]

**Mr. Morley:** The available information is set out in the table.

*UK fishing fleet: Number of fishermen, vessels and value of catch (excludes Channel Isles and Isle of Man)*

| | *England* | *Percentage* | *Scotland* | *Percentage* | *UK total* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *At end 1999* | | | | | | |
| *Number of fishermen*[1] | | | | | | |
| Regular | 5,298 | 41 | 6,042 | 47 | 12,970 | 100 |
| Part-time | 933 | 31 | 1,288 | 43 | 2,991 | 100 |
| Total | 6,231 | 39 | 7,330 | 46 | 15,961 | 100 |
| *Number of fishing vessels* | | | | | | |
| 12 metre[2] and under | 3,341 | 54 | 1,833 | 30 | 6,151 | 100 |
| Over 12 metre[2] | 381 | 29 | 698 | 54 | 1,297 | 100 |
| Total | 3,722 | 50 | 2,531 | 34 | 4,778 | 100 |
| *Value of landings (£ million)* | | | | | | |
| 1999 | 184 | 31 | 345 | 59 | 588 | 100 |

[1] As at 31 March 2000 for England
[2] Based on registered length
*Source:*
Classification by Department of Administration

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the EU Commission about aid and support for the British fishing industry following the reduced fishing opportunities available under new quotas and the new instructions to protect cod and hake. [158434]

**Mr. Morley:** None. We have announced a package of national measures within FIFG and support for regional assistance from the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has made to the European Commission about the compatibility with European law of the aid given to their national fishing industries by other EU Governments. [158436]

**Mr. Morley:** Following an announcement by the Commission of a formal investigation into state aid schemes in France and Spain, the Government wrote to the European Commission on 28 February setting out the UK's position on these aids.

In particular, we made clear our view that such aids should be considered incompatible with EU state aid guidelines as they distort competition in the fisheries sector and that paying operating subsidies prevents or delays the necessary restructuring of the least economic parts of the fleet. We understand the French aid scheme has been discontinued following Commission investigation.

## Livestock Exports

**Mr. Watts:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what contribution the export of *(a)* cattle and *(b)* sheep has made to the British economy over the last five years. [156269]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* The estimated value of *(a)* live cattle and beef and *(b)* live sheep and sheepmeat exports from the United Kingdom over the last five years are shown in the table.

*Units: million pounds*

| | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *UK exports of livestock* | | | | | |
| Live Cattle | 14 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Live Sheep | 103 | 83 | 71 | 76 | 72 |
| *UK exports of meat*[2] | | | | | |
| Beef | 140 | 16 | 13 | 20 | 19 |
| Sheepmeat | 303 | 258 | 218 | 206 | 197 |

[1] Provisional
[2] Includes meat of non-UK origin imported into the UK and then exported under the XAP scheme
*Source:*
ANIMO, HM Customs and Excise

## Food Procurement Standards

**Mr. Donaldson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what standards the Government are setting for the *(a)* catering, *(b)* food manufacturing and *(c)* fast food sectors in their procurement of products from the agricultural industry; and if he will establish a code of practice for these sectors. [157580]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The Government have no plans to prescribe standards for this purpose or to establish a code of practice for these sectors, but we encourage good communication across the food chain in a number of ways.

## Sand Eel Fishery

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his oral statement of 20 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 54WH, if he will publish the scientific advice on the level of the by-catch in the sand eel fishery. [157952]

**Mr. Morley:** This was summarised in an article on sand eels in *Fishing News* on Friday, 6 April. Table 1 gives details of haddock, whiting and cod by-catches in industrial fisheries for 1995–1999.

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* the names of the British scientists and discard experts who will work on board Danish industrial fishing vessels fishing for sand eels up

to the end of June, *(b)* the names and registration numbers of the vessels involved and *(c)* the area in which they will be fishing. [157832]

**Mr. Morley:** Following initial contacts with the Danish authorities arrangements are being made for two discard experts from CEFAS to spend time on Danish fisheries protection vessels later this month. They will board Danish sand eel vessels as necessary fishing in the eastern closed area. Arrangements are also being made for CEFAS scientists to be on board Danish sand eel vessels fishing in June and July in the central North sea.

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if UK scientists will *(a)* monitor the landing of the catches of fishing vessels engaged in the current research programme into sand eels and *(b)* be allowed full access to the landing and processing area. [157829]

**Mr. Morley:** Yes.

## Cod

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of the British allocation of cod was caught in *(a)* the Norwegian and *(b)* the EU sector in each of the past three years. [157830]

**Mr. Morley:** The percentages of UK North sea cod quota caught in the Norwegian and EU sectors are:

| | *1998* | *1999* | *2000*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total cod quota (tonnes) | 89,947 | 83,557 | 55,703 |
| Total cod uptake (tonnes) | 72,118 | 49,087 | 39,453 |
| Total cod uptake percentage | 80 | 59 | 71 |
| Percentage caught in: | | | |
| Norwegian sector | 23 | 19 | 27 |
| EU sector | 56 | 39 | 43 |
| Other sectors | 1 | 1 | 1 |

[1] Provisional

## Departmental Policies (Ribble Valley)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Ribble Valley constituency, the effects on Ribble Valley of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157852]

**Ms Quin:** MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. Information on land use, crop areas, livestock numbers, and labour on holdings in England by parliamentary constituency has been produced from 1 June 1999 Annual Agricultural and Horticultural Census. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Information from 1 June 2000 census will be available shortly and also placed in the House Library.

As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis. Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices. The value of direct CAP payments to the average farmer is set out in the table.

*Average subsidies received by full-time farm businesses, England 1999–2000*

*£000*

| | *Total direct subsidies* | *Of which:* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | *Crop subsidies* | *Livestock subsidies* | *Agri-environment* | *Other*[1] |
| Cereals | 37.8 | 34.2 | 2.3 | 1.0 | 0.1 |
| General Cropping | 31.8 | 28.8 | 2.4 | 0.6 | 0.0 |
| Horticulture | 0.4 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Pigs and Poultry | 3.6 | 2.2 | 1.4 | 0.1 | 0.0 |
| Dairy | 8.5 | 2.8 | 4.9 | 0.8 | 0.0 |
| LFA Cattle and Sheep | 29.3 | 0.4 | 25.4 | 3.3 | 0.2 |
| Lowland Cattle and Sheep | 14.1 | 1.7 | 10.6 | 1.8 | 0.0 |
| Mixed | 33.8 | 21.4 | 10.7 | 1.7 | 0.0 |
| All types | 22.5 | 14.8 | 6.4 | 1.2 | 0.1 |

[1] Includes capital grants and any other miscellaneous grants. These reflect a combination of nationally funded and partly match funded schemes.

*Notes:*

HLCA payments to hill farms are included under livestock subsidies.

The figures show direct subsidy payments; they do not include allowance for the financial benefit of prices supported above world market levels under the CAP.

*Source:*

Farm Business Survey

In addition to CAP direct payments, farmers in the UK are benefiting from £1.35 billion in short-term financial relief since 2 May 1997.

This includes £785 million in agrimonetary compensation worth some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively.

Since May 1997 the Government have more than doubled expenditure on agri-environment schemes in England. We now have more than twice as much land covered by Countryside Stewardship agreements and we have increased the funding of organic conversion from

£571,000 in 1997–98 to £12 million in 2000–01 and £18 million in 2001–02. Full-time hill farmers in England will be in receipt of some £6,360 on average following the introduction of the Hill Farm Allowance Scheme this year. This compares with £4,048 under the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance in 1996–97.

Farmers in Ribble Valley can benefit from schemes available under the England Rural Development Programme, which is backed by funding of £1.6 billion over the period 2000–06. Three of the schemes within this programme—Rural Enterprise, Processing and Marketing, and Vocational Training—have a budget of around £190 million and are being operated on a regional basis; each region has its own allocation. These allocations are set out in the England Rural Development Programme.

Consumers in Ribble Valley will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

**Departmental Policies (Tiverton and Honiton)**

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Tiverton and Honiton constituency, the effects on Tiverton and Honiton of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157812]

**Ms Quin:** MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. Information on land use, crop areas, livestock numbers, and labour on holdings in England by parliamentary constituency has been produced from 1 June 1999 Annual Agricultural and Horticultural Census. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Information from the 1 June 2000 census will be available shortly and also placed in the House Library.

As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis. Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices. The value of direct CAP payments to the average farmer is set out in the table.

*Average subsidies received by full time farm businesses, England 1999–2000*

*£000*

| | *Crop subsidies* | *Livestock subsidies* | *Agri-environment* | *Other*[1] | *Total direct subsidies* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cereals | 34.2 | 2.3 | 1.0 | 0.1 | 37.8 |
| General cropping | 28.8 | 2.4 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 31.8 |
| Horticulture | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.4 |
| Pigs and poultry | 2.2 | 1.4 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| Dairy | 2.8 | 4.9 | 0.8 | 0.0 | 8.5 |
| LFA cattle and sheep | 0.4 | 25.4 | 3.3 | 0.2 | 29.3 |
| Lowland cattle and sheep | 1.7 | 10.6 | 1.8 | 0.0 | 14.1 |
| Mixed | 21.4 | 10.7 | 1.7 | 0.0 | 33.8 |
| All types | 14.8 | 6.4 | 1.2 | 0.1 | 22.5 |

[1] Includes capital grants and any other miscellaneous grants. These reflect a combination of nationally funded and partly match funded schemes.

*Notes:*

1. HLCA payments to hill farms are included under livestock subsidies.
2. The figures show direct subsidy payments; they do not include allowance for the financial benefit of prices supported above world market levels under the CAP.

*Source:*

Farm Business Survey

In addition to CAP direct payments, farmers in the UK are benefiting from £1.35 billion in short term financial relief since 2 May 1996.

This includes £785 million in agrimonetary compensation worth some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively.

Since May 1997 the Government have more than doubled expenditure on agri-environment schemes in England. We now have more than twice as much land covered by Countryside Stewardship agreements and we have increased the funding of organic conversion from £571,000 in 1997–98 to £12 million in 2000–01 and £18 million in 2001–02. Full time hill farmers in England will be in receipt of some £6,360 on average following the introduction of the Hill Farm Allowance Scheme this year. This compares to £4,048 under the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance in 1996–97.

Farmers in Tiverton and Honiton can benefit from schemes available under the England Rural Development Programme, which is backed by funding of £1.6 billion over the period 2000–06. Three of the schemes within this programme—Rural Enterprise, Processing and Marketing, and Vocational Training—have a budget of around £190 million and are being operated on a regional basis; each region has its own allocation. These allocations are set out in the England Rural Development Programme.

Consumers in Tiverton and Honiton will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

### Lancashire Horticulturalists

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the value of EU payments to Lancashire horticulturalists in the last five years. [157990]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Payments under the EU Aid Scheme for Fresh Fruit and Vegetables are made to Producer Organisations for approved Operational Programmes. Since membership of Producer Organisations frequently extends beyond County boundaries, financial information is not available in the form requested. Payments to UK Producer Organisations has increased from £5.7 million in 1997 to about £9 million in respect of 2000.

### BSE

**Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the total cost of BSE to public funds. [158002]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Total expenditure on the BSE crisis is estimated to be £4.4 billion to the end of this financial year. Of that amount, the other European Union member states contribute about £500 million when the Fontainebleau mechanism is taken into account. Therefore, the net cost of BSE to public funds is about £3.9 billion to the end of 2001–02.

### Arable Area Payment Scheme

**Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the total payment has been to date of payments made to farmers in England in respect of the Arable Area Payment Scheme. [157877]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* 42,750 applications made to the Ministry for aid under the Arable Area Payments Scheme have been paid representing £852,219,681.92.

A further 44,116 AMC 2000 1st Tranche payments with a total value to date of £28,275,505.01 has also been paid to farmers.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is Government policy to encourage farmers to lay disinfected straw on roads adjacent to livestock farms to help prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease. [154996]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 22 March 2001]:* Disinfected straw laid across the entrance to a farm will provide a limited measure of protection against the spread of the foot and mouth virus. However, even with regular topping up, disinfectant will only be applied to the tyre treads of the vehicles passing over them. The best method of disinfection is the combination of thorough cleansing, preferable with a pressure hose, followed by the use of an approved disinfectant applied to all exposed surfaces using a hose or spray. The advice to people working in the countryside contained on the MAFF website (http://www.maff.gov.uk/) emphasises the importance of thorough spraying.

**Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information his Department received about outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in the United Kingdom *(a)* between May 1997 and December 1999 and *(b)* in 2000. [154849]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 22 March 2001]:* There were 29 suspected cases of foot and mouth disease reported to the Department during the period between May 1997 and December 1999. However, following investigations these were found to be negative.

There were no suspected cases of foot and mouth disease reported during 2000.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what contingency plans his Department had in place to deal with an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the United Kingdom in the period up to the notification to his Department of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease at Heddon-on-the-Wall. [154954]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 22 March 2001]:* MAFF has contingency plans for dealing with outbreaks of serious animal disease. These include detailed operational instructions for use by the State Veterinary Service. The general contingency plan for foot and mouth was updated and submitted to the European Commission in July 2000.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what stocks the Foot and Mouth Reference Laboratory in Pirbright holds of live unattenuated foot and mouth viruses; and what strains are held. [155849]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 27 March 2001]:* The Foot and Mouth Reference Laboratory in Pirbright holds a library of over 5,000 strains from all over the world as part of their responsibility as the FAO/OIE nominated World Reference Laboratory.

**Mr. Cash:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the powers which he is using in order to halt the spread of foot and mouth disease; which powers derive *(a)* from EU legislation and *(b)* from domestic law, with special reference to (i) slaughter, (ii) disposal of carcases, (iii) movement of livestock (A) without and (B) with transport, (iv) compensation, (v) diagnosis and veterinary inspection, (vi) quarantine arrangements, (vii) limiting access to specified areas, (viii) use of animal byproducts not for human consumption, (ix) health and safety and (x) use of the armed services. [156120]

**Ms Quin:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 4 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 200W.

The following points are in addition to that answer.

The exercise of domestic powers under the Animal Health Act and Foot-and-Mouth Disease Order is in accordance with the requirements of Council Directive 85/511/EEC introducing community measures for the control of foot and mouth disease (as amended).

The carcases of animals killed for disease control purposes are disposed of in accordance with the Animal By-Products Order 1990, which implements Council Directive 90/667/EEC. By-products from animals slaughtered for human consumption are used or disposed of in accordance with the Animal

By-Products Order 1999, the Specified Risk Material Regulations 1997, the Specified Risk Material Order 1997 or the Foot and Mouth Disease Order 1983.

Powers to ensure the health and safety of workers acting to control the Foot and Mouth outbreak are provided by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 (as amended) and COSHH Regulations.

The use of the armed forces is authorised by existing domestic powers under the Emergency Powers Act 1964.

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what formula is used to determine the amount of compensation payable for farm livestock slaughtered as a consequence of the present outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [156555]

**Ms Quin:** The level of compensation payable for animals slaughtered as a result of a foot and mouth outbreak is governed by Schedule 3 of the Animal Health Act 1981.

If an animal is infected with foot and mouth disease, the compensation for slaughter is the value of the animal immediately before it became infected. In all other cases (eg where animals have been exposed to the infection but are not affected, or showing signs of the disease) compensation is the value of the animal immediately before slaughter.

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will raise the age limit for vets assisting local veterinary inspectors to above 65 years; and if he will make a statement. [156922]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The terms and conditions for Local Veterinary Inspectors (LVIs) who are contracted on an hourly basis to carry out work on behalf of the Ministry require that the appointment shall terminate on reaching the age of 65, unless the Minister decides that it shall continue. Under the special circumstances that apply at the present time discretion is being used as appropriate.

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the value was of exports of pig and sheepmeat in the last year; and what he estimates the value to be in the first year following the end of the outbreak. [157785]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* In 2000 the value of exports of pigmeat was £186 million and of sheepmeat was £200 million. We hope that, once they resume, exports will steadily return to comparable levels.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effect of burning culled cattle on the possible spread of BSE to neighbouring farms. [157889]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* We have commissioned a risk assessment from DNV Consulting on the BSE risk to cattle of disposing of cattle carcases during the foot and mouth disease outbreak. We expect to receive the risk assessment shortly and copies will be made available to the Libraries of the House.

DNV have produced an assessment of the BSE risk to human health of disposing of cattle carcases during the foot and mouth disease outbreak, and is available in the Libraries of the House. Our procedures for disposing of cattle carcases reflect the results of this risk assessment following advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the import into Britain of livestock products is allowed from countries in which foot and mouth is endemic. [153363]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** The importation of meat is not permitted from regions where foot and mouth disease is present. EC rules permit imports from those regions of the relevant countries which are not considered to pose a risk to human or animal health. Fully matured boneless beef, which does not pose an FMD risk may be imported from other regions subject to veterinary certification. Countries to which these controls currently apply are Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay. Because of their FMD situation prohibitions are currently in place on imports of meat of FMD susceptible species from South Africa, Swaziland and Argentina. All meat imported from third countries is subject to veterinary checks at Border Inspection Posts to ensure that import requirements are met.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) on what dates in the last nine months his Department made inquiries of T. G. Norman Timber Ltd., of Longtown, Cumbria, about the availability of timber, with particular reference to old railway sleepers; [154960]

(2) on what dates in the last three months his Department made inquiries of C. A. Talbot and Son (Timber) of Wootton Bank, Eccleshall, Staffordshire, concerning the availability of timber, with particular reference to old railway sleepers; [154959]

(3) what inquiries his Department has made in the last 12 months to establish the availability of timber, suitable for use in pyres for burning deadstock. [154958]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 22 March 2001]:* I assume that the hon. Member's questions relate to the media speculation that the Government were aware that foot and mouth existed in the UK prior to the first notification of disease in Essex on 19 February. Such speculation is entirely without foundation.

The Ministry has contingency plans to deal with all notifiable exotic animal diseases, including foot and mouth disease. These are regularly updated and tested by the State Veterinary Service. As part of this process, Animal Health Offices, including the one at Stafford, will quite correctly contact contractors from whom they may need services or supplies during a disease outbreak. Any inquires directed to the businesses mentioned by the hon. Member would have been made as part of these contingency planning arrangements.

Information on all the timber stockists contacted by the Ministry over the last year is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 21 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 249W, on foot and mouth, what actions the Government will take under the term "kick start the rural economy"; and what estimate he has made of when the disease will be eradicated. [155658]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 27 March 2001]:* The Rural Task Force is continuing to look very carefully at measures to help the rural economy. On 20 March my

right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment announced a package of measures to assist rural business, but the Government have also made it clear that the best way of helping business in the countryside is to encourage people to visit it so far as is consistent with measures to deal with the disease. As a further measure to help counteract the fall in demand and restore confidence, the Government have issued guidance to local authorities to help them assess whether rights of way in their area can be re-opened.

The Government have published independent research on the epidemiology of the foot and mouth outbreak. The epidemiological forecasts both foresee the outbreak lasting at least until June and possibly beyond July.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) on what date (i) an official and (ii) a Minister in his Department first informed *(a)* an official and *(b)* a commissioner in the European Commission that the UK had its first (1) suspected and (2) confirmed case in the foot and mouth disease outbreak; [156386]

(2) on what date (i) an official and (ii) a Minister in his Department first informed *(a)* an official and *(b)* a Minister in another EU member state that the UK had its first (1) suspected and (2) confirmed case in the foot and mouth disease outbreak. [156387]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answers 30 March 2001]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe on 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 797–98W.

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the average sums are paid in compensation for each class, type and age of livestock slaughtered as a consequence of the present outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [156557]

**Ms Quin:** We are not able to give average compensation payments for each of the specified categories (class, type and age) of livestock slaughtered, as such specific figures are not recorded. We can however, give average payments for each species of animal. These are as follows:

Cattle: £792

Sheep: £92

Pigs: £92.

These figures are correct as of 9 April 2001.

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what emergency provision has been made for the release to local veterinary inspectors of foot and mouth vaccine to vaccinate at-risk animals. [156010]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* Local veterinary inspectors are working hard on measures to control foot and mouth disease and we are anxious not to divert them from this important work. The vaccination contingency plans which we have been developing do not envisage the use of local veterinary inspectors to administer vaccine.

**Sir John Stanley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what warnings were given to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department of the risk of spreading foot and mouth prior to the present outbreak through contaminated meat imports. [156881]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 4 April 2001]:* MAFF Ministers and officials have long been aware of the possibility that foot and mouth disease might be introduced through contaminated meat imports. Foot and Mouth disease is a notifiable disease under Community and Office International Des Epizooties (OIE) protocols and the risks are well known. Notified outbreaks necessarily lead to trade restrictions. Responsibility lies with the European Commission to inform member states of disease controls in other countries and to take appropriate action to safeguard the Community from the risk that disease might be introduced in imported meat. Community law permits member states to take unilateral action to limit imports from countries where a particular risk has been identified, pending the introduction of Community measures.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will introduce a programme of vaccination against foot and mouth for deer to allow the Royal Parks to be re-opened to the public. [156894]

**Mr. Morley:** Bushy Park, Richmond Park and the Home Park at Hampton Court re-opened on 11 April.

**Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his estimate is of the number of dairy herds in foot and mouth infected areas. [156915]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* On 1 April there were 7,792 dairy holdings (as classified in June 2000 Agricultural Census) in the infected areas in England and Wales.

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the total value of United Kingdom meat exports in each of the four years following the elimination of foot and mouth disease. [156916]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* Exports of meat and meat products in 2000 amounted to £630 million. We hope that, once they resume, exports will steadily return to comparable levels.

**Mr. Donaldson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to ensure that the farming sector is not adversely affected by the foot and mouth outbreak when trading with large supermarket chains. [157579]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The Ministry holds regular meetings with all its stakeholders, including retailers, to consider the impact of foot and mouth disease across the food chain and to ensure that all sectors of the industry are working together.

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the Soil Association on the role of vaccination in tackling foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [157507]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The Prime Minister met representatives of the Soil Association on 2 April. The evidence submitted by the Association has been carefully examined by our scientific and veterinary advisers as part of our ongoing assessment of the case for using vaccination against foot and mouth disease.

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* sheep, *(b)* pigs and *(c)* cattle have been moved through or into Montgomeryshire from outside the county since 1 March; and if he will make a statement. [158727]

**Mr. Morley:** The information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Genomics

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the potential of genomics in agricultural research. [153234]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** Genomics is expected to make a significant contribution to UK agriculture. Genome maps for many agriculturally important plants, animals and micro-organisms have been produced in the last few years. Research on genome maps for plants, livestock and micro-organisms should enable scientists to identify those organisms with desirable traits. This information would be beneficial in speeding up breeding programmes.

### National Institute of Agricultural Botany

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food by whom the National Institute of Agricultural Botany report which was presented to MAFF as part of their review on separation distances has been peer reviewed. [153231]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** The NIAB report has been referred to a number of independent scientific experts both here and abroad for peer review. This process has yet to be completed.

### Hand-carried Imported Foodstuffs

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the total annual volume of raw and cooked meats and other foodstuffs imported by visitors to the United Kingdom. [154249]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 19 March 2001]:* Data are not collected by Customs on the volume of raw and cooked meats and other foodstuffs imported by visitors to the United Kingdom and no reliable estimate is therefore available.

### Pig Movements

**Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects Mr. Adrian Wilcox of College Farm, Bletchington, Oxfordshire to be able to move his pigs. [155437]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 26 March 2001]:* Mr. Wilcox applied for entry to the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme and a number of pigs were removed from College Farm on 14 April.

### Common Agricultural Policy

**Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will calculate the impact on the cost of food to consumers arising from the CAP since 1973. [157376]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development publishes an estimate annually of the transfers made by consumers in the European Union as a whole resulting from agricultural policies in the Union. Estimates of the impact of the CAP upon consumers are dependent upon the assumptions made concerning the policy which would have operated in the absence of the CAP.

The table sets out the OECD estimates for the years 1986 to 1999. Estimates for earlier years are not readily available.

*Total transfers from EU consumers arising as a result of the CAP*

| *Year* | *Billion ecu/euro* |
|---|---|
| 1986 | 69.1 |
| 1987 | 64.6 |
| 1988 | 62.7 |
| 1989 | 49.2 |
| 1990 | 71.5 |
| 1991 | 79.5 |
| 1992 | 63.2 |
| 1993 | 59.9 |
| 1994 | 59.3 |
| 1995 | 55.1 |
| 1996 | 45.3 |
| 1997 | 50.5 |
| 1998 | 60.8 |
| 1999 | 61.9 |

*Source:*
OECD Producer and Consumer Support Estimates Database

### Departmental Travel

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were his Department's total gross running costs for travel, including fares, subsistence, accommodation and other expenses met from public funds but excluding such costs for journeys and stays exclusively within the United Kingdom *(a)* in the three years to 30 April 1997 and *(b)* in the 12 months ending 30 April 1997. [157629]

**Ms Quin:** The information requested is provided in the table.

*Actual spend*

£

| *Description* | *1 May 1994 to 30 April 1997* | *1 May 1996 to 30 April 1997* |
|---|---|---|
| Travel EC Institution Meetings | 2,041,759.84 | 644,740.78 |
| Travel Other Overseas Visits | 1,516,817.70 | 511,356.29 |
| Travel Foreign Hospitality | 24,002.75 | 13,902.86 |
| Subsistence EC Institution Meetings | 1,081,812.02 | 319,372.26 |
| Subsistence Other Overseas Visits | 910,703.18 | 276,013.48 |
| Total | 5,575,095.49 | 1,765,685.67 |

### Farmgate Prices (Lancashire)

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the farmgate price of *(a)* vegetables, *(b)* fruit and *(c)* non-edible products in Lancashire. [157989]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Value statistics are not collected at county level.

## Flood Defences

**Sir Michael Spicer:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will make a statement about the allocation of the £52 million additional funds for flood defences. [158463]

**Mr. Morley:** I informed the flood and coastal defence operating authorities of revised allocations for 2001–02 on 17 February. As a result of increases in the last two Spending Reviews, and following the announcements of additional funding packages in November and January, MAFF funding available for flood and coastal defence in 2001–02 is £102.6 million. The funding will be shared between:

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| Environment Agency | 53.6 |
| Local Authorities | 46 |
| Internal Drainage Boards | 3 |

Most of the increased funding is going to the Environment Agency: (a) to accelerate the capital programme on 'main' rivers, (b) to carry forward catchment studies and (c) to make a contribution towards the emergency response and repair costs incurred in the recent flooding. However both Local Authorities and Internal Drainage Boards will also be able to make applications for accelerated river defence works, and £1 million is being set aside for the emergency costs incurred by Internal Drainage Boards.

Revised plans for future years have been commissioned from the operating authorities recently. These will inform decisions about future allocations in due course.

## Departmental IT Projects

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 12 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 476W, if he will list the IT projects currently undertaken in his Department; and if he will state the *(a)* expected completion date and *(b)* cost of each project. [151505]

**Ms Quin:** I am sorry that there was an error in the list of major IT projects in the answer of 12 March. The entry for 'Food Survey System' should read 'Farm Survey System'. Options for the further development of this system are still under consideration and it is not yet possible to confirm the expected completion date or costs. The costs quoted were those expected up until March 2002.

We have clarified the heading detail in the list to show that the costs and dates of all projects were those expected and a footnote to show that they are subject to change.

The rest of the answer remains correct.

| | *Expected total costs* | *Expected end date* |
|---|---|---|
| State Veterinary Service network/TB implementation | 5,306,704 | Annual revision required |
| Replacement for current Vet Net systems—pilot projects | 150,000 | July 2001 |
| Cattle Ear Tag Allocation System | 200,000 | April 2001 |
| Geographical Information Systems for Animal Disease Control | 542,133 | April 2001 |
| British Cattle Movement Service Strategic Enhancements and Integration Testing of IT System | 3,204,727 | Annual revision required |
| Web Access to Cattle Tracing System | 1,759,153 | May 2001 |
| Monitoring of Animal Movements within UK and EC | 237,965 | Annual revision required |
| Pet Travel Scheme | 250,000 | August 2000 |
| GB Cattle Herd Registration Development | 1,367,000 | November 2000 |
| Scrapie Control System | 1,908,223 | July 2001 |
| Farm Survey System replacement | 1,329,020 | March 2002 |
| Grants and Subsidies Management System for Common Agricultural Policy Payments | 2,823,476 | Annual revision required |
| Combined Bovine Risk Assessment Scheme | 2,151,500 | December 2001 |
| Beef Extensification Premium Scheme | 1,339,000 | May 2001 |
| New Common Agricultural Policy Support Systems | 15,846,854 | Annual revision required |
| Cattle Slaughter Premium Scheme | 1,767,500 | Annual revision required |
| Agenda 2000 | 1,378,650 | Annual revision required |
| Hill Farmers Allowance | 1,838,501 | May 2001 |
| England Rural Development Programme | 2,135,375 | February 2003 |
| Sea Fish Management Systems | 394,005 | Annual revision required |
| Fisheries Satellite Surveillance | 322,541 | July 2003 |
| Integration of Existing Building and Estate Management Databases | 1,553,085 | Annual revision required |
| Upgrade to Financial Systems and reporting tools | 10,878,802 | Annual revision required |
| E-Commerce | 1,867,334 | December 2001 |
| Replacement Office/Corporate Systems | 9,827,835 | December 2001 |
| Central Science Laboratories (CSL): Integrated Business Information System | 500,000 | October 2001 |
| CSL: Upgrade to Hardware to run new Office Systems | 250,000 | May 2001 |
| Centre for Environmental, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS): Laboratory Information Management Systems | 350,800 | March 2003 |
| CEFAS: Biological Sampling System | 120,000 | March 2003 |
| Farming and Rural Conservation Agency (FRCA): Invest to Save Interdepartmental project (MAGIC) Geographical Information System | 462,000 | April 2002 |
| FRCA: Cartography Tool Kit | 930,000 | April 2003 |
| FRCA: basic mapping for administration of agri-environmental schemes | 292,000 | October 2001 |
| Intervention Board (IB): Oracle Multi Org for Intervention Board | 252,000 | February 2001 |
| IB: Block Guarantee Scheme System Redevelopment | 198,000 | April 2001 |
| IB: Audit Logging | 187,548 | December 2001 |
| IB: Data Integration | 278,833 | March 2001 |
| IB: Brussels Matrix | 429,018 | March 2001 |

| | Expected total costs | Expected end date |
|---|---|---|
| IB: Modulation | 350,000 | June 2001 |
| IB: Over Thirty Month Scheme System Extension | 343,214 | July 2001 |
| IB: Slaughter Premium Scheme System Development | 735,428 | June 2001 |
| IB: Porting PI Open Systems to Universe | 1,150,000 | December 2001 |

*Note:*
These figures show expected costs and dates as at 12 March 2001 which may be subject to change to meet business demands.

## ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

### Promotional Campaigns

**Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the television, newspaper and radio advertising and other promotional campaigns conducted by *(a)* his Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its departmental public bodies, in each of the past five years, showing for each the expenditure incurred by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [153423]

**Ms Beverley Hughes** *[holding answer 12 March 2001]:* I have set out information as *(a)* DETR (Central), *(b)* Agencies and *(c)* Public Bodies.

*(a)* DETR(C)

My Department runs several public information campaigns each year using the most appropriate combination of television, radio and newspaper advertising, supported by other promotional material such as leaflets and posters. These campaigns mainly relate to environmental protection and road safety.

For details of expenditure by medium over each of the past five years, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 15 February 2001, *Official Report,* columns 222–23W.

For details of expenditure by subject over each of the past five years, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 20 December 2000, *Official Report,* columns 168–69W.

Latest figures showing advertising expenditure for each of the campaigns covered in the reply to the hon. Member for Hertsmere are set out.

£

| Campaign | Cost |
|---|---|
| *2000–01* | |
| Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry | 44,143 |
| Quality Mark Scheme[1] | 41,633 |
| Rough Sleepers Change a Life Campaign | 433,338 |
| 6 Sheet Poster Site | 19,861 |
| Road Safety Campaign | 7,661,188 |
| Child Road Safety | 734,991 |
| Are You Doing Your Bit? | 5,587,672 |
| Thames Safety Enquiry | 83,738 |
| Council Board Appointments | 36,147 |
| Election for Mayor of London | 651,554 |
| DETR Herts CC Posters | 1,500 |
| Local Website Information | 35,209 |
| Total | 15,330,974 |

[1] Please note that an incorrect figure of £85,185 was mistakenly given in the previous reply. We are writing to the hon. Member for Hertsmere to provide him with updated figures.

Increases in advertising expenditure in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 result from:

"Are You Doing Your Bit?" campaign to help people to take action to protect the environment

Road Safety and Child Road Safety campaigns, aimed at further reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads

Greater London Authority elections campaign to encourage voting.

For details of publications and reports, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Hertsmere on 19 December 2000, *Official Report,* columns 108–09W.

*(b)* DETR Agencies

Expenditure on paid publicity by DETR's agencies is set out.

£

| Campaign | Cost |
|---|---|
| *Drivers Standard Agency* | |
| 1996–97 | |
| Separate Driving Theory Test | 36,817 |
| 1997–98 | Nil |
| 1998–99 | Nil |
| 1999–2000 | |
| Launch of touch-screen theory test | 9,808 |
| Go-Live date for touch-screen theory test | 8,500 |
| Shared DVO Group Stand at Motor Show | 16,166 |
| Total | 34,474 |
| 2000–01 | |
| Launch of "What if" Video | 6,908 |
| *Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency* | |
| 1996–97 | |
| Sales of Vehicle Registration Marks | 1,085,106 |
| Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) Enforcement | 702,127 |
| Total | 1,787,233 |
| 1997–98 | |
| VED Enforcement/Wheelclamping | 1,908,085 |
| Sales of Vehicle Registration Marks | 1,085,106 |
| Photocard Driving Licences | 5,395 |
| Total | 2,998,586 |
| 1998–99 | |
| VED Enforcement/Wheelclamping | 2,292,022 |
| Sales of Vehicle Registration Marks | 1,085,106 |
| Photocard Driving Licences | 444,890 |
| Statutory Off Road Notification | 428,936 |
| Graduated VED | 122,553 |
| Total | 4,373,507 |
| 1999–2000 | |
| Sales of Vehicle Registration Marks | 2,382,978 |
| VED Enforcement/Wheelclamping | 2,260,216 |
| Graduated VED | 419,574 |
| Photocard Driving Licence | 272,340 |
| | 5,335,108 |

£

| Campaign | Cost |
|---|---|
| 2000–01 | |
| VED Enforcement/Wheelclamping | 2,231,587 |
| Graduated VED | 2,012,765 |
| Sales of Vehicle Registration Marks | 1,957,446 |
| Statutory Off Road Notification | 510,638 |
| Photocard Driving Licence | 486,808 |
| Total | 7,199,244 |

The increase in advertising and promotional expenditure for the DVLA is partly due to the introduction of the national wheelclamping scheme and the photocard licence campaign. This increased the number of Vehicle Excise Duty campaigns from 17 in 1996–97 to 27 in 2000–01. Highways Agency expenditure during the past two years is set out in the table. The Agency was unable to provide information relating to years 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99.

£

| Campaign | Cost |
|---|---|
| *Highways Agency* | |
| 1999–2000 | |
| Consumer campaigns advising of road closures/changes | 263,299 |
| 2000–01 | |
| Consumer campaigns advising of road closures/changes | 127,149 |
| *Maritime and Coastguard Agency (established in April 1998)* | |
| 1998–99 | |
| Sea Smart | 78,986 |
| Safe Fishing | 19,195 |
| Registry of Shipping and Seamen | 11,143 |
| Total | 109,324 |
| 1999–2000 | |
| Sea Smart | 25,216 |
| Registry of Shipping and Seamen | 6,766 |
| Non-Regulated Pleasure Vessels Code | 65,610 |
| Safe Fishing | 34,945 |
| Total | 132,537 |
| 2000–01 | |
| Receiver of Wreck Amnesty | 62,538 |
| Registry of Shipping and Seamen | 820 |
| Sea Smart | 53,812 |
| Flagging In | 12,515 |
| Total | 129,685 |
| *Vehicle Inspectorate* | |
| 1996–97 | |
| Advertising Training Courses | 19,203 |
| 1997–98 | |
| Advertising Training Courses | 53,853 |
| 1998–99 | |
| Advertising Training Courses | 46,607 |
| 1999–2000 | |
| Advertising Training Courses | 60,200 |
| New telephone Number for Vehicle Inspectorate | 9,480 |
| Total | 69,680 |
| 2000–01 | |
| Advertising Training Courses | 44,732 |
| New telephone number for Vehicle Inspectorate | 5,515 |
| Total | 50,247 |
| *Planning Inspectorate* | |
| 1996–97 | |
| Planning Inspectorate Campaign | 6,084 |

The Rent Service, Vehicle Certification Agency and Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre have not carried out any significant communication activity during the period.

*(c)* NDPBs

DETR's Public Bodies are split into Executive and Advisory Non-Departmental Public Bodies. There are 55 in total (28 Executive and 27 Advisory Bodies). DETR(C) does not keep central records of Public Bodies' communications campaigns. The cost of tracing and listing each public body's advertising and promotional campaigns over the past five years could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

## Departmental Advertising

**Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the total cost of advertising run by his Department, its predecessors and its agencies was in each year since April 1992; and what the projected budget is for *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [154852]

**Ms Beverley Hughes** *[holding answer 22 March 2001]:* I have set out information detailing:

total advertising expenditure (1992 to date) for DETR (Central), its predecessors and its agencies, and

projected budget for 2001–02 and 2002–03 for DETR (Central).

DETR was created in 1997 when the Departments of Environment (DoE) and Transport (DoT) merged. Advertising expenditure since 1992 for DETR(C), its predecessors and its agencies are set out.

*Advertising Expenditure*

£

| Year | DoE/DoT | DETR(C) | Agencies |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 11,724,804 | — | 634,894 |
| 1993–94 | 8,627,562 | — | 744,726 |
| 1994–95 | 8,284,309 | — | 791,747 |
| 1995–96 | 8,845,697 | — | 850,912 |
| 1996–97 | 7,218,323 | — | 1,620,883 |
| 1997–98 | — | 6,495,781 | 3,080,340 |
| 1998–99 | — | 5,993,766 | 3,401,027 |
| 1999–2000 | — | 11,927,878 | 5,463,299 |
| 2000–01 | — | 15,330,974 | 7,127,149 |
| 2001–02 | — | [1]10,670,000 | [2]— |
| 2002–03 | — | [3]— | [2]— |

[1] Projected advertising expenditure. Based on information available at time of answering.
[2] Total projected expenditure for DETR agencies for 2001–02 and 2002–03 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.
[3] Details of budget not yet agreed.

Almost all of DETR(C) current advertising expenditure is for road safety and environmental protection campaigns.

## Bus Journeys

**Mr. Paul Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many bus journeys were taken in Shrewsbury and Atcham in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* for the latest available 12-month period; and if he will make a statement. [157598]

**Mr. Hill:** The information collected by my Department on the number of journeys made on local bus services cannot be disaggregated to a level of detail sufficient to provide accurate figures in the form requested.

### Flaxmill, Ditherington

**Mr. Paul Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress made with the Flaxmill project in Ditherington, Shrewsbury. [157599]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The Flaxmill project is for the restoration and refurbishment of a unique grade I listed and historically significant structure in the county town, i.e. the first iron-framed building in the world. The project is to create development space for retail, educational, arts and leisure and residential uses. Advantage West Midlands is to make a significant contribution to the project of some £2.8 million over a three-year period.

A certificate of title as proof of ownership, a condition of the funding agreement with Advantage West Midlands, was still outstanding at 9 April 2001. Contracts were due to be exchanged in February 2001. But the outstanding matter, together with a delay in the completion of legal documentation between Mowlem Midlands, the joint developer and works contractor, and the owner of the site, meant that this was not possible.

I understand that discussions are continuing between the parties involved to ensure progress on the project is secured.

### London Underground

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many broken rails there were on the London Underground in *(a)* each of the last 10 years and *(b)* each of the last 12 months. [157636]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* This is an operational matter for London Underground, which has provided me with the following information on broken rails on the running line discovered during the operation of passenger services for recent years and for year 2000–01 until 3 March 2001.

| | *Total number* |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 24 |
| 1997–98 | 21 |
| 1998–99 | 20 |
| 1999–2000 | 17 |
| 2000–01 | 14 |

| *Period* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|
| 1 | 1 |
| 2 | 2 |
| 3 | — |
| 4 | — |
| 5 | 2 |
| 6 | — |
| 7 | 1 |
| 8 | 4 |
| 9 | 1 |
| 10 | 2 |
| 11 | — |
| 12 | 1 |

*Note:*
LUL operate a 13 period year. The end of period 12 represents 3 March 2001. Information for period 13 has not been provided yet. LUL confirm that four of these broken rails for 2000–01 were located on sections of track owned by Railtrack.

Information on years prior to 1996–97 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many escalators were out of service for more than a day on each of the London Underground lines in each of *(a)* the last five years and *(b)* the past 12 months. [157481]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* This is an operational matter for London Underground, which informs me that although it keeps a range of records relating to escalators out of service on the Underground, to provide a breakdown of all incidents for time-periods of one day and over for each of the last five years would incur disproportionate costs.

### Birmingham Northern Relief Road

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he has secured the agreement of Midland Expressway Ltd. to provide a crossing for the Hatherton Canal in the construction of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road. [157771]

**Mr. Hill:** The obligations of Midland Expressway Ltd. (MEL) to the future restoration of the Hatherton Canal are set out in the Secretary of State's decision letter published on 28 July 1997. MEL is required to facilitate the full restoration works waiving any consequential loss of tolls that these works may occasion. It is not required to provide a crossing for the canal and it has not agreed to do so.

I understand MEL has met the Lichfield and Hatherton Canal Restoration Trust to discuss the trust's proposals for the canal crossings. The trust would like the canal crossings to be included in the BNRR construction contract and is seeking to raise funds to pay for these. I understand that MEL is continuing to work co-operatively with the trust.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what criteria were used in drawing up the list of rural local authorities to which the emergency business rate relief scheme will be applicable as a result of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [157431]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* This list identifies the most rural and least densely populated LA areas in England. The decision to target additional Government support on these areas reflects the fact that in broad terms it is the most rural areas that are suffering most of all from the effects of FMD. It equates broadly with the worst effects of FMD, including its broader economic effects. It does not attempt to match every FMD case. Other authorities are likely to suffer less because they are closer to large urban centres and have a wider spread of economic activity. That is why we have targeted relief in this way, using a standard definition of rurality, developed by the Rural Development Commission and the Countryside Agency.

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many Environment Agency staff have been diverted from their normal duties to work on the foot and mouth crisis. [157999]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Approximately 400 Environment Agency staff are working on foot and mouth related issues. As the information is not held centrally it has not been possible to identify the number of staff diverted from their normal regulatory work. Many staff are working in their normal regulatory function but are dealing with the consequences of the foot and mouth outbreak on a daily basis.

In addition, some 30 agency staff have been diverted from their normal duties to assist the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with additional administrative and technical work arising from the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with other departments regarding the creation of a recovery package for those businesses which have been affected by the foot and mouth outbreak; and if he will make a statement. [158684]

**Mr. Meacher:** I am in close contact with other Departments about measures both to help rural businesses to survive the impact of the foot and mouth outbreak and to regenerate the rural economy once the outbreak has been eradicated.

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer regarding the payment of compensation for consequential losses to firms suffering significantly reduced turnover as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak; and if he will make a statement; [158725]

(2) what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer on *(a)* suspending business rates, *(b)* suspending VAT payments and *(c)* introducing tax concessions for firms suffering significantly reduced turnover as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak; and if he will make a statement. [158722]

**Mr. Meacher:** My right hon. Friend and I have kept in close touch with Ministers from a range of other Government Departments on the economic effects of the foot and mouth outbreak and the Government have announced a number of measures to help those adversely affected. These include additional financial support for local authority discretionary hardship rate relief schemes in rural areas. Implementation is for local authorities and many have announced their intention to introduce schemes. The measures also include extension of the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme, additional funding for the Regional Development Agencies and a sympathetic approach to deferring or extending the time to pay tax, VAT and National Insurance contributions where businesses apply for this.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) of 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 301W, on foot and mouth, if he will instruct local authorities not to recover unpaid rates from businesses which have appealed for a temporary reduction in rating assessments on the grounds of the impact of foot and mouth and where the appeals have not yet been determined. [158673]

**Mr. Meacher:** I have no powers to do so. However, local authorities have discretion to defer or reschedule payment of rates of businesses that are severely affected by the foot and mouth outbreak, or by other adverse circumstances.

Local authorities also have discretion to grant rate relief to businesses suffering from hardship. On 22 March, I announced measures designed to alleviate the immediate financial hardship of small businesses in rural areas that have been badly hit by the effects of foot and mouth disease. As part of this package of measures, I announced an increase in the central government contribution to rate relief from 75 per cent. to 95 per cent. for small businesses which are suffering hardship as a result of foot and mouth disease in 151 rural authorities in England.

In addition, the Government have extended the deadline for making an appeal against the rateable values of properties in these 151 rural authority areas so that appeals received by 30 June 2001 may be backdated into the 2000–01 financial year, if appropriate.

### Emergency Services (Pleasure Boats)

**Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans there are to levy a charge on pleasure boat owners for the provision of emergency services; and if he will make a statement. [158054]

**Mr. Hill:** There are no proposed plans to levy a charge on pleasure boat owners for the provision of any emergency services.

### Departmental Policies (Cannock Chase)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Cannock Chase constituency, the effects on Cannock Chase of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158063]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The principal funding that this Department has provided to Cannock Chase since 1997 is shown in the table. This includes grants and borrowing approvals for revenue and capital expenditure.

*£ million*

| *Nature of funding* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *2001–02*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Revenue Support Grant | 2.39 | 2.69 | 2.62 | 2.44 | 2.77 |
| Income from National Non-Domestic Rates | 2.88 | 2.91 | 3.13 | 3.48 | 3.44 |
| Local Government Reorganisation | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a |
| Supplementary Credit Approval | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— | [2]— |
| Housing Investment Programme | 1.27 | 1.06 | 1.28 | 2.83 | 1.14 |

£ million

| Nature of funding | 1997–98 | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 | 2000–01 | 2001–02[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Housing Revenue Account Subsidy | 5.32 | 4.45 | 4.30 | 3.96 | n/a |
| Capital Receipts Initiative | 0.26 | 0.84 | 0.79 | — | — |
| Cash Incentive Scheme | 0.04 | 0.04 | — | — | — |
| Loan Charges Defective Housing[3] | — | — | — | — | — |
| Major Repair Allowance | — | — | — | — | 3.40 |
| SRB Funding (Scheme/Accountable Body) | | | | | |
| Cannock Gateway | 2.9 | 2.9 | 3.7 | 3.3 | 2.4 |
| Trent Challenge | 1.4 | 1.7 | 1.6 | 1.5 | 1.0 |
| Total | 4.3 | 4.6 | 5.3 | 4.8 | 3.4 |
| New Deal for Communities | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Neighbourhood Renewal Funding | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| ERDF Funding | 0.17 | 0.74 | — | — | — |
| *Staffordshire* | | | | | |
| Transport Supplementary Grant | 7.37 | 2.33 | 1.94 | 0 | 0.42 |
| Transport Annual Capital Guidance | 7.12 | 2.33 | 1.94 | 1.90 | 0.42 |
| Transport Block Supplementary Credit Approval | 1.07 | 0.70 | 2.36 | 9.32 | 14.37 |
| Rural Bus Challenge Grant[4] | 0 | 0.17 | 0.12 | 0.12 | — |
| Rural Bus Subsidy Grant | 0 | 0.20 | 0.66 | 0.75 | 1.03 |
| Capital Challenge (Supplementary Credit and Basic Credit Approvals) | 0.75 | 1.41 | 1.20 | — | — |

[1] Where known
[2] None

*Notes:*

*Housing*

The housing subsidy figure for 2000–01 is still provisional.

The reduction in HIP resources for 2001–02 is due to the introduction of the new Major Repair Allowance, ie a new way of allocating resources for works to council stock; the table shows Cannock's indicative figure for 2001–02.

[3] There is no data for Loan Charges Defective Housing.

*Cannock Chase SRB*

*Cannock Gateway*

A comprehensive package of private sector led development with community involvement in a coal closure area. The seven-year scheme aims to tackle problems of drug abuse and child issues, low levels of educational attainment and involves major land reclamation schemes for private sector led employment development.

*Trent Challenge*

A six-year scheme led by Cannock Chase District Council, which complements the Regional Challenge bid for inward investment at the Lea Hall Power Station site. It targets three settlements, which have experienced considerable change in the wake of the closures of the local coal mine and power station. The scheme will enhance employment prospects through initiatives aimed at raising education and skill levels and by addressing housing, environment and quality of life issues.

*Transport*

The transport figures in the table apply to Staffordshire and not Cannock Chase District.

[4] Rural Bus Challenge totals represent awards for successful schemes, spend can be phased over more than one year.
[5] N/K

## Departmental Policies (Plymouth Unitary Authority)

**Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency, *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency and *(c)* South-West Devon constituency, the effects on the Plymouth unitary authority area of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158032]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The principal funding that this Department has provided to Plymouth city council in the years 1997–98 to 2001–02 and to Devon county council in 1997–98 is shown in the tables. These include grants and borrowing approvals for revenue and capital expenditure.

It is not possible to determine how much of this money has been spent on Plymouth, Sutton and Plymouth, Devonport constituencies and the part of South-West Devon constituency in the Plymouth unitary authority area. It is for the local authority to decide where within its boundary these resources are applied.

*Plymouth city council*[1]

£ million

| Nature of funding | 1997–98 | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 | 2000–01 | [2]2001–02 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Revenue Support Grant[3] | 13.978 | 103.545 | 104.496 | 103.809 | 110.231 |
| Income from National Non-Domestic Rates[3] | 8.171 | 60.295 | 65.108 | 72.855 | 71.213 |
| Local Government Reorganisation Supplementary Credit Approval | — | 6.798 | 5.214 | [11]3.515 | — |
| Housing Investment Programme | [4]4.788 | 4.417 | 4.703 | [6]12.939 | [7]14.750 |
| Housing Revenue Account Subsidy | 12.131 | 11.278 | 11.149 | [11]10.093 | — |
| Capital Receipts Initiative | 0.909 | 3.076 | 3.166 | n/a | n/a |
| Cash Incentive Scheme | 0.270 | 0.251 | 0.000 | n/a | n/a |
| Loan Charges Defective Housing | 0.344 | 0.344 | 0.344 | [12]0.344 | [12]0.344 |
| Neighbourhood Renewal Fund | — | — | — | — | [8]1.058 |

*Plymouth city council*[1]

*£ million*

| *Nature of funding* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *[2]2001–02* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Transport Supplementary Grant | 0 | 0.334 | 0.634 | 0 | 0 |
| Transport Annual Capital Guideline | 0 | 0.334 | 0.634 | 0 | 0.500 |
| Transport Block Supplementary Credit Approval | 0.850 | 0.929 | [9]2.122 | 3.723 | [9]5.865 |
| Rural Bus Challenge Grant[10] | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.072 | n/k |
| Rural Bus Subsidy Grant | 0 | 0.010 | 0.010 | 0.010 | 0.012 |
| Capital Challenge (Supplementary Credit and Basic Credit Approvals) | 0.711 | 1.370 | 1.359 | — | — |

*Devon county council*[1]

*£ million*

| *Nature of funding* | *1997–98* |
|---|---|
| Revenue Support Grant[3] | [2]266.389 |
| Income from National Non-Domestic Rates[3] | [2]205.912 |
| Local Government Reorganisation Supplementary Credit Approval | 1.812 |
| Transport Supplementary Grant | 1.738 |
| Transport Annual Capital Guideline | 1.738 |
| Transport Block Supplementary Credit Approval | 2.560 |
| Capital Challenge (Supplementary Credit and Basic Credit Approvals) | 2.694 |

[1] Plymouth city council became a unitary authority, responsible for all the council services in its area, from 1998–99.
[2] Figures where known.
[3] The amounts of Revenue Support Grant and Income from National Non-Domestic Rates shown for 1997–98 and 1998–99 are the revised amounts allocated under "The Local Government Finance Report (England) 1997–98 Amending Report 1999" and "The Local Government Finance Report (England) 1998–99 Amending Report 2000" respectively.
[4] Devon was subject to a Structural Change Order on 1 April 1998. The figures for Revenue Support Grant and National Non-Domestic Rates quoted for Devon county council for 1997–98 include an amount for the areas covered by the city of Plymouth and the borough of Torbay.
[5] 1997–98 HIP allocation inherited from the previous Government's spending plans. Present Government introduced CRI from 1997–98.
[6] Single Housing Pot introduced from 2000–01 resulting in CRI being merged with HIP.
[7] Resource accounting has resulted in a change to the way capital resources are allocated for 2001–02, with the introduction of a new Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) to cover the cost of maintaining local authority housing in a sound condition. Plymouth city council's MRA allocation for 2001–02 is £8.888 million and, for comparison purposes, is included in the 2001–02 HIP allocation above.
[8] Neighbourhood Renewal Fund starts in 2001–02.
[9] Transport Block Supplementary Credit Approval figures for Plymouth city council include Public Transport Information allocations of £0.804 million in 1999–2000 and £0.600 million in 2001–02.
[10] Rural Bus Challenge figures represent awards—actual spend profiles for schemes may cover more than one year.
[11] Provisional.
[12] Estimated.

*New Deal for Communities (NDC)*

Devonport People's Dreams in Plymouth has submitted a full delivery plan bid for funding NDC Round 2. In 2000–01, £0.4 million funding has been provided for management and administration of the process and £0.131 for 'Quick Win' proposals.

*Single Regeneration Budget (SRB)*

Three SRB awards have been made in Plymouth in Rounds 4–6 since May 1997. Funding provided for these schemes, and for schemes continuing from previous SRB rounds, since 1997–98 is included in the following table. It is not possible to disaggregate the funding for these schemes by constituency.

*£ million*

| *SRB scheme* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *[1]2001–02* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Plymouth 2000 Rounds 1–4 (Turning the Tide; Western Approaches; Key to the Future; Areas of Deprivation)[2] | 3.232 | 4.112 | 6.251 | 5.294 | [1]— |
| Working Together for a Better Future (Round 5) | n/a | n/a | 0.164 | 1.687 | [1]— |
| Bid for Sutton Ward (Round 6) | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | [1]— |
| Plymouth 2020 Rounds 1–6 | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 8.569 |

[1] Figures where known.
[2] Rounds 1–4 funding merged for accountability purposes.
[3] Rounds 1–6 funding merged for accountability purposes from 2001–02.

*European Funding*

The whole of Plymouth was included in the Plymouth Objective 2 programme, which closed for new applications at the end of 1999. Major projects which have received funding since 1997–98 include: Tamar Science Park Phase 2 (£1.1 million), Seaton Barracks (£0.6 million) and Goschen Business Communications Centre (£0.5 million) in Plymouth, Devonport constituency; Royal William Yard (£1.6 million) and West End Revival Package (£0.4 million) in Plymouth, Sutton constituency; and Mountbatten Sailing and Watersports Centre (£1.6 million) in the part of South-West Devon constituency included in the Plymouth unitary authority area.

Most of Plymouth is included in the South West Objective 2 area that stands to benefit from £108 million of European funds over the next seven years. The remaining five wards in Plymouth stand to benefit from a programme for transitional areas in the South-West worth around £10 million in European funding over the next six years.

## Local Government Finance

**Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the increase in *(a)* Standard Spending Assessment and *(b)* council tax between the previous and current financial years was for (i) Bournemouth, (ii) Brighton and (iii) Blackpool; and if he will make a statement. [158246]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs) are a means of distributing a given total of grant which takes account of the demographic, physical and

social characteristics of an area. Council tax levels are a matter for local authorities, which have to answer to their voters. SSA and council tax increases for 2001–02 are given in the table:

| *Borough council* | *Standard Spending Assessment increase (percentage)* | *Authority's own council tax increase (Band D) (percentage)* |
|---|---|---|
| Bournemouth | 3.4 | 10.0 |
| Brighton and Hove | 5.9 | 6.0 |
| Blackpool | 4.2 | 12.1 |

## Local Government Finance (Wiltshire)

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what funding his Department has provided to *(a)* Wiltshire county council and *(b)* Salisbury district council in the years 1997–98 to 2001–02, including grants and borrowing approvals for revenue and capital expenditure. [157791]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The principal funding that this Department has provided to Salisbury district council and Wiltshire county council in the years 1997–98 to 2001–02 are shown in the table (where available). These include grants and borrowing approvals for revenue and capital expenditure.

*£ million*

| *Nature of funding* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *2001–02*[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Revenue Support Grant | 3.266 | 2.473 | 2.336 | 2.064 | 2.273 |
| | [3]8.309 | [3]8.174 | [3]8.348 | [3]7.973 | [3]8.939 |
| Income from National Non-Domestic Rates | 3.516 | 3.610 | 3.881 | 4.338 | 4.299 |
| | [3]8.107 | [3]8.524 | [3]9.329 | [3]10.641 | [3]10.458 |
| Housing Investment Programme[10] | 1.196 | 0.728 | 0.965 | 2.608 | [4]1.248 |
| Housing Revenue Account Subsidy[10] | 1.903 | 1.378 | 1.205 | [4]1.684 | [11]— |
| Capital Receipts Initiative[10] | 0.480 | 1.138 | 1.010 | n/a | [5]n/a |
| Cash Incentive Scheme[10] | 0.100 | 0.050 | n/a | n/a | [5]n/a |
| Loan Charges Defective Housing[10] | 79.646 | [7]79.646 | [7]79.646 | [7]79.646 | [7]79.646 |
| Transport Supplementary Grant[11] | [1]1.049 | [1]0.858 | [1]1.090 | [1]nil | [1]0.154 |
| Transport Annual Capital Guideline[11] | [1]1.049 | [1]0.858 | [1]1.090 | [1]nil | [1]nil |
| Transport Block Supplementary Credit Approval[11] | [1]0.270 | [1]0.354 | [1]0.716 | [1]3.303 | [1]12.69 |
| Rural Bus Challenge Grant[11] | [1]nil | [1]0.786 | [1]0.786 | [1]0.786 | [1]1.004 |
| Rural Bus Subsidy Grant[11] | [1]nil | [1]0.463 | [1]1.154 | [1]0.213 | [12]— |
| Supplementary Credit Approvals (Salisbury Transport package)[9] | n/a | n/a | n/a | n/a | 3.58 |

[1] Figures for Wiltshire
[2] Where known
[3] MRA is ring fenced from HIP resources and was allocated centrally to those local authorities who managed their own housing stock
[4] Provisional figure—subject to change
[5] CRI ceased as a programme after 1999–2000
[6] CIS still continues as a programme but without any DETR allocations
[7] Figures are estimated
[8] Figures represent the award—actual spend can be over more than one year
[9] Funds are paid to Wiltshire County Council, but can only be spent on Salisbury
[10] Funding applies to district level only
[11] Funding applies to county level only
[12] Not known
[13] Figures not yet available

## High Hedges

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the terms of reference given to the Building Research Establishment and Tree Advice Trust are to develop an objective way of assessing the obstruction of light by hedges; when the report will be completed; and when it will be published. [158469]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The Building Research Establishment (BRE) and Tree Advice Trust have been asked to produce guidance on the impact of evergreen hedges on daylight and sunlight to buildings, and loss of sunlight to gardens; and to devise a method for calculating what height a hedge needs to be in order to alleviate any obstruction of light.

Draft guidelines, including the proposed procedure for calculating hedge height, have recently been issued by BRE for limited consultation. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House. These guidelines will be tested against a sample of problem hedges, and will be refined—as necessary—in the light of the results of these field tests and the consultation. The final report on this project is due to be submitted to my Department at the end of July 2001.

## Rural Regeneration Partnerships

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the local rural regeneration partnerships operating in the south-west of England; and what the budget of each is for 2001–02. [158589]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The partnerships operating in the south-west of England are:

Cornwall—Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Rural Development Programme Committee

Devon—Devon Joint Rural Development Committee

Dorset—Committee for Rural Dorset

Somerset—Rural Somerset Committee

Gloucestershire—Forest Regeneration Partnership

Wiltshire—Rural Development Programme for Wiltshire.

The partnerships do not have specific budgets but have equal access to the Rural Programme given to the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) by DETR. The SW RDA's rural budget for 2001–02 is £9,388,000.

### Park Homes Industry

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions on what date research was commissioned into the economics of the park homes industry; when the research is due to be completed; and when it will be published. [158470]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** Research into the economics of the park homes industry was commissioned on 22 January 2001. Current plans are for the research to be completed by the end of September and a report to be published before the end of the year.

### Highcliffe Castle

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when a decision will be taken on the application for alterations to Highcliffe castle to facilitate disabled access. [158468]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The application by Christchurch borough council for listed building consent to construct a temporary disabled ramp and associated works at Highcliffe castle was submitted to the Secretary of State on 15 February 2001. The Secretary of State is currently considering the issues and will ensure that the council is notified of the outcome as soon as possible.

### Housing (London)

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the allocations of capital housing expenditure for 2001–02 for each London borough broken down into *(a)* repairs to local authority property, *(b)* repairs to regulated social landlord property, *(c)* new local authority build and *(d)* new regulated social landlord property. [158584]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The table shows the three elements of the housing capital allocations through the Housing Investment Programme and the Major Repairs Allowance allocations to London authorities for 2001–02.

*£ million*

| | *Annual capital guideline* | *Private sector renewal grant transitional payments* | *Disabled facilities grant* | *Major repairs allowance* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Barking and Dagenham | 4.419 | 0.002 | 0.412 | 15.220 |
| Barnet | 5.202 | — | 0.585 | 8.536 |
| Bexley | 1.553 | 0.178 | 0.763 | — |
| Brent | 16.622 | — | 0.879 | 8.013 |
| Bromley | 2.257 | 0.40 | 0.381 | — |
| Camden | 18.758 | — | 0.068 | 22.184 |
| City of London | 0.241 | — | 0.003 | 1.771 |
| Croydon | 5.870 | — | 0.426 | 10.705 |
| Ealing | 11.200 | 0.285 | 1.141 | 11.419 |
| Enfield | 3.939 | 0.084 | 0.658 | 9.882 |
| Greenwich | 11.084 | — | 0.503 | 20.320 |
| Hackney | 17.148 | 0.050 | 0.268 | 22.733 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 14.421 | 0.036 | 0.441 | 11.261 |
| Haringey | 18.697 | — | 0.567 | 13.403 |
| Harrow | 3.540 | 0.045 | 0.689 | 4.133 |
| Havering | 2.255 | — | 0.232 | 8.822 |
| Hillingdon | 5.115 | 0.037 | 0.838 | 8.137 |
| Hounslow | 3.620 | 0.460 | 0.584 | 10.867 |
| Islington | 12.651 | — | 0.212 | 25.434 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 12.810 | 0.045 | 0.055 | 5.817 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 1.958 | — | 0.199 | 3.746 |
| Lambeth | 18.370 | 0.350 | 0.248 | 27.361 |
| Lewisham | 14.563 | 0.262 | 0.154 | 21.858 |
| Merton | 2.492 | 0.006 | 0.208 | 5.022 |
| Newham | 21.902 | — | 0.448 | 17.178 |
| Redbridge | 3.260 | — | 0.747 | 4.483 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 2.440 | 0.047 | 0.443 | 4.682 |
| Southwark | 13.979 | 0.198 | 0.285 | 38.459 |
| Sutton | 2.027 | 0.062 | 0.358 | 6.199 |
| Tower Hamlets | 14.809 | 0.099 | 0.275 | 22.855 |
| Waltham Forest | 14.378 | 0.120 | 0.478 | 9.937 |
| Wandsworth | 11.386 | 1.500 | 0.237 | 14.773 |
| Westminster | 17.107 | — | 0.239 | 11.851 |

*Note:*

The Annual Capital Guideline (ACG) figures for Hammersmith and Fulham, Newham, Tower Hamlets and Waltham Forest reflect small additional allocations made to those boroughs to fulfil ministerial commitments that authorities with housing stock would receive a combined 2001–02 housing ACG and Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) allocation that was at least 10 per cent. above their 2000–01 housing ACG. The adjustments were necessary as the final MRA allocations were not known until after the Housing Investment Programme allocations had been decided.

Resources to enable local authorities to maintain their own housing stock are provided through the MRA allocations which are distributed through the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy system. ACG allocations are not subdivided between repair and new building or between council and registered social landlord stock and local authorities have full discretion to use these resources to match local needs and priorities.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for the latest available date for each London borough *(a)* the number of people on the housing waiting list, *(b)* the number of priority homeless and *(c)* the number of people accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation under housing legislation. [158582]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The table shows the number of households on the housing register, the number of homeless households in priority need accepted by London authorities and the number of households accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation by London authorities under the provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts.

| | *Households on the housing register (April 2000)* | *Acceptances of homeless households in priority need (January -December 2000)* | *Households in B&B accommodation (December 2000)* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Barking and Dagenham | 1,925 | 278 | 0 |
| Barnet | 5,489 | 293 (1) | 159 |
| Bexley | 3,592 | 343 | 73 |
| Brent | 1,2603 | 1,169 | 477 |
| Bromley | 3,264 | 885 | 139 |
| Camden | 5,884 | 1,009 | 62 |
| City of London | 787 | 24 | 34 |
| Croydon | 6,265 | 1,668 | 401 |
| Ealing | 7,709 | 476 (3) | 337 |
| Enfield | 6,001 | 912 | 252 |
| Greenwich | 5,473 | 1,233 | 0 |
| Hackney | 7,011 | 414 (2) | 460 |
| Hammersmith & Fulham | 4,726 | 973 | 316 |
| Haringey | 9,510 | 1,137 (3) | 222 |
| Harrow | 2,610 | 680 | 156 |
| Havering | 1,738 | 55 (1) | 0 |
| Hillingdon | 3,656 | 858 | 407 |
| Hounslow | 5,017 | 1,085 | 180 |
| Islington | 1,1590 | 1,485 | 132 |
| Kensington & Chelsea | 8,206 | 612 | 591 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 3,113 | 288 (3) | 16 |
| Lambeth | 16,220 | 1,008 | 111 |
| Lewisham | 9,774 | 891 | 0 |
| Merton | 3,920 | 178 | 32 |
| Newham | 11,107 | 1,353 | 562 |
| Redbridge | 3,555 | 430 | 277 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 4,992 | 255 (3) | 71 |
| Southwark | 5,543 | 1,127 (3) | 257 |
| Sutton | 2,154 | 432 | 46 |
| Tower Hamlets | 6,751 | 1,275 | 145 |
| Waltham Forest | 7,476 | 906 | 85 |
| Wandsworth | 2,441 | 628 (3) | 240 |
| Westminster | 8,099 | 1,037 | 912 |

*Note:*
Numbers in brackets after an entry indicate the number of quarters for which figures were reported.

## Housing Targets

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the implications of removing housing targets from the planning process. [158431]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Under the previous Government, long-term projections of household growth were converted using a "predict and provide" methodology into inflexible targets for new housing. This Government's approach is to enable public consideration at the regional level about the likely rate of housing provision required in a region over the foreseeable future, expressed as an annual rate, and to keep this under regular review.

Local authorities are expected to provide sufficient land for housing but give priority to reusing previously developed land within urban areas. We have set a target that, by 2008, 60 per cent. of additional dwellings should be provided by redevelopment of previously developed land or through conversion of existing buildings. These policies have been supported by the issue of new planning guidance on housing, (PPG3).

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on controls to prevent urban cramming in market towns. [158432]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: "Housing" advises local authorities to improve the quality of residential development by good design and layout (para 54). It further advises local authorities to have clear policies for the protection of open space and playing fields (para 53). We are presently consulting on revised guidance on planning for sport, open space and recreation (PPG17) which reinforces this message.

### Green Belt

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is Government policy to allow *(a)* development on green belt land and *(b)* a review of the green belt in certain circumstances. [158658]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Planning Policy Guidance Note 2—"Green Belts" states a presumption against most built development on land designated as green belt. It allows review of established green belts and the alteration of boundaries in exceptional circumstances. If such an alteration were proposed, the Secretary of State would then wish to be satisfied that the authority has considered opportunities for development within urban areas before allowing it to take place.

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish figures for (1) *(a)* the number of hectares of green belt land in each region and *(b)* the proportion of land that is green belt in each region of the United Kingdom; [158703]

(2) *(a)* the number of hectares of green belt land in each council in England and *(b)* the proportion of land that is green belt in each council of the United Kingdom. [158702]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Information based on digital (computerised) green belt boundaries in England has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many hectares of non-green belt greenfield land have been *(a)* developed on and *(b)* given planning permission for development, since 1 May 1997; [158704]

(2) how many hectares of green belt land have *(a)* been developed and *(b)* given planning permission for development, since 1 May 1997. [158705]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The information requested on planning permissions within and outside green belts is not available centrally. The Department's land use change statistics provide estimates of the annual aggregate change to residential use within and outside green belts in England. In 1998, the latest year for which figures are available and during which the last Government's policy guidance on housing was still operational, 2,650 hectares of 'not previously developed' land outside green belts changed to residential use. Over the same period, 140 hectares of land within green belts changed to residential use, about 0.01 per cent. of the total area of green belts.

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps have been taken since May 1997 to allow open green spaces of land in built-up areas to be designated as green belt. [158664]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Designation of land as green belt is a matter for local planning authorities having regard to the advice in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2—Green Belts. Advice on designation of land as green belt has not changed since the publication of the January 1995 edition of PPG2.

The Government have recently issued for consultation a revision of PPG17—Sport, Open Space and Recreation, which emphasises the need to safeguard existing urban open spaces and to supplement provision where appropriate.

### Business Rate Revaluation

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to change the rateable value thresholds for mandatory rate relief following the recent business rate revaluation. [158669]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Rateable value thresholds for mandatory rate relief were increased on 1 April 2000, when the recent business rate revaluation came into effect. The rateable value thresholds under the village shop rate relief scheme were increased from £5,000 to £6,000 for mandatory relief and from £10,000 to £12,000 for discretionary relief. The rateable value threshold below which rates are not payable on empty properties was increased from £1,500 to £1,900. These increases reflect average changes in the rateable values of properties below the old thresholds. The £2,500 reduction in rateable value of properties used for the breeding and rearing of horses and ponies remained unchanged at the 1 April 2000 revaluation, because there was no significant change in the rateable values of such properties.

### Construction (Local Source Materials)

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to allow councils to place conditions on planning permission to require materials to be constructed from local sources. [158667]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** It is for local planning authorities in the first instance to decide on specific planning conditions. The advice in DOE Circular 11/95—The Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions—is that the use of conditions may be acceptable to secure a high quality of design in a proposal to make a positive contribution to a site and its surroundings and show consideration for its local context. Conditions may, for example, specify matching materials or the use of only original materials on listed buildings but the source of materials is a matter for the developer or builder.

### Contaminated Land

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made on drawing up a national register of contaminated land. [158698]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** Under Part IIA of the Environment Protection Act 1990, which came into force in England in April 2000, each local authority with borough or district functions has a duty to

> "cause its area to be inspected from time to time for the purpose of identifying contaminated land".

Statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State requires each local authority to take a strategic approach to carrying out this inspection function, and to describe its own particular approach in a written strategy. Under the guidance, these written strategies are required to be

published by 20 June 2001. As at the beginning of April this year, the Environment Agency was able to confirm that at least 91 per cent. of authorities had work in hand to develop their inspection strategies.

In any case where a local authority formally identifies any land as being contaminated land for the purposes of the Part IIA regime, either that authority or, in some cases, the Environment Agency, has a duty to ensure that appropriate remediation is carried out. Each local authority is required by section 78R of the 1990 Act to maintain a register of details of remediation carried out on contaminated land in its area. The Environment Agency has a parallel duty to compile a register of remediation on sites for which it is the enforcing authority. Part IIA does not, however, include any provisions establishing a single national register.

**Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many acres of derelict land there are in *(a)* England, *(b)* the North West Region and *(c)* Halton; and what percentage of derelict land in (i) the North West Region and (ii) Halton is contaminated. [158500]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The most recent estimates from the National Land Use Database show that, in 1998, the area of derelict land and buildings was 19,340 hectares in England, 3,400 hectares in the North West Government Office region and 31 hectares in Halton. Information on how much of this land is contaminated is not available.

### Local Planning System

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to extend the local planning system to *(a)* forestry and agriculture *(b)* bulldozed tracks, *(c)* power stations and *(d)* overhead power lines. [158666]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** None. Power stations over 50 MW and most overhead electric lines are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under the Electricity Act 1989.

### Transport Supplementary Grants

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the allocation of local authorities' transport supplementary grants are linked to air quality standards. [158661]

**Mr. Hill:** Capital resources for local authorities for local transport improvements, including transport supplementary grant, are provided through the Local Transport Plan regime.

Our guidance to authorities on Local Transport Plans (LTPs) makes clear that allocations will be determined by an assessment of the needs and priorities established in the plans and the extent to which the LTP is likely to provide value for money in delivering its integrated transport objectives. It also recognises that air quality is likely to be one of the major factors influencing the objectives and strategies contained within LTPs, particularly in large urban areas.

The Environment Act 1995 requires authorities to review and assess local air quality to determine whether the national air quality objectives are likely to be met, and where this is unlikely, to designate air quality management areas and prepare action plans setting out the steps they propose to take in pursuit of them. Our guidance on LTPs makes clear that where an air quality management area has been declared, LTPs should include measures to improve air quality. In order to maximise the effectiveness of both air quality action plans and LTPs, the two should produced in a co-ordinated manner.

Authorities submitted their first full Local Transport Plans last July. Authorities will be submitting their first annual progress reports later this year and we shall be monitoring closely their progress against the targets set in their LTPs, including those related to air quality standards.

### Pollution Charges

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made since May 1997 on the establishing of pollution charges on the main air, land and water pollutants. [158659]

**Mr. Hill:** The Environment Agency inherited from its predecessor bodies charging regimes for integrated pollution control, radioactive substances regulation, waste management licensing and discharges to controlled waters. It has implemented an interim charging scheme for the new Pollution Prevention and Control (PPC) regulatory regime, which came into effect in 2000. The agency is currently working on a long-term scheme for PPC and on a revision to the waste management licensing charging scheme, so that it reflects a risk-based approach to inspections.

### Incinerators

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many incinerators will need to be constructed over the next 10 years under the Government's waste strategy. [158706]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The Government set out their aims and objectives for sustainable waste management in "Waste Strategy 2000", published in May 2000.

The choice of waste facilities is for local councils to take in consultation with their local communities. The Government have no plan for any particular number of incinerators, but recognise that the recovery of energy from waste may have a role to play, alongside recycling and composting, in an integrated waste management plan.

### Dog Fouling Byelaws

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if local authorities have power to introduce byelaws against dog fouling without the prior approval of his Department. [158663]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** Local authorities do not have the power to introduce dog fouling byelaws without obtaining this Department's approval. However, local authorities can designate areas where it will be an offence for failing to clear up after one's dog under the Dogs (Fouling of Land) Act 1996. In such cases, dog wardens are able to issue fixed penalties of £25 to offenders or

take them to court where the maximum fine on conviction would be £1,000, whereas under byelaws the maximum fine is £500.

### Commercial Premises Lighting

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his policy is on bringing lighting on commercial premises under local authority planning control. [158700]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Where proposed lighting installations, or proposals involving lighting, constitute development, they fall within the scope of planning control, and require submission of a planning application to the local planning authority in the usual way. Where they decide to approve an application, local planning authorities can impose planning conditions to limit any adverse impacts of light. However, the installation of some lighting does not constitute development—for example, if it does not materially affect the appearance of the building—and is therefore outside planning control. The courts have ruled that light itself cannot be treated as development. We have no plans to change the position.

### Minewater

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken since May 1997 to prevent the discharges of minewater from abandoned mines. [158699]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The Government are committed to controlling pollution from abandoned mines and have both strengthened the regulatory regime concerning abandoned mines and supported works and programmes to address minewater pollution. Under the Mines (Notice of Abandonment) Regulations 1998 operators must now give the Environment Agency advance warning of any proposed abandonment to allow preventive action to be taken to avoid minewater breakouts. In addition, the Government have brought into effect section 60 of the Environment Act 1995, thus removing a statutory defence for owners and former operators of mines for minewater pollution, and have given the Environment Agency new powers to take remedial action under the Anti-Pollution Works Regulations 1999. Among the specific remedial and preventative schemes supported by the Government are programmes operated by the Coal Authority in close liaison with the Environment Agency and Scottish Environment Protection Agency to prevent and treat significant water pollution from abandoned coal mines. Twelve treatment sites are now working and five others are under construction with a forward programme for four sites each year.

### Eco-labels

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to ensure that products tested on animals are not able to secure an eco-label. [158697]

**Mr. Meacher:** The only eco-labelling scheme administered in this country by the Secretary of State is the European Union eco-label. A company wishing to obtain a licence to use that label must ensure that its product satisfies the technical criteria applying to that type of product. The criteria are agreed between the member states, following consultation with interested parties, and then adopted and published by the European Commission. The regulation governing the scheme requires that the technical criteria relate only to the environmental impacts of the type of product concerned and its functional fitness for use; and, as the scheme must operate consistently across the single market, no additional requirements for the licensing of the label may be imposed at a national level. However, the scheme must also operate without prejudice to other requirements of EU or national law on relevant product issues, which may include animal testing, and which determine which products may actually be placed on the market.

### Urban Trees (Cabling)

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to prevent trees in urban areas being destroyed by cabling operations. [158665]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The utilities, including cable companies, are already signed up to guidelines—NJUG10 ("Guidelines for the planning, installation and maintenance of utility services in proximity to trees")—designed to ensure that they carry out their works without damaging trees unnecessarily.

The key messages of NJUG10 have also been reinforced in a code of practice, included in the Department's "Tree Preservation Orders—A guide to the law and good practice". This further encourages good street works practice and effective consultation between utility operators and local authority tree officers.

### Local Authorities (Prompt Payment)

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to encourage more prompt payment of bills by local authorities. [158670]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The Government have set a statutory best value performance indicator requiring local authorities to monitor the percentage of invoices paid on time, and to publish this figure in their annual performance plan. Authorities are expected to set targets that are consistent with our own standards for central Government, whereby 100 per cent. of invoices must be paid on time by the end of the financial year 2002–03.

### European Drinking Water and Bathing Water Standards

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which parts of the United Kingdom have failed to meet European drinking water and bathing water standards since May 1997. [158657]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** At least 3 million tests are done on public drinking water supplies each year, for a variety of potential contaminants. Since 1997, rates of failure to meet the relevant national standards (which are in some cases more stringent than those required under the EC Drinking Water Directive) have been as follows (figures for 2000 are not yet available).

*Percentage*

| | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* |
|---|---|---|---|
| England and Wales | 0.25 | 0.22 | 0.18 |
| Scotland | 1.70 | 1.41 | 0.96 |
| Northern Ireland | 1.11 | 1.14 | 1.05 |

In the years 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000, 57, 56, 47 and 33 UK bathing waters, respectively, failed to meet the relevant mandatory standards set in the EC Bathing Water Directive. Names and locations are included in the 'Bathing Water Directive—Detailed Summary of UK Survey Results' for each year, which have been placed in the Library.

### Energy Conservation

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to allow councils to place conditions on planning permission to require buildings to optimise energy conservation. [158668]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** It is for local planning authorities in the first instance to decide on specific planning conditions. Advice is given in DOE Circular 11/95—The Use of Conditions in Planning Permissions. This indicates that planning conditions which duplicate the effect of other controls are normally unnecessary. The conservation of Fuel and power is covered by Part L of the Building Regulations.

### Opencast Mining

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps the Government have taken to reverse the presumption in planning policy in favour of opencast mining. [158662]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** A presumption in favour of opencast coal mining was introduced by a Conservative Administration in May 1988. This Government fulfilled their pre-election commitment to reverse the presumption in favour of opencast coal mining by issuing revised Mineral Planning Guidance on Coal (MPG3 (revised) March 1999) which advises that there should be a presumption against new coal mining development unless the proposal is environmentally acceptable (or could be made so by planning conditions or obligations) or would provide overriding local or community benefits.

### Waterways

**Mr. Fabian Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to reform riparian rights for those wishing to use Britain's waterways for leisure. [158437]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** We currently have no plans to reform riparian rights. After discussion with the main interest groups, we made a commitment to commission research into the extent of access to waterways for leisure activities. That contract was recently awarded to the University of Brighton. The results of the research will inform the future development of our policies for water-based leisure.

### Planning Policy Guidance 7

**Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his policy on major developments in *(a)* the area of national parks and *(b)* areas of outstanding natural beauty in respect of the provisions of paragraph 3.21 of PPG7. [158389]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** PPG7 makes it clear that major developments should not take place in national parks save in the most exceptional circumstances. Such developments will need to demonstrate that they are in the public interest before they proceed. All such applications for development are subject to rigorous examination and will be subject to the specific assessments set out in paragraph 4.5 of PPG7. The Government have made it clear that they expect the same considerations to apply for proposals for major developments in areas of outstanding natural beauty.

Paragraph 3.21 of PPG7 indicates that new house building and other new development in open countryside, away from established settlements or from areas allocated for development in development plans, should be strictly controlled. But this paragraph also includes policy which would exceptionally allow individual isolated new houses to be built in the countryside if the proposals were of the highest quality and truly outstanding in terms of architecture and landscape design.

The Government believe that there is a need for more affordable housing in rural areas, and do not see the current planning exception for isolated large dwellings which may be built in unsustainable locations as consistent with that priority, or with its objectives for the countryside more generally. We therefore intend to consult on amendments to PPG7 to remove the exceptions policy which allows such large dwellings to be built.

### Local Authority Housing

**Mr. Hopkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the amount of overhanging debt which has been written off by central Government for each local authority which has transferred its housing stock to a registered social landlord in each of the past three years, *(b)* the total estimated amount of overhanging debt which will be written off in 2001–02 and 2002–03 and *(c)* the budget heads under which these amounts are specified. [158214]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** A local authority is required to use the capital receipt from the transfer of its housing stock to repay the debt attributable to that stock. Where this is insufficient the Department will provide a one-off payment to assist the authority repay the debt. The capital receipt must, however, first cover any premiums payable to the Public Works Loan Board on the early repayment of the loans.

To date, four one-off payments have been made. In 1999–2000 £20.99 million was paid to Burnley. In 2000–01 payments were made to Coventry (£111.68 million) Calderdale (£64.59 million) and Blackburn with Darwen (£78.9 million). Estimates for any future one-off payments will depend upon the housing stock transfer programme for the years concerned. Any resources required for the one-off payments will be held in the DETR Housing Budget.

**Mr. Hopkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the level of housing revenue account debt for each local authority in England. [158213]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The information has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

**Mr. Hopkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to subsidise local authorities, debt breakage costs where, following a large scale voluntary stock transfer, their capital receipt does not cover the full amount. [158212]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** We currently have no plans.

### Residential Developments

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his policy is concerning suburban and brown belt residential developments which increase the number of units of accommodation on the same site; what instructions and guidance he gives to inspectors appointed to preside over planning appeals in such cases; and if such instructions and guidance changed in the last four years. [158217]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Government policy on planning for housing is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: "Housing" (March 2000). PPG3 encourages local authorities and developers to

> "think imaginatively about designs and layouts which make more efficient use of land without compromising the quality of the environment".

It further emphasises that local authorities should create places which are attractive, and respect and enhance local character (paras 54–56).

Planning Inspectors are fully briefed on PPG3 and other aspects of planning policy. No additional guidance has been issued to inspectors relating to residential developments which might increase the density of dwellings on a site. They take into account all relevant material considerations when considering planning appeals under the procedural rules that govern the handling of appeals. Revised rules were published in June 2000.

### Aircraft Noise

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish the response he has received to his consultation on the control of noise from civil aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [158573]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** My Department received some 590 responses to this detailed consultation. They are currently being studied. We shall announce our conclusions in due course. Copies of the individual responses will be made available for inspection, by arrangement, at the Department's offices, except where consent to disclosure has been explicitly withheld.

### Coalfield Regeneration

**Mr. Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what comparative weight his Department attaches to planning applications which could have an economic regeneration impact in former colliery sites. [158274]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act requires that an application for planning permission or an appeal shall be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Other considerations may include Government planning policy guidance, as well as the particular circumstances of the case, including the contribution a proposal could make to economic regeneration.

**Mr. Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance he has provided to local planning authorities in relation to the regeneration of former colliery sites. [158276]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** No specific guidance has been issued to local planning authorities in relation to the regeneration of former colliery sites. The Government stated in response to the report of the Coalfields Task Force that sufficient flexibility already exists in national planning guidance to permit the development of carefully selected employment sites.

**Mr. Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken, and what new initiatives he proposes, to bring about the regeneration of former colliery sites in the Yorkshire area. [158277]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Twenty-eight former colliery sites, covering in excess of 1,200 hectares, are located in Yorkshire. 26 of these are within the portfolio of Yorkshire Forward. The reclamation and servicing of these sites is being taken forward through the 10-year National Coalfield Programme.

Work has already commenced on 16 of the Yorkshire sites. To date 247 hectares of derelict land has been reclaimed, with a further 286 hectares in the process of being reclaimed; 2,400 job opportunities have been created; about 60,000 sq m of floorspace constructed and £40 million of private sector investment secured. Reclamation work on a further four of the sites is expected to commence during the current year.

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust has provided over £4.3 million in grants to the coalfields communities in the Yorkshire region. The Trust provides grants for smaller voluntary and community groups, through its development worker team, to help strengthen community identities. It also supports intermediate labour market projects that involve the training and employment of local people—projects that support lifelong learning. Following the Government's recent decision to provide an additional £45 million to the trust over the three years to March 2005, the trust is developing rolling regional plans to ensure that its actions meet regional needs. The trust will allow the trust to maintain and develop further its key role in combating poverty, debt and social exclusion in the former coalfield areas.

In addition to these coalfield-specific programmes a range of national programmes directly benefit the coalmining communities in Yorkshire, including the Single Regeneration Budget, the Housing Investment Programme and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund. The

Single Regeneration Budget alone has provided over £100 million to deliver a holistic regeneration package across these coalfield areas.

### Tudor Court School

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 321W, if the Health and Safety Executive will visit the site of the subsidence at Tudor Court School to ascertain that sufficient safety precautions have also been taken in relation to the abutting highway and neighbouring residential properties, and that its requirement to make the subsidence area safe, has been adhered to satisfactorily. [158383]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) intends to visit Tudor Court School before the start of the summer term. The HSE has been in contact with the Highways Authority and the Building Control Department of Thurrock council about concerns over subsidence in neighbouring areas. They enforce the relevant legislation.

### Euratom

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many verification missions Euratom has made to United Kingdom nuclear facilities, pursuant to article 35 of the Euratom Treaty since the United Kingdom joined the Treaty; and if he will list the plants involved and date of visit to each. [158429]

**Mr. Meacher:** The European Commission has undertaken four verification visits to UK nuclear plants under the terms of article 35 of the Euratom Treaty as follows:

Dounreay 10–14 May 1993

Sellafield 6–10 December 1993

Dounreay 15–18 March 1999

Dungeness 6–10 November 2000.

## DEFENCE

### Defence Contracts

11. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the value of defence contracts in the north-west since 1997. [156937]

**Dr. Moonie:** Over 60,000 new defence contracts are placed each year and the Ministry of Defence does not routinely analyse all of these on a regional basis. However, it is estimated that the value of defence equipment contracts placed in the north-west of England was £850 million in financial year 1997–98 and £1,200 million in 1998–99. These estimates relate to the locations of defence equipment contractors, and do not take account of the locations of sub-contractors.

25. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he makes concerning employment in manufacturing in the UK when making defence procurement decisions. [156952]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Ministry of Defence is committed to ensuring that our armed forces have the right equipment, procured in a cost-effective manner that offers the best value for money. When making defence procurement decisions a wide range of factors are taken into account, including possible effects on employment in the UK.

### European Security and Defence Policy

16. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress towards the Headline Goal on European Defence. [156943]

**Mr. Hoon:** The UK and France announced at Cahors in February the proposal to hold a second EU Capabilities Conference in the autumn. At this Conference, EU member states will identify and commit to the improvements needed to achieve the level of capability set out in the Headline Goal.

30. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the French Defence Minister to discuss UK and French contributions to European Security and Defence Policy. [156957]

36. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the French Defence Minister to discuss the European Security and Defence Policy. [156963]

38. **Mr. Cash:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning the European Security and Defence Policy. [156965]

**Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the European Security and Defence Policy. [156928]

**Mr. Hoon:** I refer the hon. Members to the answer I gave to the hon. Members for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) and for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) on 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 12.

31. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he last met the NATO Secretary General to discuss European Security and Defence Policy. [156958]

**Mr. Hoon:** I last discussed European Security and Defence Policy with Lord Robertson at the North Atlantic Council in Defence Ministers session on 5–6 December 2000.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will define the phrase "pursuit of efforts" used in the presidency report of the European Security and Defence Policy at Nice, in the area of *(a)* command and control, *(b)* intelligence and *(c)* strategic lift under section I(i); and if he will make a statement. [158309]

**Mr. Hoon:** European Security and Defence Policy is about improving European military capability. The European Council at Helsinki decided to develop collective capability goals in the fields of command and control, intelligence and strategic transport. As with the Headline Goal, the European Council at Nice noted efforts made by member states to define and achieve these goals. Member states committed themselves to pursuing efforts to develop and improve these capabilities. They also agreed to take steps to ensure the coherent development of EU and NATO capabilities where they overlap.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the Reserve Forces in the context of the European Security and Defence Policy commitments. [158316]

**Mr. Hoon:** UK participation in any particular operation, and the nature of our contribution (including any potential use of the Reserve Forces), would be matters for decision by the UK Government in the light of circumstances at the time.

Our aim in restructuring the Reserve Forces, particularly for the Territorial Army, was to make it more integrated with regular forces and defence plans, with a shift in emphasis away from traditional home defence roles, to others such as signallers, artillery, air defence, logisticians and particularly medical services.

The number deployed with regulars would depend on the nature and scale of the operation.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the costs of upgrading EU armed forces to comply with the strategic capability requirements as identified in the Presidency report on the European Security and Defence Policy. [158315]

**Mr. Hoon:** The EU has set itself a target for military capability improvements under the Headline Goal. Commitments by individual nations to meet the targets that they have signed up to are a matter for those nations, as are the ways by which these are achieved.

Many European nations are undertaking restructuring programmes and defence reviews. Defence reviews help to identify the areas where re-prioritisation of defence spending can bring about more effective defence outputs. Improvement in capabilities is not just about spending more money, but spending more effectively.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will define peacemaking as established under the actions of the European Security and Defence Policy; and if he will make a statement. [158308]

**Mr. Hoon:** The establishing of conditions for negotiating peace through the disengagement of the warring parties and their withdrawal from a demilitarised zone has been endorsed by EU Ministers as suitable for an EU led force. In this, as in other scenarios, it is assumed that the EU would be acting militarily in accordance with the UN Charter.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on changes to *(a)* his Department's and *(b)* NATO's practice in the context of the transparency of comparison of Governments identified in the Appendix to Annexe I of the Nice Presidency Guidelines on the European Security and Defence Policy. [158317]

**Mr. Hoon:** Transparency is necessary to stimulate capability improvement among EU member states, and to ensure coherence with NATO defence planning and Partnership for Peace (PfP) Planning and Review Process (PARP).

There have been no significant changes in departmental practice to ensure transparency as identified in Annexe I of the Nice Presidency Report on the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP).

## KFOR

18. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of KFOR. [156945]

**Mr. Spellar:** NATO forms the core of the international peacekeeping mission to Kosovo in which some 43,000 military personnel from 39 countries are deployed. The mission is seeking to build a secure environment within Kosovo in which all citizens, irrespective of their ethnic origins, can live in peace and, with international aid, democracy can begin to grow.

KFOR's mandate comes from UN Security Council Resolution 1244 of 12 June 1999 and is guided by a Military Technical Agreement signed by NATO and Yugoslav commanders on 9 June 1999.

35. **Mr. Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the number of British troops deployed in Kosovo. [156962]

**Mr. Spellar:** On 17 April, there were 3,343 British troops deployed to KFOR.

## Armed Forces (Training)

22. **Mr. Viggers:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the training provided by British armed forces to the armed forces of other countries. [156949]

**Mr. Spellar:** Our armed forces provide a wide range of training, both in the UK and abroad, to those of other countries. This training is a key element of our relationship with many countries. It is an integral part of UK defence policy and makes an important contribution to the Government's conflict prevention initiative.

## Operational Commitment

23. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the level of operational commitment of the armed forces is. [156950]

**Mr. Spellar:** As at 1 March 2001, some 22 per cent. of the trained Army were committed to operations. This compares favourably to the figure of 26 per cent. that we inherited on 1 May 1997.

For the other Services, 10 per cent. of the Naval Service were committed to operations as at 1 January this year; this figure, which is the latest available, reflects the position over the Christmas and New Year break. For the RAF 10 per cent. of the trained strength was committed to operations as at 1 March this year. Unfortunately, for the Naval Service and RAF comparable figures for 1 May 1997 are not available.

## NATO (Nuclear Weapons Policy)

24. **Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will request NATO to review its nuclear weapons policy. [156951]

**Mr. Hoon:** NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept emphasised that the Alliance's nuclear forces will continue to play an essential part in preserving peace and preventing coercion, and will be maintained at the minimum level necessary to ensure credible deterrence. I see no reason to request a further review of that position.

### Defence Co-operation (France)

26. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on defence co-operation with France. [156953]

**Mr. Hoon:** Co-operation between France and the UK on defence matters is very good. This is emphasised by important bilateral agreements, including navy to navy and army to army Letters of Intent (LOI); an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) covering the European Air Group; a LOI on co-operation in crisis management and operations; and a Mutual Logistics Support Agreement.

These agreements cover a wide range of activity and build on already close defence links and successful combined operations e.g. Bosnia, West Africa, Kosovo.

Other areas of co-operation include the Franco British Joint Commission on Peacekeeping, established in 1996; joint work to develop and better co-ordinate our activities in Africa and Central and Eastern Europe.

New areas of co-operation that we are considering, as part of the UK's multinational defence co-operation initiative, include fuel supplies, medical issues, arms control and Combat Search and Rescue, and will further strengthen our bilateral relationship.

### Throckmorton Airfield

27. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his long-term plans for the use of Throckmorton airfield in Worcestershire. [156954]

**Dr. Moonie:** The site is used as an outdoor 'quiet electromagnetic test range' for testing technologies developed at the associated DERA site at Malvern, the main benefit being the large amount of open space available. It is envisaged that this activity will continue into the foreseeable future. Several commercial tenants currently use the former hangars for business activity—employing about 100 local people in total—and the option to further develop this activity exists.

A part of the site is currently being used by MAFF in support of foot and mouth related activities. It is not anticipated that this usage will have any impact on long-term plans for the site, which offers a brown field location that has the potential to be used, in full or part, to assist in the economic development and prosperity of this region. DERA continues to discuss with both Regional and Local government representatives possible future developments in the context of the County and Local Structure Plans.

It is intended that Throckmorton airfield, now known as DERA Pershore, becomes part of NewDERA plc on 1 July 2001.

### Compensation

29. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many compensation claims from ex-service personnel are outstanding against his Department. [156956]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Ministry of Defence claims database does not distinguish between claims from former and serving members of the armed forces. The total number of outstanding claims from serving and former Service personnel against the Ministry of Defence is 2,341.

### Defence Establishments (Shoeburyness)

32. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in providing employment and promoting development on the defence establishments in Shoeburyness. [156959]

**Dr. Moonie:** As a consequence of the Public Private Partnership (PPP) initiative, operations at the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) range, Shoeburyness, known also as New Ranges, will be carried out by NewDERA under an arrangement which is currently being negotiated. The intention is that NewDERA will have the flexibility to conduct operations on ranges while meeting the needs of the Ministry of Defence and maintaining value for money for the taxpayer. Meanwhile DERA is continuing to work with SERCO Ltd. to rationalise the New Ranges estate to introduce new businesses which are able to co-exist with continuing range activities. There are currently 10 tenants on the site and this number is expected to increase. Recent new tenants include two from the transport industry. Old Ranges at Shoeburyness was sold in March 2000 to Gladedale Homes Ltd. and the Ministry of Defence has no further interest in the site.

### Foot and Mouth

33. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to deploy the Territorial Army to assist in combating the foot and mouth outbreak. [156960]

**Mr. Hoon:** Individual members of the Territorial Army are already engaged in combating the foot and mouth outbreak in affected parts of the country. This is on a voluntary basis. Generally, their engagement is during their allocated Territorial Army time, that is the weekends and weekday evenings they would ordinarily spend on TA duty.

**Sir John Stanley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) prior to the present outbreak of foot and mouth, what contingency plan his Department had for providing military assistance to the civil power in combating foot and mouth; and when this plan was last updated; [158332]

(2) if, prior to the present outbreak of foot and mouth, his Department had received a request to prepare a contingency plan for providing military assistance to the civil power in combating foot and mouth based on achieving a maximum of 24 hours between detection and slaughter anywhere in the United Kingdom. [158307]

**Mr. Spellar:** There are well-established procedures in place to enable civil authorities to raise requests for military assistance in a wide variety of circumstance. Other Government Departments are aware of these arrangements, and they were implemented rapidly and effectively during the current outbreak of the disease. The procedures ensure that past experience, and the current capabilities of the armed forces are drawn upon in order to make the most effective and appropriate contribution to crisis management and (in this case) combating the spread of the disease. In particular, the armed forces are skilled practitioners in a number of important roles such as logistic support and command and control. These skills are exercised on a regular basis and, in the event of a crisis, their high state of readiness can be drawn upon.

### Army Manpower

34. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the manpower strength is of the Army. [156961]

**Mr. Spellar:** As at 1 March 2001, the full-time trained strength of the Army was 100,199 and the size of the Territorial Army was 40,684.

### NATO

37. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to meet the United States Secretary of Defence to discuss issues of mutual interest concerning NATO; and if he will make a statement. [156964]

**Mr. Hoon:** I next plan to meet Secretary Rumsfeld at the NATO Defence Ministerials in Brussels between 6–8 June.

### Baton Rounds

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which individuals and competencies were represented on the Baton Rounds Steering Group; when this body was created; what its annual budget is; and what meetings and correspondence the Group has had with the body set up as a result of the Patten Commission recommendation to commission urgent research to develop an alternative to the plastic baton round. [158053]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** I have been asked to reply.

The Baton Rounds Steering Group which has now been wound up, comprised representatives of the police, the Home Office (including scientific advice), the Ministry of Defence (both military and scientific) and the Northern Ireland Office. It is not our practice to name individual members of committees or officials. The group itself held no budget.

As the work of the Baton Rounds Steering Group had largely been completed prior to the establishment of the project group looking at alternatives to the baton round, no formal meetings or correspondence between the two took place. But, as the majority of the organisations represented on the "Alternatives to Baton Rounds" project group were also represented on the Baton Rounds Steering Group, any relevant information was routinely shared.

### Defence Assets

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list UK assets identified in the Force catalogue under the Helsinki Headline Goal; and if he will list those assets therein which are *(a)* double and *(b)* multiple-hatted to (i) the UN, (ii) NATO, (iii) other bodies and (iv) standing tasks. [158314]

**Mr. Hoon:** As announced on 20 November 2000, in the maximum scale operation envisaged at Helsinki—a corps level deployment of up to 60,000 troops—the UK component could be around 12,500 strong. Maritime and air deployments of up to 18 warships and 72 combat aircraft could be made in addition.

The pool of forces identified by the UK provides for an element of choice in order to cater for differing operational, political or geographical circumstances, and the major elements are as follows:

*Land*

Either an Armoured or Mechanised brigade, each of which could be sustained for at least a year or an Air Assault brigade which would be deployed for up to six months. Combat Support enabling capabilities such as Artillery, and Short Range Air Defence, and Attack Helicopters could be deployed in addition, supported by the appropriate complement of logistic enablers and national support troops.

*Maritime*

Maritime forces comprising one aircraft carrier, two nuclear powered submarines, deployment of up to four destroyers/frigates, support vessels; and an amphibious task group, including one helicopter landing platform and an amphibious brigade. The aircraft carrier, helicopter landing platform and submarines could not necessarily be sustained continuously for a whole year.

*Air*

Up to 72 combat aircraft (including Sea Harriers), with associated support aircraft including strategic transport. This number would be available for six months to cover initial theatre entry. For a longer term commitment the total would reduce.

All the pool of forces and capabilities which the UK has identified in response to the EU's Headline Goal, are also potentially available to NATO (for which a range of other forces are also available).

The UK does not earmark troops for use by the UN or other bodies. However under the UN's Standby Arrangements System, designed to facilitate the rapid deployment of forces once political decisions have been made, we have declared a range of capabilities from the UK Joint Rapid Reaction Force as potentially available for peacekeeping operations. This was undertaken in a Memorandum of Understanding between the UK and the UN.

The forces declared as potentially available for an EU-led operation are not committed to current standing tasks.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those occasions since May 1997 on which defence assets were *(a)* hired out and *(b)* loaned to a private (i) company and (ii) individual; and if he will make a statement on his policy thereon. [156972]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Ministry of Defence (MOD) places some 50,000 contracts a year, many of which involve the loan of defence assets in aid of the contract. Under the terms of exemption 9 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information details regarding the hire or loan of defence equipment could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

It is MOD's general policy to raise charges for any equipment that is loaned out to private companies or individuals. These charges are normally raised at a level that ensures MOD's costs are recovered.

### Tornado

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in the investigation into allegations of accounting irregularities and financial malpractice on the Tornado maintenance

programme; how many Defence Police Fraud Squad officers were attached to the case; when investigations will be completed; and if he will make a statement. [157593]

**Mr. Spellar:** I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to my answer of 13 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 635W. This remains an operational policing matter. I understand that varying numbers of officers have been assigned to the investigation at different stages. The Ministry of Defence Police Fraud Squad are currently awaiting the results of inquiries which it is hoped will enable them to take the investigation forward. At this stage it is not possible to predict when it is likely to be completed.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the Tornado GR1/GR4 fleet are operationally deployable; what percentage of the fleet this represents; and if he will make a statement. [157589]

**Mr. Spellar:** 122 of a total of 181, or 67 per cent. of Tornado GR1/GR4 aircraft in the active fleet are allocated to the front line. Of these, all are potentially capable of being deployed. The specific numbers available vary from day-to-day depending on aircraft serviceability. However, there are sufficient aircraft of both marks of Tornado to meet current operational, training and immediate readiness requirements.

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the scheduled deployments for the Tornado GR4 for the next year; indicating in each case the date and duration of deployment and the number of aircraft to be deployed; and if he will make a statement. [157639]

**Mr. Spellar:** Tornado GR4 aircraft are scheduled to undertake the following major deployments in the year from 1 April 2001. The number of aircraft in each deployment is shown in brackets:

Various exercises, United States and Canada, 9 February to 1 October 2001—(9)

NATO Air Meet, Oerland, Norway 3–14 September 2001—(6)

Ex SAIF SAREEA, Oman, 16 September to 30 October 2001—(12)

Ex STRONG RESOLVE, Bodo, Norway, 1–15 March 2002—(12)

*Note:*

The nine Tornados deployed to North America will be used by a number of squadrons in rotation.

### Royal Navy Shore Establishments

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 21 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 253W, which Royal Navy shore establishments are under review with respect to possible amalgamation or closure. [158526]

**Mr. Spellar:** A comprehensive review of the utilisation of the Royal Navy's training estate has identified possible efficiencies but is not yet fully complete and requires further work. This work is being taken forward, in conjunction with proposals for the rationalisation of specialist training which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced in the House as part of the Defence Training Review on 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 545–46W, to determine the optimum mix of shore establishments to meet the training needs of the Royal Navy. It is not possible to confirm which establishments might be affected until this further work has been completed.

As I announced in a written answer to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 788W, formal consultation is currently under way with the departmental trade unions regarding the proposed streamlining and re-location to Portsmouth of elements of the Commander in Chief Fleet's Headquarters from Northwood as a result of the Fleet First study. No decision will be taken on the re-location until the formal consultation process is complete. Comments have been invited from the unions by 15 May 2001.

### Royal Navy Training Estate

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place a copy of the Royal Navy's study of its training estate in the Library. [158527]

**Mr. Spellar:** The Naval Recruiting and Training Agency (NRTA) initiated a comprehensive study of the Royal Navy's Training Estate in association with KPMG Consultants in 2000. The initial conclusions are being reviewed in light of the findings of the Defence Training Review which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in the House on 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 545–46W, and the proposals for the future fleet HQ which is currently undergoing the formal consultation process. I shall write to the hon. Member once the review of the study's initial conclusions is complete.

### DMSO Solvent Experiments

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service volunteers have been exposed to the solvent DMSO in experiments since 1990 at the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down; what the purpose was of these experiments; in what years these experiments took place; what the conclusions were of these experiments; on what dates the Independent Ethics Committee scrutinised these experiments; and if he will place in the Library copies of the technical reports which arose out of these experiments. [157328]

**Dr. Moonie:** Since 1990, the Chemical and Biological Defence Sector at Porton Down has undertaken studies in which 25 service volunteers were exposed to small amounts of dimethylsulphoxide (DMSO). The two protocols covering this work were submitted to the Ethical Subgroup of the Defence Scientific Advisory Committee (DSAC) Medical Committee in November 1989 and April 1990, respectively. The studies were designed to investigate whether DMSO could be used as a chemical warfare agent simulant (training agent). Volunteers were exposed to either DMSO applied as a liquid to the skin or as an inhaled vapour. The quantity of the metabolite dimethylsulphide (DMS) exhaled on their breath was measured.

The results of these studies have not been written up in any technical reports but the assessment was that DMSO was not suitable for the requirement.

### Refrigerants

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which buildings and premises *(a)* owned and *(b)* leased by his Department use (i) chlorofluorocarbons and (ii) hydrochlorofluorocarbons for refrigeration and other energy needs; and if he will give details of such use and the reasons for it. [153012]

**Dr. Moonie** *[holding answer 9 March 2001]:* This information is not held centrally in the form requested and will take a little time to compile. I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to what extent his Department's building in Whitehall uses hydrofluorocarbons for *(a)* refrigeration and *(b)* air conditioning; what amounts of hydrofluorocarbons have been purchased in each year since 1995; and what plans he has to phase out the (i) purchase and (ii) use of hydrofluorocarbons. [153014]

**Dr. Moonie** *[holding answer 9 March 2001]:* As far as can be ascertained from our records, minimal use of hydrofluorocarbons is currently made in the operation of Main Building, Whitehall. Known uses include small scale refrigeration equipment, small air conditioning units and drinking water coolers. Only very small amounts of hydrofluorocarbons would have been purchased since 1995. We have no current plans to phase out the purchase or use of hydrofluorocarbons in Main Building. However, any use of hydrofluorocarbons in relating to operating the building will continue to follow the Government policy laid down in Climate Change the UK Programme (November 2000).

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's policy is regarding the purchase of *(a)* hydrocarbons and *(b)* other environmentally benign refrigerants to meet the refrigeration and other energy needs of buildings and premises (i) owned and (ii) leased by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [153013]

**Dr. Moonie** *[holding answer 9 March 2001]:* It is the policy of the Ministry of Defence (MOD) that hydrocarbons and other environmentally benign refrigerants will be routinely considered as replacements for ozone depleting substances both in existing and new refrigeration applications in MOD buildings and premises. These refrigerants will be utilised wherever they provide an acceptable solution in terms of safety, technical feasibility and efficiency.

### Training Rounds

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many training rounds were used by *(a)* RAF and *(b)* Fleet Air Arm pilots, by aircraft type, in the last 12 months. [156976]

**Mr. Spellar:** I am withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to Defence, Security and International Relations.

### Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if all the documents in his Department relating to the official inquiry in 1970 into allegations that the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment had experimented on old people have been placed in the Public Record Office; and if he will make a statement. [157304]

**Dr. Moonie:** No, but we are in the process of transferring these to the Public Record Office.

### Defence Committees (UK Membership)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the UK contribution to staffing *(a)* the Political and Security Committee, *(b)* the Military Committee of the European Union and *(c)* the Military Staff of the European Union. [158323]

**Mr. Hoon:** The Political and Security Committee (PSC) of the EU is composed of national representatives of senior/ambassadorial level dealing with all aspects of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, including the Common European Security and Defence Policy (CESDP). Each of the EU member states (including the UK) has a representative.

The EU Military Committee is composed of the EU member states' Chiefs of Defence, represented on a day-to-day basis by a national military representative, based in Brussels. It gives military advice and makes recommendations to the PSC, and provides military direction to the Military Staff.

The EU Military Staff will provide military expertise and support to the CESDP. The Military Staff posts are still in the process of being filled. The UK will hold 13 of the 135 posts, including the Deputy Director General of the EUMS.

### EU Deployment

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the way in which his Department will hand over data to the European Union military staff for identifying possible assets for EU deployment. [158324]

**Mr. Hoon:** Information is passed to the European Union Military Staff in accordance with the appropriate security regulations and procedures.

The UK has identified a range of forces and capabilities it could contribute to the achievement of the EU's Headline Goal. Deployment of forces for a particular operation will depend on a national decision in light of circumstances at the time.

### Fleet Capability

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the fleet size is of *(a)* Hercules C1, *(b)* Hercules C3, *(c)* Hercules C4 and *(d)* Hercules C5; how many on 1 April were (i) fully serviceable, (ii) unserviceable 1 line, (iii) unserviceable 2 line, (iv) unserviceable 3/4 line, (v) on trials, (vi) held in reserve and (vii) undergoing upgrade; what percentage of the fleet this represents for each category; and if he will make a statement. [157605]

**Mr. Spellar:** Figures are not available for 1 April which was a Sunday. I will write to the right hon. and learned Member regarding general availability of the Hercules fleet.

### Hercules C130J

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Hercules C130J are in service with the RAF; when they received military aircraft release; and if he will make a statement. [157641]

**Mr. Spellar:** As at 6 April, 15 of the 25 Hercules C-130J aircraft ordered were in service with the RAF, and a further two aircraft were in the process of being accepted from the Contractor. Initial Military Aircraft Release was issued on 17 January 2000. The aircraft are currently cleared for strategic (cargo transportation) operations. A revised Military Aircraft Release covering tactical operations (cargo and paratroop aerial delivery) is planned for mid 2002.

### UK Nuclear Defence Policy

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the United Kingdom's obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty with the 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement with the United States of America. [158100]

**Mr. Hoon:** The United Kingdom's obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty are fully compatible with the terms of the 1958 UK/US Agreement for Co-operation on the Uses of Atomic Energy for Mutual Defence Purposes.

### Aldermaston and Los Alamos

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the nature was of the cargo sent from AWE Aldermaston to Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico via RAF Brize Norton and Kirtland Airforce Base in Albuquerque on 2 April. [158097]

**Mr. Hoon:** I am withholding the details under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the relationship between the nuclear weapons laboratories at Aldermaston and Los Alamos. [158099]

**Mr. Hoon:** The laboratories continue to enjoy a close working relationship on nuclear weapons science and technology under the terms of the 1958 US/UK Mutual Defence Agreement.

### St. Dunstan's Charity

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what support he and his predecessors have given to St. Dunstan's charity for blind ex-service men and women; and what further support is under consideration. [158023]

**Dr. Moonie:** In keeping with the long standing practice that central Government do not provide funds to assist individual charities' core activities, St. Dunstan's is required to raise its own funding. It does not, therefore, receive financial support from the Ministry of Defence. However, considerable Government assistance is available for those ex-Service personnel who are disabled. Personnel deemed to have sustained a disability due to their work in the armed forces may qualify for a tax-free 'War Disablement Pension' from the War Pensions Agency. They may also qualify for a pension under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS).

### HMS Edinburgh

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the planned deployments of HMS Edinburgh are for the next 12 months. [158525]

**Mr. Spellar:** HMS Edinburgh is scheduled to deploy from Portsmouth on 15 May as the Atlantic Patrol Task (South) ship. Thereafter, subject to operational requirements, she is due to operate in North European waters during January-March 2002.

### Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary

**Mr. Duncan Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships have *(a)* entered into service with the Royal Navy since 1 May 1997 and *(b)* left the service of the Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary since 1 May 1997. [158524]

**Mr. Spellar:** The following ships have entered service with the Royal Navy since 1 May 1997:

HMS Ocean, HMS Kent, HMS Portland, HMS Sutherland, HMS Penzance, HMS Pembroke, HMS Grimsby, HMS Bangor, HMS Ramsey, HMS Blyth, HMS Vigilant and HMS Vengeance.

The following ships have left Royal Navy and RFA service since 1 May 1997:

HMS Birmingham, HMS Brave, HMS Beaver, HMS Boxer, HMS London, HMS Bicester, HMS Berkeley, HMS Orkney, HMS Blackwater, HMS Spey, HMS Arun, HMS Itchen, RFA Olna and RFA Olwen.

### Whistleblowers (Soldiers)

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procedures enable soldiers to give confidential information to officers concerning suspicions of *(a)* paramilitary and *(b)* Nazi membership of fellow soldiers. [158570]

**Mr. Spellar:** Service policy is that membership of paramilitary or Nazi-type organisations is unacceptable. Any member of the armed forces who has a suspicion about an individual involved in such activities would have a duty to report it to the chain of command. Divisional or commanding officers take all such allegations very seriously and have a duty to investigate them and take appropriate action. In addition, in particular where criminal, disciplinary or security activity is suspected, an allegation may be made to either the Service police or security staff.

Each Service also operates a confidential helpline which would advise Service personnel of the correct course of action to take if, for any reason, they were uncertain what steps they should take in these circumstances.

### Lance Corporal William Thompson

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the service career of former RIR Lance Corporal William Thompson, indicating in which units of the RIR he served. [158569]

**Mr. Spellar:** In accordance with exemption 8a and exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, such details are not to be disclosed without the consent of the individual to whom the information relates.

### RAF Chinook ZD576

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 19 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 86W, on what evidence he based his statement that RAF Chinook ZD576's engines were working right up until impact. [158215]

**Mr. Spellar:** This statement was based on the report of the technical investigation carried out by the Air Accidents Investigation Branch following the accident, which said:

> "The engines sustained generally moderate impact and fire damage. Strip examination indicated that both were running at high speed with turbines hot at the time of impact, and revealed no signs of pre-impact failure or malfunction that could have affected the operation of either engine."

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps the Air Accident Investigation Branch took to verify independently information provided by Textron Lycoming during their investigation into the loss of RAF Chinook ZD576. [158184]

**Mr. Spellar:** The engines of RAF Chinook ZD576 and their fuel systems were examined externally in detail by the Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) at Farnborough with the assistance of a representative from Textron Lycoming, together with representatives from Chandler Evans Co. and Hawker Siddeley Dynamics Engineering. The engines were then strip examined at Textron Lycoming's Stratford, Connecticut plant under the direction of the AAIB.

### MLRS M28 Rockets

**Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many MLRS M28 rockets Her Majesty's armed forces have in stock. [158396]

**Mr. Spellar:** I am withholding information regarding the quantity of MLRS M28 rockets held in stock by the armed forces, in accordance with exemption 1 (a) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

**Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many MLRS M28 rockets have been fired by Her Majesty's armed forces within the United Kingdom since 25 October 1998, indicating in each case the date and location. [158395]

**Mr. Spellar:** The number of MLRS M28 rockets that have been fired by Her Majesty's armed forces within the United Kingdom since 25 October 1998, by location and date, is as follows:

| *Location* | *Unit* | *Missiles fired* | *Date* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Castlemartin | Royal School of Artillery, Larkhill | 6 | 16 February 2000 |
| Otterburn | 101 (V) Regiment Royal Artillery | 6 | 25 November 2000 |
| Castlemartin | Royal School of Artillery, Larkhill | 6 | 21 February 2001 |

In addition 750 reduced range practice rockets were fired at the above ranges.

### Northern Ireland

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of Military Appreciation of the Security Situation in Northern Ireland presented to the Prime Minister on 4 October 1971. [158505]

**Mr. Spellar:** The document in question was submitted by the Ministry of Defence to the Bloody Sunday Inquiry. It would be inappropriate to publish such documents while the Inquiry is still sitting.

### US National Missile Defence System

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the effect of the US National Missile Defence System on the national security of the UK. [156940]

**Mr. Hoon:** We share the US's concerns about the problem of missile proliferation and understand the role that missile defence can play as one element of the response. The US has not yet put forward specific missile defence proposals, but has made clear that it intends to consult fully with its Allies before making any decision. We expect to play a full and constructive part in that process, taking account of UK national security interests.

### Canadian Defence Deployments

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations he has held with his Canadian counterpart on identifying Canadian assets for deployment in EU-led operations. [158312]

**Mr. Hoon:** I have regular discussions with my Canadian counterpart. The European Union has already welcomed the interest shown by Canada in participating in EU-led operations. Consultations with Canada will be stepped up in times of crisis. Participation by Canada will be of particular importance in the case of EU operations drawing on NATO assets and capabilities. In this context, when the European Union embarks on detailed examination of an option making use of NATO assets and capabilities, particular attention will be paid to consultation with Canada.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Departmental Policies (Ribble Valley)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Ribble Valley constituency, the effects on Ribble Valley of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157850]

**Mr. Wills:** Details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the Ribble Valley constituency and Lancashire LEA have been placed in the Library.

### Departmental Policies (Camden)

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the effects, with statistical information on *(a)* Hampstead and Highgate and *(b)* the London borough of Camden of his Department's policies since 2 May 1997. [158014]

**Mr. Wills** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on *(a)* Hampstead and Highgate and *(b)* the London borough of Camden and Camden LEA have been placed in the Library.

### Child Care

**Mr. Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many new child care places were created in *(a)* Wandsworth and *(b)* the constituency of Battersea between 2 May 1997 and April 2001; and if he will make a statement. [156769]

**Ms Hodge:** Between May 1997 and March 1999, the National Childcare Strategy created 9,784 childcare places in the London region. Since April 1999 local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships have provided details of the new childcare places that have opened by local education authority and constituency. Between April 1999 and December 2000 two Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships have reported new childcare places in the constituency of Battersea. Wandsworth Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership have reported the creation of 411 new out of school hours childcare places in the borough of Wandsworth and 124 of these are in the constituency of Battersea. Lambeth Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership reported the creation of 2,648 new childcare places between April 1999 and December 2000, of which 24 places were on the border of the constituency and fall within Battersea.

Since September 1998, all four-year-olds in Wandsworth have been entitled to receive a free, part time, early education place. This entitlement is also available for all three year olds in Wandsworth. From 1999 to 2001, Wandsworth received a total of £2,850,000 to fund 3,172 early education places for three year olds. In 2001–02, Wandsworth LEA have been allocated additional funding of £2,050,488 to provide places for 1,726 three year olds. This is in addition to the places that the authority will make available through their own resources (including Standard Spending Assessment).

### Work Permits (IT)

**Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many work permits for entrants to the UK were granted in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 2000 to information technology and e-commerce specialists from countries outside the European Union. [157694]

**Ms Hodge:** The number of foreign nationals granted permission, through work permit arrangements, to undertake information technology related jobs during 2000 was 18,257. Comparable figures for 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999 are not available as the way in which work permit management information is collected was changed in October 1999.

### Employment (Asian Women)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to increase participation in the labour market of British Asian women; and if he will make a statement. [157773]

**Ms Jowell:** The Government have a range of initiatives to increase job opportunities for groups such as British Asian women who traditionally suffer disadvantage in the labour market. In particular, three major initiatives—New Deal, Action Teams and Employment Zones—are taking steps, including outreach work in local communities, to overcome the specific barriers that stop Asian women from moving into work.

### Education Achievement Awards

**Mr. Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the success of the education achievement awards; and if he will make a statement. [157776]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* School Achievement Awards are for schools that have substantially improved their results since 1997 or achieved better results last year than other schools in similar circumstances. They are a very effective way of recognising those achievements and enabling schools to reward whole staff teams. The very regrettable error affecting a minority of the schools involved should not detract from that.

**Mr. Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what appeals procedure is available to schools that feel unfairly excluded from the list of those regarded as eligible for an achievement award. [157777]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The Department has telephone and e-mail helplines for School Achievement Awards inquiries that are available to all schools. Every school that asks why it did not win an award is being told the specific reason. We will ensure that every school that qualifies for an award receives one.

### Teachers' Working Hours

**Mr. Coaker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions he has had with teacher unions about resolving the dispute over working hours; and if he will make a statement. [157778]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 16 April 2001]:* My right hon. Friend will hold discussions with the teacher unions about a review of teacher workload when they have all suspended industrial action. At that point, he will be prepared to hold discussions about the proposed remit and timetable for the review which was recommended by the independent School Teachers' Review Body.

## Schools (Battersea)

**Mr. Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funding has been made available for improving school buildings under the New Deal for Schools in the Battersea parliamentary constituency since 1 May 1997; and if he will list the improvements concerned. [157804]

**Jacqui Smith:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to his previous question on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 310W.

Information showing the schools in the Battersea constituency that benefited from investment under New Deal for Schools is shown in table A. These allocations formed part of the £4.651 million investment made so far in schools in the London borough of Wandsworth local education authority under the New Deal for Schools programme.

In total, since 1997 the London borough of Wandsworth local education authority has received some £13.214 million of funding for capital investment in school buildings as shown in Table B.

Nationally, investment in school buildings has tripled from £683 million a year in 1996–97 to over £2 billion in 2000–01. It will be £3.5 billion in 2003–04, including grant, credit approvals and Private Finance Initiative credits. There will be central Government investment of £8.5 billion in school buildings in total from 2001–02 to 2003–04. Capital investment already allocated to the London Borough of Wandsworth local education authority in 2001–02, including the increases announced by the Chancellor in the Budget statement of 7 March, amounts to £5.942 million.

*Table A: New Deal for Schools (NDS). Allocation for schools in the Battersea constituency*

| *School* | *Project* | *Grant awarded (£)* |
|---|---|---|
| *1997–98* | | |
| Alderbrook Primary | Replace gas heater | [1]135,000 |
| Joseph Tritton Primary | Provide a secure main entrance with CCTV | |
| *1998–99* | | |
| Chesterton (with Chantfield) Primary | Replacement of three asbestos clad huts | 123,338 |
| St. George's C of E Primary (VA) | Renew heating pipework system | 73,840 |
| Joseph Tritton Primary | Major works to corroded boundary wall | 57,477 |
| Honeywell Infant | Demolition of old dining hall and outside toilets and replacement with new facilities | 194,419 |
| Honeywell Junior | Demolition and replacement of old dining hall and outside toilets with new facilities | 196,299 |
| Borough wide package of 22 schools | Safety of chimneys/flue renewals | [2]379,500 |
| *1999–2000* | | |
| Included within a 12 school package: | | |
| Belleville Primary | Renewal of mechanical and electrical services | [2]1,015,500 |
| High View Primary | | |
| The Vines | | |
| Wix Primary | | |
| Included within eight school package: | | |
| Chesterton Community College | Asbestos removal | [2]157,886 |
| *2000–01* | | |
| Included within a 12 school package: | | |
| Allfarthing Primary | Renewal of roof and associated drainage works | [2]1,621,017 |
| Battersea Technology College | | |
| Bolingbroke Primary | | |
| John Burns Primary | | |
| Chesterton Primary | Replacement of temporary classrooms | 234,240 |

[1] Local education authorities (LEAs) were not required to specify individual project costs for phase 1 of the NDS programme, so the amount shown is the total allocation in that year to the LEA. London borough of Wandsworth local education authority holds project level information.

[2] Denotes total allocation made to package projects covering more than one school. London borough of Wandsworth local education authority will be able to advise the value of projects at schools which have benefited from these allocations.

*Table B: All capital allocations to London borough of Wandsworth local education authority*

*£000*

| | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Annual Capital Guideline (ACG) Basic Credit Approvals | 50 | 274 | 1,614 | 1,166 |
| Supplementary Credit Approvals (SCAs) | 212 | 98 | 26 | 124 |
| Grant to Voluntary Aided (VA) Schools | 428 | 229 | 142 | 715 |
| New Deal for Schools (NDS) | 135 | 865 | 1,016 | 2,635 |
| School Security Grant | 36 | 45 | 59 | 59 |
| Energy Efficiency Initiative | — | 25 | — | — |
| Class Size Initiative | — | — | 115 | 108 |
| National Grid for Learning (NGfL) Grant | — | 292 | 455 | 580 |
| Assistance with Asset Management Plans | — | — | 23 | — |
| Seed Challenge Initiative | — | — | — | 133 |
| Devolved Formula Capital for Schools | — | — | — | 659 |
| Additional Devolved Formula Capital for Schools | — | — | — | 593 |
| Renewal of School Laboratories | — | — | — | 124 |
| Nursery Provision | — | — | — | 68 |
| Schools Access Initiative (Grant) | — | 3 | 26 | 16 |
| Outside Toilet Initiative | — | 66 | — | — |
| Total | 861 | 1,897 | 3,476 | 6,980 |

**Departmental Policies (Tiverton and Honiton)**

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Tiverton and Honiton constituency, the effects on Tiverton and Honiton of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157814]

**Mr. Wills:** Outlined are details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the Tiverton and Honiton constituency and Devon LEA.

*Schools with specialist status*

Queen Elizabeth Community College was awarded Technology college status in 1998.

*School Achievement Awards*

Staff at 12 schools in the constituency received Improvement Awards because pupil performance in 2000 was substantially better than in 1997, or because schools had come out of special measures. Four schools received Excellence Awards, because pupil performance in 2000 was better than most schools in similar circumstances. Awards were around £5,000 for a typical primary school and £25,000 for a typical secondary school.

*Class Sizes*

*£000*

| | *Revenue Funding* | *Capital Funding* |
|---|---|---|
| 1998–99 | 1,000 | 523 |
| 1999–2000 | 1,831 | 732 |
| 2000–01 | 2,596 | 719 |
| Total | 5,427 | 1,974 |

The September 2000 figures show that in Devon there are now 62 (0.3 per cent.) pupils remaining in infant classes of 31 or more. The figure in January 1998 was 5,639 (26 per cent.).

*Classroom of the Future*

Devon LEA was awarded £900,000 as part of this initiative in February 2001. The stated aim is, in the context of recent educational research, to provide life long learning opportunities that broaden experiences for pupils and the whole community. It will be an inclusive project that provides greater educational opportunities for those living in rural communities, so that social exclusion in isolated rural areas no longer exists. The proposal is to set up units in two primary schools and a community college within an existing cluster of schools, and to work with three technology colleges. The potential of ICT is fully explored, in combination with a sustainable design. Partners include Exeter and Plymouth universities and the Timber Research and Development Association.

*Performance Data (England averages include independent schools)*

*Key Stage 2 test results: percentage of pupils achieving level 4 or above*

| | *[1]1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *English* | | | | |
| LEA | 62 | 66 | 72 | 75 |
| England | 63 | 65 | 71 | 75 |
| *Maths* | | | | |
| LEA | 62 | 60 | 70 | 72 |
| England | 62 | 59 | 69 | 72 |
| *Science* | | | | |
| LEA | 67 | 72 | 80 | 86 |
| England | 69 | 69 | 78 | 85 |

*GCSE and GNVQ results*

*Percentage*

| | *[1]1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *5+ A*-C grades* | | | | |
| LEA average | 44 | 47 | 48 | 49 |
| England average | 45 | 46 | 48 | 49 |
| *5+ A*-G grades* | | | | |
| LEA average | 90 | 91 | 91 | 91 |
| England average | 86 | 88 | 89 | 89 |
| *No Passes* | | | | |
| LEA average | 5 | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| England average | 8 | 7 | 6 | 6 |
| *Average Point Score* | | | | |
| LEA average | n/a | 38.4 | 38.7 | 39.2 |
| England average | n/a | 37.0 | 38.1 | 38.9 |

[1]Results for 1997 include Plymouth and Torbay, which became separate unitary authorities with effect from 1998.

*GCE A/AS level examinations and advanced GNVQs*

| | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Average points for 2 or more A/AS levels* | | | |
| LEA average | 16.3 | 17.3 | 17.9 |
| England average | 17.8 | 18.2 | 18.5 |
| *A/AS average per entry* | | | |
| LEA average | 5.2 | 5.5 | 5.3 |
| England average | 5.4 | 5.5 | 5.5 |

*GCE A/AS level examinations and advanced GNVQs*

| | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Average point score GNVQs* | | | |
| LEA average | 10.5 | 10.7 | 10.6 |
| England average | 9.6 | 9.9 | 10.1 |

*Funding per pupil*

In Devon LEA, funding per pupil has increased by £420 in real terms between 1997–98 and 2001–02.

*LEA capital funding*

*£000*

| | 1997–98 | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 | 2000–01 | 2001–02 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Credit approvals* | | | | | | |
| Annual Capital Guideline (ACG) | 10,890 | 6,788 | 6,727 | 9,467 | 10,072 | 43,944 |
| Supplementary Credit Approval (SCA) | 2,771 | 857 | 1,200 | 328 | 1,400 | 6,556 |
| *Grants* | | | | | | |
| New Deal for Schools | 1,018 | 2,397 | 4,763 | 7,536 | — | 15,714 |
| NDS Condition funding | — | — | — | — | 1,520 | 1,520 |
| Nat. Grid for Learning (NGfL) | — | 979 | 1,213 | 2,342 | 3,620 | 8,154 |
| Voluntary Aided Grant | 1,002 | 187 | 251 | 387 | 1,768 | 3,595 |
| Devolved Formula Capital | — | — | — | 5,013 | 4,101 | 9,114 |
| Science labs | — | — | — | 327 | 327 | 654 |
| Energy | — | 175 | — | — | — | 175 |
| Assist Management Plan support | — | — | 108 | — | — | 108 |
| SEED challenge | — | — | — | 341 | 395 | 736 |
| Class Size Initiative | — | 247 | 1,001 | 664 | — | 1,912 |
| Outside toilet removal | — | 972 | — | — | — | 972 |
| Schools Security at 75 per cent. | 262 | 219 | 231 | 233 | 165 | 1,110 |
| SSLU's Grant | — | — | — | 114 | 99 | 213 |
| Schools Access Initiative at 85 per cent. | — | — | — | 22 | 581 | 603 |
| Totals | 15,943 | 12,821 | 15,494 | 26,774 | 24,048 | 95,080 |

*Modern Apprenticeships*

Information on Modern Apprenticeships for all English constituencies was placed in the Library of the House of Commons on 30 March 2001.

*New Deal for Schools*

| Year | School | Project | Allocation (£) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1997–98 | Tiverton High | ICT project | [1]1,017,000 |
| 1998–99 | Clyst Hydon Primary | Replacement of cesspool | 16,500 |
| 1999–2000 | Cullompton Community College | Replacement of concrete roof | 558,888 |
| | Clyst Vale Community College | Upgrade food technology area | 40,000 |
| 2000–01 | The King's School | Replacement of HORSA kitchen/dining building | 532,465 |
| | Honiton Primary | Replacement of four temporary classrooms and demolition of HORSA kitchen | 493,370 |
| | Kentisbeare Primary | Replacement of HORSA hut, temporary classroom and toilets (Phase 2) | 411,347 |
| | Broadclyst Community Primary | Replacement of HORSA hut classrooms | 713,065 |

[1] The LEA will be able to advise how much of the total allocation of £1.017 million was awarded to this school.

*New Deal for Young People*

In the Tiverton and Honiton constituency, 423 young people have joined the New Deal to end December 2000. 236 have found jobs, 190 of which are sustained.

*Labour market statistics*

The working age employment rate in Devon local education authority in winter 2000–01 was 77.6 per cent., above the UK rate of 74.5 per cent. The rate in winter 1996–97 was 73.5 per cent.

The claimant unemployment rate has fallen from 3.3 per cent. in March 1997 to 1.6 per cent. in March 2001 in the Tiverton and Honiton constituency.

## Class Sizes

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many classes in UK primary schools excluding years one, two and three have more than 30 children in them. [157828]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** The number of key stage 2 classes in England, taught by one teacher, with 31 or more pupils, was 22,817 (29.5 per cent.) in January 2001. The equivalent figure for January 1998 was 25,295 (34.3 per cent.). For information for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, I refer my hon. Friend to the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively.

Nationally, average class sizes for primary children have fallen under this Government. At Key Stage 1 the figure has gone down from 27.1 in January 1998 to 25.2 in January 2001. At Key Stage 2 the figure has gone down from 28.3 in January 1998 to 27.9 in 2001. This is a reflection of the fact that delivery of our infant class size pledge is not being achieved at the expense of bigger junior classes. We are making £73 million available in 2001–02 to make further progress on class sizes at Key Stage 2.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the average class size was in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) March 1997 and (ii) March 2001 in North Yorkshire. [157868]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The available information is shown in the table.

*Average class size[1] in maintained primary and secondary schools in North Yorkshire LEA*

| | Primary | Secondary |
|---|---|---|
| January 2001[2] | 25.3 | 21.1 |
| January 1997 | 26.3 | 20.6 |

[1] Classes taught by one teacher.
[2] Provisional.

Information on class sizes as at January 2001 has been published in a Statistical First Release "Class Sizes in Maintained Schools in England January 2001" on 6 April, copies of which are available from the Library, or alternatively can be accessed from the Department for Education and Employment statistical website www.dfee.gov.uk/statistics.

Nationally, average class sizes for primary schools has fallen significantly since 1997. At Key Stage 1 the figure has gone down from 26.9 in 1997 to 25.2 in 2001. At Key Stage 2 the figure has gone down from 28.1 in 1997 to 27.9 in 2001. This is a reflection of the fact that delivery of our infant class size pledge is not being achieved at the expense of bigger junior classes. More generally at secondary level, the 2001 figures show that class sizes nationally have stabilised after a decade of rises. As for the pupil/teacher ratio in secondary schools, the number of pupils in secondary schools rose between 1991 and 1997 and between 1997 and 2001 by just under 190,000 nationally in both sets of years—yet the increase in the pupil/teacher ratio nationally in secondary schools was three times greater between 1991 and 1997 than it was between 1997 and 2001. Indeed, the 2001 figures show that the secondary pupil/teacher ratio has in fact improved for the first time in 10 years and now stands at 17.1.

**Mr. Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the average class size was in the Bury St. Edmunds constituency for (i) middle schools and (ii) upper schools in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000; and what is it at present. [157975]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The information requested is shown in the following table.

*Average class sizes[1] in Bury St. Edmunds constituency*

| | Middle deemed secondary schools | Maintained secondary schools[2] | Key Stage 1 |
|---|---|---|---|
| January 2001[3] | 25.2 | 19.1 | 23.4 |
| January 2000 | 22.9 | 19.9 | 24.0 |
| January 1999 | 23.1 | 18.7 | 24.9 |
| January 1998 | 23.1 | 18.7 | 24.0 |
| January 1997 | 22.7 | 18.9 | 24.7 |

[1] Classes taught by one teacher.
[2] Excluding middle deemed secondary schools.
[3] Provisional.

Average class sizes for primary children in Bury St. Edmunds have fallen significantly since 1997. At Key Stage 1 the figure has gone down from 24.7 in 1997 to 23.4 in 2001. At Key Stage 2 the figure has gone down from 26.7 in 1997 to 25.8 in 2001. This is a reflection of the fact that delivery of our infant class size pledge is not being achieved at the expense of bigger junior classes. More generally at secondary level, the 2001 figures show that class sizes nationally have stabilised after a decade of rises. As for the pupil/teacher ratio in secondary schools, the number of pupils in secondary schools rose between 1991 and 1997 and between 1997 and 2001 by just under 190,000 nationally in both sets of years—yet the increase in the pupil/teacher ratio nationally in secondary schools was three times greater between 1991 and 1997 than it was between 1997 and 2001. Indeed, the 2001 figures show that the secondary pupil/teacher ratio has in fact improved for the first time in 10 years and now stands at 17.1.

**Mr. Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the average class size was in Suffolk local education authority for (i) middle schools and (ii) upper schools in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000; and what is it at present. [157976]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

*Average class sizes[1] in Suffolk LEA*

| | Middle deemed schools | Maintained secondary schools[2] | Key Stage 1 |
|---|---|---|---|
| January 2001[3] | 24.2 | 20.2 | 23.7 |
| January 2000 | 23.8 | 19.9 | 24.3 |
| January 1999 | 23.6 | 19.6 | 24.1 |
| January 1998 | 23.7 | 19.7 | 24.1 |
| January 1997 | 23.3 | 20.1 | 24.3 |

[1] Classes taught by one teacher
[2] Excluding middle deemed secondary schools
[3] Provisional

Average class sizes for primary children in Suffolk LEA have fallen since this Government came to power. In addition to smaller Key Stage 1 classes, the size of the average Key Stage 2 class has gone down from 26.3 in January 1998 to 26.2 in January 2001. More generally at secondary level, the 2001 figures show that class sizes nationally have stabilised after a decade of rises. As for the pupil/teacher ratio in secondary schools, the number of pupils in secondary schools rose between 1991 and 1997 and between 1997 and 2001 by just under 190,000 nationally in both sets of years—yet the increase in the pupil/teacher ratio nationally in secondary schools was three times greater between 1991 and 1997 than it was

between 1997 and 2001. Indeed, the 2001 figures show that the secondary pupil/teacher ratio has in fact improved for the first time in 10 years and now stands at 17.1.

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the change to average class sizes in sixth forms in *(a)* West Sussex and *(b)* Chichester constituency since May 1997. [158593]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** In West Sussex local education authority the size of the average sixth-form class has fallen from 11 in January 1997 to 9.7 in January 2001. The corresponding fall in Chichester is from 11.1 to 10.5.

At secondary level, the 2001 figures show that class sizes nationally have stabilised after a decade of rises. As for the pupil/teacher ratio in secondary schools, the number of pupils in secondary schools rose between 1991 and 1997 and between 1997 and 2001 by just under 190,000 nationally in both sets of years—yet the increase in the pupil/teacher ratio nationally in secondary schools was three times greater between 1991 and 1997 than it was between 1997 and 2001. Indeed, the 2001 figures show that the secondary pupil/teacher ratio has in fact improved for the first time in 10 years and now stands at 17.1.

### Art and Design Edexcel Unit Tests

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the pass rate of students at *(a)* unit 4 and *(b)* unit one of the recent GNVQ intermediate art and design Edexcel unit tests. [157895]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Responsibility for assessing the standards of qualifications rests with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and with the awarding body.

### New Deal (Coventry)

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people in Coventry have found jobs through the New Deal. [157858]

**Ms Jowell** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The table shows, for Coventry, jobs gained from New Deal programmes in the period ending January 2001.

| | *Jobs gained* |
|---|---|
| New Deal for Young People | 1,765 |
| 25+ New Deal | 85 |
| New Deal for Lone Parents | 536 |
| New Deal 50+ | 226 |
| New Deal for Partners | 1 |

### New Deal (Hampstead and Highgate)

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people in Hampstead and Highgate are benefiting from each strand of the New Deal. [158021]

**Ms Jowell** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The following table shows, for Hampstead and Highgate parliamentary constituency, starts to New Deal programmes and jobs gained in the period ending January 2001.

| | *Starts* | *Jobs gained* |
|---|---|---|
| New Deal for Young People | 1,085 | 367 |
| 25+ New Deal | 1,333 | 221 |
| New Deal for Lone Parents | 301 | 71 |
| New Deal 50+ | n/a | 26 |

Figures for other voluntary New Deal programmes are not available at parliamentary constituency level.

### Learning Difficulties

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of the teaching assistants providing classroom support for children with learning difficulties have received training in special needs education. [158081]

**Jacqui Smith:** This information is not held centrally.

Through the Department's Standards Fund programme, we are supporting expenditure on special educational needs (SEN) training and development for teachers, headteachers, special educational needs co-ordinators and teaching assistants. It is envisaged that, of the overall £82 million available for SEN in 2001–02, £30 million will be spent on training. This is an increase from SEN training expenditure of £26 million in 2000–01 and £21 million in 1999–2000.

From September 2000 we have made available introductory training materials for recently recruited teaching assistants, which include coverage of the special educational needs framework, and in October of last year we published "Working with teaching assistants: a good practice guide".

**Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of enforcement of the legislation relating to the employment of people with learning difficulties. [158347]

**Ms Hodge:** My Department monitors Employment Tribunal cases and case law on the employment provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA). It also carries out targeted research on how the DDA's employment provisions are working. "Monitoring the Disability Discrimination Act 1995—Phase 2" (an interim report published in March 2000 by Income Data Services Ltd.), provides a statistical analysis of Employment Tribunal cases and a commentary on case law.

Of the 487 Employment Tribunal cases where the disability was known and the case reached a hearing, 18 concerned specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia) and 3 severe learning difficulties. The Disability Rights Commission, as part of its statutory role for monitoring the DDA, will be taking forward with my Department the next phase of the project later in 2001.

### Pupil Exclusion

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children have been excluded from school because of their health needs in the last 12 months. [158082]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** The information requested is not collected centrally.

Information on permanent exclusions was published in the Statistical Bulletin "Permanent Exclusions from Maintained Schools in England" on 29 November 2000, copies of which are available from the Library, or alternatively can be accessed from the Department for Education and Employment statistical website www.dfee.gov.uk/statistics.

We are providing £174 million this year to help schools and LEAs tackle exclusion—a third more than in 1999–2000 and 10 times more than in 1996–97. This is helping to pay for more than 1,000 on-site Learning Support Units which take disruptive pupils out of the classroom quickly, improve their behaviour and reduce the need for exclusion. Where an exclusion is necessary, provision for excluded pupils is being greatly increased. There are now 1,000 more places and nearly 600 more teachers and support staff in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) than in 1997. The quality of education provided by PRUs has improved rapidly and by September 2002 all local education authorities will be required to offer excluded pupils a full-time education, not the 2–3 hours typical in the past.

## Special Educational Needs

**Angela Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children have a statement of special educational needs, what percentage of school age children have been statemented, and what percentage of statemented children are on *(a)* level 2 and *(b)* level 3, in each local education authority. [153149]

**Jacqui Smith:** The information requested is not collected centrally.

The available data are shown in the table.

Arrangements for identifying and providing for children with SEN are set out in the Education Act 1996 (and, prior to this, the Education Acts 1993 and 1981). This Act is supported by the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs, issued in 1994, to which local education authorities (LEAs) and schools must have regard. The Government published "Meeting Special Educational Needs: A Programme of Action" in November 1998 following consultation on its proposals to support the increased achievement of children with SEN.

The Code of Practice sets out five recommended stages for addressing the different levels of pupils' SEN. Stages 1–3 are school-based, with support from specialists from outside the school at stage 3. The vast majority of these children will have their needs met in mainstream schools. Stage 4 involves the LEA considering the need for, and if appropriate making, a multi-disciplinary assessment of the child's needs. Stage 5 involves the LEA making and monitoring a statement of SEN. The Government are currently reviewing the Code of Practice.

*All schools: Number of pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN)—January 2000*

| *Local education authority area* | *Number of pupils with statements* | *Total number of pupils* | *SEN as a percentage of all pupils*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| *England* | 252,857 | 8,345,815 | 3.0 |
| *North East* | 13,943 | 446,668 | 3.1 |
| Darlington | 580 | 17,231 | 3.4 |
| Durham | 3,296 | 82,634 | 4.0 |
| Gateshead | 827 | 32,786 | 2.5 |
| Hartlepool | 430 | 17,250 | 2.5 |
| Middlesbrough | 776 | 26,541 | 2.9 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 1,151 | 45,623 | 2.5 |
| North Tyneside | 942 | 33,012 | 2.9 |
| Northumberland | 1,635 | 53,095 | 3.1 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 590 | 26,231 | 2.2 |
| South Tyneside | 839 | 26,543 | 3.2 |
| Stockton-on-Tees | 1,082 | 34,777 | 3.1 |
| Sunderland | 1,795 | 50,945 | 3.5 |
| *North West* | 39,791 | 1,203,679 | 3.3 |
| Blackburn with Darwen | 1,176 | 28,781 | 4.1 |
| Blackpool | 828 | 22,684 | 3.7 |
| Bolton | 1,630 | 50,160 | 3.2 |
| Bury | 918 | 32,295 | 2.8 |
| Cheshire | 3,564 | 115,961 | 3.1 |
| Cumbria | 2,899 | 81,879 | 3.5 |
| Halton | 965 | 21,657 | 4.5 |
| Knowsley | 1,179 | 29,801 | 4.0 |
| Lancashire | 7,666 | 189,279 | 4.1 |
| Liverpool | 2,359 | 83,087 | 2.8 |
| Manchester | 2,160 | 75,076 | 2.9 |
| Oldham | 679 | 43,281 | 1.6 |
| Rochdale | 982 | 37,378 | 2.6 |
| Salford | 946 | 38,830 | 2.4 |
| St. Helens | 1,440 | 30,998 | 4.6 |
| Sefton | 1,649 | 51,796 | 3.2 |
| Stockport | 1,250 | 49,455 | 2.5 |
| Tameside | 1,189 | 38,931 | 3.4 |
| Trafford | 853 | 39,028 | 2.2 |
| Warrington | 993 | 32,996 | 3.0 |
| Wigan | 2,292 | 51,354 | 4.5 |
| Wirral | 2,146 | 58,972 | 3.6 |
| *Yorkshire and the Humber* | 26,974 | 867,713 | 3.1 |
| Barnsley | 1,126 | 35,573 | 3.2 |
| Bradford | 2,555 | 93,324 | 2.7 |
| Calderdale | 1,071 | 36,601 | 2.9 |
| Doncaster | 2,252 | 53,258 | 4.2 |
| East Riding of Yorkshire | 1,299 | 51,986 | 2.5 |
| Kingston Upon Hull, City of | 998 | 44,927 | 2.2 |
| Kirklees | 2,832 | 67,285 | 4.2 |
| Leeds | 4,239 | 122,363 | 3.5 |
| North East Lincolnshire | 805 | 29,047 | 2.8 |
| North Lincolnshire | 735 | 25,980 | 2.8 |
| North Yorkshire | 2,400 | 95,293 | 2.5 |
| Rotherham | 1,764 | 46,688 | 3.8 |
| Sheffield | 2,593 | 79,474 | 3.3 |
| Wakefield | 1,575 | 58,353 | 2.7 |
| York | 730 | 27,561 | 2.6 |
| *East Midlands* | 19,126 | 709,751 | 2.7 |
| Derby | 1,427 | 40,719 | 3.5 |
| Derbyshire | 4,321 | 121,462 | 3.6 |
| Leicester | 2,094 | 51,093 | 4.1 |
| Leicestershire | 2,813 | 99,715 | 2.8 |
| Lincolnshire | 3,239 | 104,362 | 3.1 |
| Northamptonshire | 3,114 | 112,071 | 2.8 |
| Nottingham | 685 | 46,848 | 1.5 |
| Nottinghamshire | 1,273 | 126,626 | 1.0 |
| Rutland | 160 | 6,855 | 2.3 |
| *West Midlands* | 28,322 | 935,483 | 3.0 |
| Birmingham | 5,256 | 187,380 | 2.8 |
| Coventry | 1,425 | 53,901 | 2.6 |
| Dudley | 1,259 | 51,590 | 2.4 |
| herefordshire | 825 | 26,102 | 3.2 |
| Sandwell | 1,352 | 52,851 | 2.6 |
| Shropshire | 1,667 | 45,259 | 3.7 |
| Solihull | 750 | 41,126 | 1.8 |
| Staffordshire | 5,552 | 138,349 | 4.0 |
| Stoke-on-Trent | 1,229 | 39,605 | 3.1 |
| Telford and Wrekin | 1,256 | 28,169 | 4.5 |
| Walsall | 1,426 | 51,061 | 2.8 |
| Warwickshire | 2,514 | 84,033 | 3.0 |
| Wolverhampton | 1,213 | 45,084 | 2.7 |
| Worcestershire | 2,598 | 90,973 | 2.9 |

*All schools: Number of pupils with statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN)—January 2000*

| *Local education authority area* | *Number of pupils with statements* | *Total number of pupils* | *SEN as a percentage of all pupils*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| *East of England* | 24,913 | 901,470 | 2.8 |
| Bedfordshire | 2,315 | 69,641 | 3.3 |
| Cambridgeshire | 2,845 | 85,034 | 3.3 |
| Essex | 4,634 | 210,299 | 2.2 |
| Hertfordshire | 4,709 | 195,782 | 2.4 |
| Luton | 732 | 32,593 | 2.2 |
| Norfolk | 4,084 | 119,701 | 3.4 |
| Peterborough | 1,011 | 29,697 | 3.4 |
| Southend-on-Sea | 684 | 27,550 | 2.5 |
| Suffolk | 3,387 | 108,881 | 3.1 |
| Thurrock | 512 | 22,292 | 2.3 |
| *London* | 34,200 | 1,185,392 | 2.9 |
| *Inner London* | 13,410 | 426,647 | 3.1 |
| Camden | 880 | 29,894 | 2.9 |
| City of London | 2 | 1,925 | 0.1 |
| Hackney | 1,040 | 31,437 | 3.3 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 748 | 21,731 | 3.4 |
| Haringey | 944 | 36,038 | 2.6 |
| Islington | 912 | 24,923 | 3.7 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 310 | 21,590 | 1.4 |
| Lambeth | 1,221 | 30,332 | 4.0 |
| Lewisham | 1,274 | 38,694 | 3.3 |
| Newham | 1,496 | 49,506 | 3.0 |
| Southwark | 1,227 | 40,852 | 3.0 |
| Tower Hamlets | 1,569 | 37,633 | 4.2 |
| Wandsworth | 1,150 | 37,498 | 3.1 |
| Westminster | 637 | 24,594 | 2.6 |
| *Outer London* | 20,790 | 758,745 | 2.7 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 816 | 29,445 | 2.8 |
| Barnet | 1,272 | 54,777 | 2.3 |
| Bexley | 1,074 | 40,885 | 2.6 |
| Brent | 1,235 | 39,661 | 3.1 |
| Bromley | 1,643 | 51,219 | 3.2 |
| Croydon | 1,174 | 58,505 | 2.0 |
| Ealing | 1,224 | 49,080 | 2.5 |
| Enfield | 1,196 | 49,290 | 2.4 |
| Greenwich | 1,599 | 38,784 | 4.1 |
| Harrow | 808 | 33,787 | 2.4 |
| Havering | 1,094 | 37,656 | 2.9 |
| Hillingdon | 1,419 | 44,363 | 3.2 |
| Hounslow | 1,077 | 36,928 | 2.9 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 558 | 24,000 | 2.3 |
| Merton | 808 | 27,216 | 3.0 |
| Redbridge | 847 | 46,743 | 1.8 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 624 | 27,904 | 2.2 |
| Sutton | 967 | 30,955 | 3.1 |
| Waltham Forest | 1,355 | 37,547 | 3.6 |
| *South East* | 40,173 | 1,312,345 | 3.1 |
| Bracknell Forest | 464 | 18,011 | 2.6 |
| Brighton and Hove | 1,445 | 35,361 | 4.1 |
| Buckinghamshire | 2,428 | 83,711 | 2.9 |
| East Sussex | 2,326 | 74,490 | 3.1 |
| Hampshire | 4,705 | 192,205 | 2.4 |
| Isle of Wight | 873 | 20,401 | 4.3 |
| Kent | 8,030 | 228,836 | 3.5 |
| Medway | 1,631 | 46,726 | 3.5 |
| Milton Keynes | 1,343 | 36,070 | 3.7 |
| Oxfordshire | 2,431 | 99,345 | 2.4 |
| Portsmouth | 757 | 29,539 | 2.6 |
| Reading | 612 | 20,959 | 2.9 |
| Slough | 676 | 20,858 | 3.2 |
| Southampton | 831 | 32,983 | 2.5 |
| Surrey | 5,344 | 176,782 | 3.0 |
| West Berkshire | 1,103 | 27,670 | 4.0 |
| West Sussex | 3,662 | 116,591 | 3.1 |
| Windsor and Maidenhead | 606 | 24,908 | 2.4 |
| Wokingham | 906 | 26,899 | 3.4 |
| *South West* | 25,425 | 783,314 | 3.2 |
| Bath and North East Somerset | 721 | 29,679 | 2.4 |
| Bournemouth | 675 | 23,049 | 2.9 |
| Bristol, City of | 2,436 | 60,354 | 4.0 |
| Cornwall | 3,341 | 76,095 | 4.4 |
| Devon | 3,750 | 105,086 | 3.6 |
| Dorset | 1,814 | 60,385 | 3.0 |
| Gloucestershire | 2,681 | 93,395 | 2.9 |
| Isles of Scilly | 4 | 266 | 1.5 |
| North Somerset | 906 | 28,647 | 3.2 |
| Plymouth | 1,513 | 42,768 | 3.5 |
| Poole | 703 | 21,090 | 3.3 |
| Somerset | 2,257 | 79,711 | 2.8 |
| South Gloucestershire | 1,292 | 41,819 | 3.1 |
| Swindon | 961 | 29,886 | 3.2 |
| Torbay | 689 | 20,065 | 3.4 |
| Wiltshire | 1,661 | 70,962 | 2.3 |

[1] Excludes dually registered pupils in Special Schools and Pupil Referral Units

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to ensure statements under Part 3 of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill [*Lords*] quantify provision. [158121]

**Jacqui Smith:** Section 324(3) of the Education Act 1996 requires that statements specify the special educational provision to be made for individual children. We have no plans to change this. The existing Special Educational Needs Code of Practice recognises that, in many cases, specific provision should be quantified, while in other cases flexibility should be retained. The revised Code of Practice, which will shortly be placed before Parliament for approval, will expand on this guidance. It will make it clear that a statement should describe clearly all of the child's special educational needs in full; set out the main objectives that the special educational provision aims to meet; specify clearly and detail the provision required to meet each of the child's needs; describe the arrangements for setting shorter-term objectives for the child and any special arrangements for the annual review of the statement. The revised Code will recognise that there may often be a need for provision to be expressed in terms of hours, equipment or personnel, and it will also state clearly that authorities must not, in any circumstances, have blanket policies not to quantify provision in statements.

## School Curriculum (Environmental Issues)

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps the Government have taken since May 1997 to ensure that environmental issues form part of the school curriculum. [158710]

**Jacqui Smith:** Sustainable Development Education (SDE), which includes learning about environmental issues, has been part of the National Curriculum since September 2000.

## Speech Therapy

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many hours of speech therapy will be provided to children under the provisions of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill [*Lords*]. [158122]

**Jacqui Smith:** This matter does not come within the provisions of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill. Specific provision for speech and language therapy might be set out in a statement of special educational needs (SEN) maintained in relation to a particular child. In the draft revised SEN Code of Practice

we have indicated that addressing speech and language impairment should normally be recorded as educational provision unless there are exceptional reasons for not doing so.

Local education authorities receive support under the Standards Fund to enhance speech and language therapy services in conjunction with the NHS and the voluntary sector. Of the £82 million available for SEN under the Standards Fund 2001–02, we envisage that about £10 million will be spent on improving speech and language therapy provision.

In addition, I announced on 27 March a £10 million initiative to provide communication aids for children with SEN and disabilities. This expenditure will be incurred over the period 2002–03 and 2003–04.

### Second Language Teaching

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many primary schools teach a second language. [158397]

**Jacqui Smith:** We do not hold information centrally on the number of primary schools currently teaching a second language, but it is estimated that one in five do so. The National Curriculum contains guidance for teaching 7 to 11-year-olds, covering skills, knowledge and understanding, together with attainment targets. We have also published a scheme of work for primary French, and further materials for primary German and Spanish.

I recently announced further funding of over £200,000 for the Early Language Learning initiative, through which we are piloting approaches to extend language teaching in primary schools, gathering good practice and developing classroom materials. In our formal response to the Nuffield Languages Inquiry we set out our intention to build on existing links between primary schools and specialist language colleges. The increasing number of colleges and the developing focus on their roles as 'hubs' of excellence will enhance opportunities for primary schools to access languages expertise.

### Specialist Schools Programme

**Mr. Salter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what his plans are for the expansion of the specialist schools programme. [158537]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** The number of specialist schools has increased threefold since May 1997, from 181 to 536, with a further 73 designated to start operating from September 2001. Our target of 1,500 specialist schools by 2006 proposed in the Green Paper "Schools: Building on Success" is an increase of 1,000 on our original target of 500. As a result of the 2000 Spending Review, the Government will be providing an additional £33 million from the Capital Modernisation Fund over the next three years to make it possible to expand the specialist schools programme at a faster rate to reach 1,000 specialist schools by 2003. This will enable us to introduce all three of the new specialisms (Science, Engineering, and Business and Enterprise) in September next year.

### Harassment (Disability)

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the number of people with learning disabilities who have experienced bullying and harassment at work in the last year. [158077]

**Ms Hodge:** People with learning disabilities can take cases under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) where they believe they have faced harassment or bullying which amounts to a "detriment" on account of their disability. My Department monitors Employment Tribunal decisions and emerging case law on all aspects of the DDA, including complaints made by disabled people about harassment and bullying. In its final report, "From Exclusion to Inclusion", the Disability Rights Task Force commented that the DDA is effective in its treatment of harassment but proposed strengthening the Employment Code of Practice. In our response to the Task Force, entitled "Towards Inclusion" and published on 5 March, we explain that we have asked the Disability Rights Commission to ensure that the current section in the Code of Practice on harassment is reviewed and strengthened, as necessary.

### Pipework Insulation

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what standard of heat insulation is specified for pipework in PFI projects in his Department. [151655]

**Mr. Wicks:** There are no PFI heating or building projects in the Department.

### Student Loans

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) of 9 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 764W, if he will estimate the nominal rate of interest required to hold the net present value of student loans at £590 million if the threshold of student loans repayment were increased to £15,000. [157872]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The net present value of the estimated £982 million income contingent loans issued in 1999–2000 to students domiciled in England and Wales is estimated to be £590 million. The nominal rate of interest required to maintain this net present value with a threshold for repayment of £15,000 per year is estimated to be around 4½ per cent.

### National Training Organisations

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what account he will take in conducting the review of national training organisations' employees of the coherence of the sector in question as well as its size defined by the number of employees. [155865]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 28 March 2001]:* We will consider a number of issues in relation to the future direction of the National Training Organisations network raised during the consultation, which concludes on 12 April. These include the coherence of the sector, as well as work force coverage.

### Modern Apprenticeships (Newcastle)

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many modern apprenticeship and advanced modern apprenticeship starts there were in the *(a)* City of Newcastle upon Tyne and *(b)* Newcastle upon Tyne, Central constituency in each financial year from 1996–97 to the most recent date in 2000–01 for which figures are available. [157103]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* Since 1 April 1996, we know of 3,475 starts on Modern Apprenticeships in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne local authority district and 978 in the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Central parliamentary constituency as at 30 November 2000. Broken down by financial year these are:

| *Financial year* | *Foundation modern apprenticeships*[1] | *Advanced modern apprenticeships*[2] | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Newcastle upon Tyne local authority district* | | | |
| 1996–97 | [3]— | 357 | 357 |
| 1997–98 | 3 | 482 | 485 |
| 1998–99 | 140 | 392 | 532 |
| 1999–2000 | 749 | 483 | 1,232 |
| 2000–01[4] | 559 | 310 | 869 |
| Total | 1,451 | 2,024 | 3,475 |
| *Newcastle upon Tyne Central parliamentary constituency* | | | |
| 1996–97 | [3]— | 85 | 85 |
| 1997–98 | 1 | 149 | 150 |
| 1998–99 | 39 | 99 | 138 |
| 1999–2000 | 218 | 134 | 352 |
| 2000–01[4] | 170 | 83 | 253 |
| Total | 428 | 550 | 978 |

[1] Foundation Modern Apprenticeships, formerly known as National Traineeships, were introduced nationally in September 1997.
[2] Advanced Modern Apprenticeships, formerly known as Modern Apprenticeships, were introduced nationally in September 1995.
[3] Not applicable.
[4] April to November.
*Source:*
WBTYP trainee database.

### Students (Newcastle)

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many full and part-time students there are *(a)* aged 16 to 18 years and *(b)* over 18 years with home postcodes in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne at Further Education Funding Council-funded institutions, broken down between FEFC-funded courses and other courses, in each year since 1996–97. [157105]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The numbers of students with home postcodes in the local authority district of Newcastle-Upon Tyne split by age, mode of attendance and funding category is contained in the table:

| | *FEFC funded* | | | | *Non-FEFC funded* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *16–18* | | *Adult* | | *16–18* | | *Adult* | |
| *Year* | *Full-time* | *Part-time* | *Full-time* | *Part-time* | *Full-time* | *Part-time* | *Full-time* | *Part-time* |
| 1996–97 | 1,471 | 1,601 | 1,223 | 18,233 | 71 | 116 | 336 | 212 |
| 1997–98 | 1,301 | 1,720 | 1,100 | 17,626 | 98 | 146 | 348 | 347 |
| 1998–99 | 1,251 | 1,652 | 1,232 | 17,641 | 101 | 318 | 446 | 915 |
| 1999–2000 | 1,302 | 1,600 | 833 | 18,804 | 106 | 324 | 412 | 1,132 |

*Notes:*
1. All data are whole-year data.
2. Figures for 1999–2000 are provisional.
3. Includes data from all FEFC funded institutions (including Specialist Designated Institutions).
4. Excludes Higher Education Institutions.

## CABINET OFFICE

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Tom King:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many officials, at what grades, have been transferred to *(a)* MAFF, *(b)* the Rural Task Force and *(c)* other relevant bodies working on the foot and mouth outbreak from other Government Departments. [157718]

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** Information is not held in the form requested. Over 100 staff from central and regional government are assisting MAFF. Around 15 further staff are working within the Rural Task Force.

### Workforce Development Plan (Civil Service)

**Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if the Central Government National Training Organisation has completed a work force development plan for the Civil Service. [158422]

**Mr. Stringer:** I am pleased to confirm that the Central Government National Training Organisation completed a work force development plan for the Civil Service. The plan is called "Developing 21st Century Skills" and sets out the priority skills needs for the Civil Service and actions that will be taken to address these needs. The plan focuses on equipping Civil Servants to deliver the Modernising Government agenda. Copies of the plan have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

### Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in her Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis is for this limit. [158116]

**Mr. Stringer:** The Government are committed to equality of opportunity and to increasing the diversity of

those appointed to public bodies. In general, no age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies for which the Prime Minister or I are responsible.

There is one exception. Candidates for appointment to the Civil Service Appeal Board must be either recently retired or about to retire from the Senior Civil Service or a recently retired (or about to retire) Civil Service Trade Union official. They are appointed for an initial period of three years with a possibility of re-appointment. This is explained in the advertisement. To ensure that board members are up to date with civil service/trade union practice and procedures, they are not allowed to serve beyond age 70. In practice, however, appointees normally complete their full period of office before reaching that age.

It should also be noted that although there is no age limit to appointments made to the Advisory Committee on Advertising, each appointee must be "currently employed" as a media or marketing professional.

### Departmental Publications

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will instruct Departments that internet-only publications that are no longer current should continue to be made publicly available in an archival subset of departmental websites. [158118]

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** The Guidelines for UK Government websites are currently being revised and will in future emphasise the importance of retaining archival electronic master copies of all publications published on websites.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the meetings and conferences organised by his Department and agencies of his Department which have been *(a)* cancelled and *(b)* postponed owing to foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [155361]

**Mr. Battle** *[holding answer 23 March 2001]:* The information requested is not held centrally and could be collated only at disproportionate cost.

### Ministerial Meetings

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times *(a)* the Minister for Europe and *(b)* other Ministers from his Department have met with Nadhmi Auchi, of General Mediterranean Holdings Ltd.; and if he will list the (i) dates and (ii) locations of all such meetings. [156873]

**Mr. Vaz** *[holding answer 4 April 2001]:* Neither I nor any other Minister from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have had any official meetings with Mr. Auchi.

### China

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reasons the EU made an announcement of its position on a China resolution at the 57 UN Commission for Human Rights prior to seeing the text of the resolution which the USA was drafting. [157450]

**Mr. Battle:** EU partners felt it was important to send an early and clear message to those concerned, including China and member states of the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), about the EU's approach towards the US resolution on China, and the expected Chinese no-action motion at the current UNCHR session. EU Foreign Ministers agreed a common position at the General Affairs Council on 19 March, after receiving informal briefing from the US authorities. It was agreed not to co-sponsor the US resolution on China at the UN Commission on Human Rights, but to strengthen the EU common position by actively lobbying against the expected Chinese no-action motion, for the first time since 1996.

### Visas

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will provide a breakdown, by entry clearance post, of the number of family visit visa applications *(a)* received, *(b)* determined, *(c)* allowed and *(d)* refused in March; [157971]

(2) if he will provide a breakdown, by entry clearance post, of the number of family visit visa refusals in relation to which *(a)* an appeal was received, *(b)* the refusal was overturned by an entry clearance manager after receipt of an appeal and *(c)* an appeal was despatched in March. [157972]

**Mr. Vaz:** The information requested is not yet available. Once it is I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of the letter in the Libraries of the House.

### Kazakhstan

**Mr. David Atkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest assessment is of the state of human rights and democracy in Kazakhstan; and what conditions are included in EU agreements to provide for progress on these matters. [158197]

**Mr. Vaz:** Kazakhstan's human rights record since independence is mixed. In August 1998 the Government acceded to four UN Conventions: the Convention Against Torture; the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women; the Convention on the Eradication of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; and the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. The Foreign Secretary pressed President Nazarbaev, during the latter's visit to Britain last November, for Kazakh accession to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and abolition of the death penalty.

Serious problems remain. The UK, with its EU partners, has recently issued demarches to the Kazakh Government expressing concern about proposed amendments to the Law on the Mass Media and to the Law on Religion, which threaten to restrict media and religious freedoms.

Democracy and respect for human rights underpin the EU-Kazakhstan Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (PCA) which came into effect in July 1999. Progress towards democratisation and human rights norms is regularly discussed at high-level PCA meetings between the EU and Kazakhstan. The PCA also provides for co-operation and technical assistance to aid progress in these areas.

### Western European Union

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the taking over by the EU of continuing WEU deployments. [158311]

**Mr. Vaz:** The mandate of the Western European Union's Multi-national Advisory Police Element in Albania (MAPE) will expire on 30 May. From 1 June, the European Union will assume direct responsibility for advice, training and the institution building activities of the Albanian police. This will be done through a co-operation project under the Community assistance programme for the Western Balkans.

At the request of the Croatian authorities, the Western European Union has agreed to extend the mandate of the Western European Union's de-mining assistance mission (WEUDAM) with European Union financial support until 30 November when the mission will come to an end.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the future role of *(a)* the WEU Satellite Centre and *(b)* the Institute for Security Studies, under the CFSP. [158310]

**Mr. Vaz:** Following earlier statements at the Cologne European Council, Ministers agreed in principle at the Nice European Council to incorporate the relevant functions of the Western European Union's Satellite Centre and Institute of Security Studies into the European Union by January 2002.

### European Security and Defence Policy

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the consultations with Russia on security and defence issues, raised in section (2)(vi) of the Nice Presidency report on the European Security and Defence Policy. [158313]

**Mr. Vaz:** EU Heads of Government discussed the European Security and Defence Policy with President Putin at the Stockholm European Council. Senior officials of EU member states have also discussed ESDP with Russia in preparation for the EU/Russia summit on 17 May 2001.

### Chagos Islanders

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to receive the report on the feasibility study of allowing the Chagos islanders to return; and if he will make a statement. [158650]

**Mr. Battle:** In accordance with the recommendations for further study in the preliminary report Phase 2A, the procurement and installation of measuring equipment on the islands is now complete and the collection of data has begun. At least six months of data are required before the next phase, 2B, can start. A project manager for Phase 2B has been appointed and terms of reference are currently being drawn up. We hope to have let the tender for this phase within 5–6 months. It is too early to say when the report will be ready but we would expect Phase 2 to take about one year. Phase 3 studies will depend on the findings of Phase 2.

### Diego Garcia

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what payments have been made by the USA for the use of Diego Garcia in each year since 1971. [158651]

**Mr. Battle:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 28 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 1077W.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many personnel are employed by the British Indian Ocean Territories administration in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the Territories; and how many are posted on Diego Garcia in each category. [158652]

**Mr. Battle:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 22 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 403W.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received from the USA concerning the future resettlement of Diego Garcia by the Chagos islanders since the 2000 court judgment on the right of return. [158649]

**Mr. Battle:** In our regular meetings with US officials they have made no formal representations to us but in our discussions with them about the implications of the court judgment. They have stressed the importance they attach, as we do, to the relevant treaty obligations.

### British Indian Ocean Territories

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue expenditure for each of the past 10 years on the British Indian Ocean Territories. [158654]

**Mr. Battle:** We do not yet have the figures for the financial year 2000–01. The approximate figures for *(a)* Capital and *(b)* Recurrent expenditure for the previous six financial years are as follows. For the years prior to that the information requested can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

£

| *Financial Year* | *(a)* | *(b)* |
|---|---|---|
| 1999–2000 | 42,000 | 1,850,000 |
| 1998–99 | 0 | 1,325,000 |
| 1997–98 | 33,000 | 1,530,000 |
| 1996–97 | 22,000 | 1,225,000 |
| 1995–96 | 49,000 | 1,391,000 |
| 1994–95 | 49,000 | 825,000 |

### Lockerbie Trial

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what official reports he has received from UN observers about the Lockerbie trial at Camp Zeist; and if he will make a statement. [158132]

**Mr. Battle:** There were no UN observers at the Lockerbie trial. There were several international observers, representing five organisations, nominated by the Secretary-General. We understand that one of these observers has written a report in a private capacity. The Registrar of the Lockerbie trial was sent a copy of the report and has made the report available to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

### Embassy Representation

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance was provided by the Embassy for the First Minister for Scotland during his recent visit to Washington; and what advice the First Minister received from the UK Ambassador about representation of UK regions in the embassy. [158133]

**Mr. Robin Cook:** The British Embassy in Washington provided the First Minister for Scotland with the usual assistance they would offer to visiting Ministers. They provided a full programme of calls and the First Minister was accompanied during his visit which included a call on the White House.

The Ambassador and the First Minister discussed the possibility of a secondment of a Scottish Executive official to the Embassy. Additionally, the embassy has been in touch with each of the devolved administrations about their representational activity in the United States.

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on providing representation in the Embassy in *(a)* Washington and *(b)* Tripoli for constituent parts of the United Kingdom. [158134]

**Mr. Robin Cook:** In respect of Washington, I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to his previous question. Embassy staff in staff in all our posts overseas continue to represent all the constituent parts of the UK.

### Moluccas

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what communications he has had with the Indonesian authorities concerning the situation of Christians in the Moluccas; [158484]

(2) what representations he has received concerning the situation of Christians in the Moluccas; [158483]

(3) what measures he has taken to end violence in the Moluccas. [158485]

**Mr. Battle:** We have been and continue to be very concerned about events in Indonesia, and especially in Maluku. The second anniversary on 19 January of the outbreak of intercommunal unrest was marked by renewed violence in Ambon: at least 14 people died in clashes between Muslims and the security forces. This illustrated the fragility of the situation in Ambon at a time when there had been some recent improvements; the Muslim and Christian holidays in December passed without serious incident.

Both the Secretary of State for International Development and I visited Indonesia in October 2000 and discussed the situation in Maluku with President Wahid and senior Ministers. We urged tolerance and restraint and made clear to them the Indonesian Government's responsibility to maintain law and order and take immediate steps to bring the perpetrators of the violence to justice. I also discussed events with Alwi Shihab, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, in the margins of the EU-ASEAN meeting in Vientiane on 12 December. I further discussed the situation in Indonesia with the Indonesian Ambassador in London on 4 April.

Our Ambassador to Indonesia has visited the Moluccas twice this year. The visits provided an opportunity to assess the situation at first hand. Together with other international partners, we are working with the Indonesian authorities and UNDP to promote reconciliation and begin wider reconstruction work.

We welcome the commitment of the Indonesian Government to resolve the country's regional conflicts through dialogue and reconciliation. The challenge for Indonesia is to build on the foundations laid by the recent democratic process and to deliver human rights that benefit everybody. We will play a full part in helping towards that goal.

### Sudan

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures he is taking to promote human rights in the Sudan. [158487]

**Mr. Wilson:** We remain concerned about the human rights of all in Sudan and we regularly urge all sides in the civil war to respect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms. We make representations about our human rights concerns to the Government of Sudan, both bilaterally and with our EU colleagues through the EU/Sudan critical dialogue. The dialogue provides a forum for strong criticism of the Sudanese Government, and allows for a co-ordinated EU assessment of the human rights situation.

We also work with our EU colleagues in the UN fora to keep our concerns on the international agenda. For example, the EU recently sponsored a UN General Assembly human rights resolution on Sudan and we are currently working on a similar text at the UN Commission on Human Rights.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received concerning violence in the Sudan. [158486]

**Mr. Wilson:** We receive numerous representations from members of the public, NGOs, and Members of Parliament, demonstrating the immense strength of feeling about the situation in Sudan. Indeed, the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary recently received a petition organised by the Sudanese-British Human Rights Forum containing 18,000 signatures.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Police Vacancies

**Mr. Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vacancies there were for police officers in the Devon and Cornwall constabulary in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 2001. [155738]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The information has been provided by the Chief Constable and is set out in the table. It compares the actual number of officers in post with the police authority's budgeted provision. The number of funded police posts has not been increased due to civilianisation of support posts that were previously filled by police officers. Between December 1992 and 31 January 2001 civilian support staff numbers in Devon and Cornwall Constabulary have increased by 380 to 1,428.

*Devon and Cornwall Constabulary*

| Year | Number of funded police posts | Actual number of police officers[1] | Vacancies |
|---|---|---|---|
| December 1992 | 2,928 | 2,915 | 13 |
| March 1997 | 2,929 | 2,865 | 64 |
| January 2001 | 2,928 | 2,927 | 1 |

[1] Before 1 April 1995 police numbers were counted on head basis. Since April 1995 they have been counted on a full-time equivalent basis.

**Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vacancies for policemen and policewomen there were in Hampshire in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 2001. [157821]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Information for the years in question is set out in the table. The data for 1992 are taken from Home Office records. Following the abolition of police establishments in 1995, it became a matter for police authorities and chief constables to decide on police numbers. For 1997 and 2001 the information on vacancies has been provided by the Chief Constable.

Between 31 March 1992 and 31 January 2001 civilian support staff numbers in Hampshire Constabulary increased 352 to 1,404 (88 of the increase has been since March 1997).

*Hampshire Constabulary*

| Year | Budgeted police strength[1] | Actual strength[1] | Vacancies |
|---|---|---|---|
| 31 March 1992 | 3,202 | 3,206 | 0 (+4) |
| 31 March 1997 | 3,486 | 3,452 | 34 |
| 31 January 2001 | [2]3,573 | 3,451 | 122 |

[1] Before 1 April 1995 police numbers were counted on head basis. Since April 1995 they have been counted on a full-time equivalent basis.

[2] The Budgeted police strength figure for January 2001 includes Crime Fighting Fund posts (82 posts).

### Police Recruitment

**Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officer recruits in England and Wales began residential training during *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01; and if he will provide figures for each police force area. [156870]

**Mr. Straw:** Figures provided by National Police Training (NPT) and by the Metropolitan police record that 3,963 new recruits began residential training during 1999–2000 and 7,009 new recruits began residential training during 2000–01, an increase of 76.9 per cent.

The table provides a breakdown by police force, by region.

*Police recruits beginning residential training*

| Region | Force | Recruits starting residential training 1999–2000 | Recruits starting residential training 2000–01 | Change (Number) | Change (Percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| East Midlands Region | | 253 | 530 | 277 | 109.5 |
| | Derbyshire | 59 | 100 | 41 | 69.5 |
| | Leicestershire | 83 | 107 | 24 | 28.9 |
| | Lincolnshire | 24 | 115 | 91 | 379.2 |
| | Northamptonshire | 16 | 75 | 59 | 368.8 |
| | Nottinghamshire | 71 | 133 | 62 | 87.3 |
| Eastern Region | | 318 | 628 | 310 | 97.5 |
| | Bedfordshire | 33 | 74 | 41 | 124.2 |
| | Cambridgeshire | 24 | 126 | 102 | 425.0 |
| | Essex | 68 | 180 | 112 | 164.7 |
| | Hertfordshire | 148 | 110 | −38 | −25.7 |
| | Norfolk | 30 | 82 | 52 | 173.3 |
| | Suffolk | 15 | 56 | 41 | 273.3 |
| London | | 988 | 1,281 | 293 | 29.7 |
| | City of London | 0 | 28 | 28 | N/A |
| | Metropolitan police | 988 | 1,253 | 265 | 26.8 |
| North East Region | | 193 | 377 | 184 | 95.3 |
| | Cleveland | 43 | 79 | 36 | 83.7 |
| | Durham | 45 | 76 | 31 | 68.9 |
| | Northumbria | 105 | 222 | 117 | 111.4 |
| North West Region | | 441 | 825 | 384 | 87.1 |
| | Cheshire | 23 | 80 | 57 | 247.8 |
| | Cumbria | 19 | 30 | 11 | 57.9 |
| | GMP | 273 | 386 | 113 | 41.4 |
| | Lancashire | 87 | 164 | 77 | 88.5 |
| | Merseyside | 39 | 165 | 126 | 323.1 |

*Police recruits beginning residential training*

| *Region* | *Force* | *Recruits starting residential training 1999–2000* | *Recruits starting residential training 2000–01* | *Change (Number)* | *Change (Percentage)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| South East Region | | 718 | 1,080 | 362 | 50.4 |
| | Hampshire | 119 | 178 | 59 | 49.6 |
| | Kent | 152 | 262 | 110 | 72.4 |
| | Surrey | 181 | 231 | 50 | 27.6 |
| | Sussex | 85 | 180 | 95 | 111.8 |
| | Thames Valley | 181 | 229 | 48 | 26.5 |
| South West Region | | 293 | 529 | 236 | 80.5 |
| | Avon and Somerset | 87 | 146 | 59 | 67.8 |
| | Devon and Cornwall | 70 | 170 | 100 | 142.9 |
| | Dorset | 61 | 81 | 20 | 32.8 |
| | Gloucestershire | 57 | 73 | 16 | 28.1 |
| | Wiltshire | 18 | 59 | 41 | 227.8 |
| Wales | | 266 | 456 | 190 | 71.4 |
| | Dyfed-Powys | 35 | 58 | 23 | 65.7 |
| | Gwent | 58 | 64 | 6 | 10.3 |
| | North Wales | 57 | 91 | 34 | 59.6 |
| | South Wales | 116 | 243 | 127 | 109.5 |
| West Midlands Region | | 298 | 780 | 482 | 161.7 |
| | Staffordshire | 18 | 59 | 41 | 227.8 |
| | Warwickshire | 37 | 85 | 48 | 129.7 |
| | West Mercia | 7 | 89 | 82 | 1,171.4 |
| | West Midlands | 236 | 547 | 311 | 131.8 |
| Yorkshire and the Humber | | 195 | 523 | 328 | 168.2 |
| | Humberside | 40 | 95 | 55 | 137.5 |
| | North Yorkshire | 9 | 61 | 52 | 577.8 |
| | South Yorkshire | 85 | 161 | 76 | 89.4 |
| | West Yorkshire | 61 | 206 | 145 | 237.7 |
| Total | All Forces | 3,963 | 7,009 | 3,046 | 76.9 |

## The Prince's Trust

**Mr. Caplin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to involve the Prince's Trust in working with young offenders in custody. [158183]

**Mr. Boateng:** In addition to existing work with the Prince's Trust in several young offender institutions, I am pleased to announce a new joint initiative, running for 12 months between the Prison Service and the Prince's Trust.

We plan to run the Trust's Volunteers programme for young adult offenders in six prisons—Chelmsford, Gloucester, Leeds, Liverpool, New Hall, Norwich and at Her Majesty's Young Offender Institution, Reading.

The purpose of the Volunteers programme is to assist in the personal development of young people. The aim of this initiative is to replicate the scheme's current record, as assessed by the Trust, of moving 70 per cent. of unemployed participants on the programme into full-time employment, training or education within three months of completing the programme for this challenging group of young people.

## Voting Procedures

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department is taking to inform blind and visually impaired people of the new procedures to assist independent voting for blind and partially sighted people. [158072]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** I was joined on 22 March by the Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) representatives to launch publicly the availability of the voting device and the large print display ballot paper at polling stations. The device was featured on the BBC Radio 4 "In Touch" programme on 3 and 10 April, including an interview I gave on the subject.

The braille and audio tape versions of a leaflet on postal voting, "Make your voice heard", also contain information about the new voting procedures at polling stations for blind and partially sighted voters.

Electoral administrators have been encouraged to make contact with local organisations representing the visually impaired to organise demonstrations of the voting device. The RNIB has been closely involved in the development of the device and has assisted in publicising the new voting procedures.

## Metropolitan Police

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the full-time equivalent number of officers was who *(a)* transferred out of Metropolitan police and *(b)* were seconded to other forces as a result of the major boundary changes in 2000; and if he will provide a figure for the number of officers in the Metropolitan police, taking the changes into account, immediately prior to the boundary change which is comparable with subsequent equivalent figures. [157779]

**Mr. Charles Clarke** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that between 1 January 1999 and 6 April 2001, 108 officers transferred to the Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey forces.

I am also told by the Commissioner that 466 police officers were seconded to the forces of Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey when the boundary change took effect on 1 April 2000. These officers will return to the Metropolitan police over the following two years as and when replacements are recruited by the three county forces.

The effects of the boundary change were incorporated into the police funding formula and the overall transfer was in terms of financial resources, not of officers. Where data on police numbers are used in the formula, a notional transfer of 887 from the Metropolitan police to the three county forces was applied. Because it is for police authorities and Chief Constables to decide how resources are utilised, it is not appropriate to convert the notional transfer directly into a full-time equivalent strength for the Metropolitan police immediately prior to the boundary changes.

Between 31 March and 30 September 2000, the strength of the Metropolitan police fell by 790, to 24,695. This will have been due to a combination of boundary change resources and the temporary secondments to Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey. By 31 January 2001, the numbers of officers in the Metropolitan police had risen to 24,861, 166 more than on 30 September 2000.

### Illegal Trafficking (Prostitution)

**Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers he has to prevent the trafficking of women and girls in to the United Kingdom for sexual exploitation and prostitution; and what action is being taken at international level to combat such exploitation. [157527]

**Mrs. Roche** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The Sex Offences Review recommended to Government in "Setting the Boundaries" that there should be a specific new offence of trafficking for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation for reward. The Government are considering that recommendation in the light of the responses to the report. The Home Office is also co-ordinating a wide range of work by various Government Departments in relation to establishing trafficking offences. These measures support and supplement work being done internationally both in the European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN). The United Kingdom has already signed the UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, especially women and children; and is taking part in discussions within the EU on proposals to establish common offences and penalties in relation to preventing and combating trafficking in human beings, paying particular attention to the sexual exploitation of women and children.

The EU funded STOP programme exists to encourage, support and reinforce practical co-operation to tackle trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation in children. The International Organisation for Migration, of which the United Kingdom is a full member, is also engaged on work in this field.

Apart from prosecution for other offences, traffickers who attempt to facilitate the illegal entry of their victims may be prosecuted for the offence of facilitation which now carries a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment. Alternatively, or in addition, such traffickers who are also foreign nationals may also be refused leave to enter the United Kingdom.

Apart from prosecuting traffickers, the National Crime Squad, National Criminal Intelligence Service, Immigration Service, Police and Europol are all actively involved in the gathering and dissemination of intelligence on trafficking and people smuggling. This work has been co-ordinated through a multi-agency taskforce entitled Project Reflex. The establishment of a network of Immigration Liaison Officers at strategic locations will further facilitate the exchange of information. The announcement by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in his reply to my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Cleethorpes (Shona McIsaac) on 5 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 256W, of an additional £90 million over three years to combat organised crime includes an additional £22.5 million in support of Project Reflex. This new money will enable further work to be carried out to combat trafficking and people smuggling, including the establishment of a joint team drawn from the National Crime Squad and Immigration Service. The EU is working closely together, drawing upon existing co-operation, to tackle the criminals responsible for this horrific trade.

### Departmental Policies (Cannock Chase)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Cannock Chase constituency, the effects on Cannock Chase of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158067]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, "Home Office Annual Report 2000–2001", is available in the Library.

Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. "Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000" and "Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000" can be found in the Library. The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by Basic Command Unit and Crime and Disorder partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are examples relating to the Cannock Chase constituency or the immediate locality:

*Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI)*

Under round one of the RBI Staffordshire Police were awarded £529,000 for a project to deal with prolific offenders in Staffordshire.

*Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)*

Cannock district council received approximately £488,000 for two schemes submitted under round one of the CCTV initiative. The Benion Road Estate scheme was awarded £322,000 for a 13 camera system covering a housing estate that suffers from incidents of burglary, violence against the person and anti-social behaviour. Hednesford Town Centre Car Parks was awarded £165,000 for a scheme covering the main shopping street, four car parks, the bus station and Hednesford railway station.

Cannock Chase council have two schemes to a capital value of £211,000 shortlisted for further consideration under round two of the CCTV initiative.

*Youth Offending*

The Youth Justice Board are contributing approximately £55,000 to a Bail Supervision Scheme being run in Staffordshire which covers the Cannock Chase area. The main objectives of this scheme are: to identify and target prior to court those young people who are at risk of being remanded to custody or secure accommodation; to present programmes to the court at first and subsequent appearances, for alternative options to secure remand for young people.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Cannock Chase to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 49,690 by the end of February 2001; and

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

## Jay Abatan

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the Essex police review's finding about the Sussex police's decision that the fatal assault on Jay Abatan was not racially motivated; [157145]

(2) following the conclusions of the review by Essex police into the investigation by Sussex police following the death of Jay Abatan, if he will *(a)* write again to Bindman and Partners Solicitors and *(b)* reconsider the request by the family of Jay Abatan for a meeting to discuss their concerns. [157144]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Essex police conducted a review of the initial criminal investigation by Sussex police, which considered their treatment of the possibility that the assault on Jay Abatan was racially motivated. Although the Essex review did raise a number of concerns with regard to lessons which could be learnt from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report, it does not specifically criticise Sussex police for not treating the assault on Jay Abatan as racially motivated.

In the light of the findings of the Essex review, Sussex police have now asked Avon and Somerset constabulary to undertake a further Inquiry to establish whether any disciplinary offences have been committed. Sussex police voluntarily referred this Inquiry to the Police Complaints Authority for supervision in December 2000. The terms of reference are: to investigate the handling by Sussex police of the assault on Jay Abatan on 24 January 1999 which led to his death on 29 January 1999 with specific reference to:

the initial response by Sussex on the night of the assault;

the management of the scene of crime and associated forensic issues;

family liaison;

the conduct and management of the inquiry;

the investigation of the lines of inquiry;

the racist aspects of the attack;

the reviews of the inquiry;

other matters arising from the investigation;

any other specific complaints subsequently made by or on behalf of Jay Abatan's family.

As this Inquiry is still on-going, I do not believe that it would be appropriate or helpful for me to comment further or meet with the family of Jay Abatan at this stage.

## Departmental Running Costs

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total gross running costs were to his Department in the 12 months ending 30 April 1997 of *(a)* stationery and *(b)* printing and publishing. [157620]

**Mr. Straw:** The total gross running costs to my Department in the 12 months ending 30 April 1997 were *(a)* £2,449,710 for stationery and *(b)* £1,614,168 for printing and publishing.

## Consultancy Payments

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total gross running cost to his Department was of fees and disbursements paid to consultants in the 12 months ending 30 April 1997. [157618]

**Mr. Straw:** The information requested is not available in the format requested. In order to provide the hon. Member with as full an answer as possible the combined total running costs of fees and disbursements to my Department paid to consultants in the 12 months ending 31 March 1997 amounted to £11,804,984 (exclusive of VAT).

## Departmental Travel Costs

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department's total gross running costs were for travel, including fares, subsistence, accommodation and other expenses met from public funds, but excluding such cost for journeys and stays exclusively within the United Kingdom, in the *(a)* three years ending 30 April 1997 and *(b)* 12 months ending 30 April 1997. [157622]

**Mr. Straw:** Information regarding expenses met from public funds for periods prior to April 1996 is not readily available. The amount met from public funds for the 12-month period ended 30 April 1997 was £2,602,103.29.

### Departmental Policies (Tiverton and Honiton)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Tiverton and Honiton constituency, the effects on Tiverton and Honiton of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157809]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, "Home Office Annual Report 2000–01", is available in the Library.

Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. "Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000" and "Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000" can be found in the Library. The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by Basic Command Unit and Crime and Disorder partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are examples relating to the Tiverton and Honiton constituency or the immediate locality:

*Targeted Policing Initiative*

Under round two of the Targeted Policing Initiative Devon and Cornwall Constabulary have been awarded £81,000 for a project in the East Devon area. The project aims to focus on offender targeting for anti-social behaviour. This involves employment of a researcher/co-ordinator who would utilise existing Information Technology (IT) and resources to identify prolific criminals to be tackled by a "joined up" targeted approach.

*Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)*

Mid-Devon district council were awarded £18,000 under round two of the CCTV initiative for a six-camera system covering Cullompton Town Centre.

*Youth Offending*

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) are contributing funding towards four intervention Schemes and one Bail Supervision Scheme in Devon that cover Tiverton and Honiton. The Parenting Skills Project is receiving approximately £43,000. The project aims to contribute to the prevention of offending by young people, by providing a range of up to 120 parental support packages annually. The Devon Mentoring Project aims to provide a swift intervention to young offenders so that they confront the consequences of their offence as close as possible to its commission. This project is receiving £52,000 from the YJB. The YJB are providing £52,000 towards the Devon Making Amends Project. The objectives of this project are to prevent offending by providing various opportunities for young offenders to confront the consequences of their offending. £151,000 is being funded towards the Devon Intensive Supervision and Support Programme. This aims to develop life-skills and cognitive behavioural programme to help young offenders to survive independently within the community and to develop self awareness of the consequences of their offending on themselves, their victims and the wider community.

Approximately £75,000 is being contributed towards a Bail Support Scheme. This project aims to reduce re-offending among high risk/level offenders who are on bail or remand to courts.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Tiverton and Honiton to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 49,690 by the end of February 2001; and

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

### Departmental Policies (Ribble Valley)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Ribble Valley constituency, the effects on Ribble Valley of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157845]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, "Home Office Annual Report 2000–2001", is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. 'Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000' and 'Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000' can be found in the Library. The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by Basic Command Unit and Crime and Disorder partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are some examples relating to the Ribble Valley constituency or the immediate locality:

*Youth Offending*

One Intervention Scheme and one Bail Supervision Scheme are being funded by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) in Lancashire that includes coverage of the Ribble Valley. The Lancashire Restorative Justice Project has

been awarded a contribution of approximately £37,000. Youth Justice Mediation is a victim/offender mediation service provided by Blackpool borough and Lancashire county council's Youth Offending Teams who are working together to offer this service to children and young persons who offend and their victims and young offenders with the opportunity to communicate with one another in a safe environment in order that the offender may make amends for their inappropriate behaviour and assist the victim to come to terms with the harm they have suffered.

The Bail Support Scheme has been awarded £191,000 and the main objectives are to provide a practical alternative to magistrates' courts for remands to custody, secure accommodation remands to local authority accommodation.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Ribble Valley to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 49,690 by the end of February 2001; and

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

## Burglary

**Sir Peter Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has assessed on the effect of mandatory prison sentences for burglary on the incidence of burglary. [157761]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** It is, as yet, too soon to evaluate the impact of section 111 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 (previously section 4 of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997), which introduced mandatory minimum sentences for repeat burglars. The effects of the provisions, which were brought into force in December 1999, will take some time to be felt because section 111 applies only when all three offences are committed after implementation and one of the two previous offences is committed after the offender has been convicted of the other.

An evaluation is, however, planned and will take place in two main stages. The first stage will take place in 2003–04 and will be an evaluation of the costs and benefits of the measure across the criminal justice system, including changes in the incidence of burglary. By then, there should be enough evidence to form a more soundly based view of its effects.

The final evaluation is planned for 2010 when the full effects should have worked their way through.

**Sir Peter Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many mandatory sentences for burglary have been passed each year since such sentences were first introduced; what proportion of all sentences for burglary mandatory sentences represent in each of those years; and how many burglaries were reported to the police in each of those years. [157762]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Under the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997 (as re-enacted by the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000) which came into effect on 1 December 1999, a mandatory prison sentence of three years' minimum duration was introduced for third-time domestic burglary offenders.

The Home Office's Court Proceedings Databases for 1999 and for 2000 (which are provisional) show that no such sentences have yet been recorded.

An offender would have to be apprehended, prosecuted and convicted on three separate occasions since 1 December 1999 to be subject to the mandatory sentence. Such action is likely to take some time to get to court.

There were 442,600 offences of domestic burglary recorded by the police in England and Wales in 1999–2000 and 16,800 persons were sentenced for this offence in 1999.

## Ground Control Technologies

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, what advice was given to the DSAC on *(a)* the social impact of the use of plastic baton rounds and *(b)* the views of victims' organisations. [158045]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** None. The Defence Scientific Advisory Council considered the scientific and technological issues in relation to this equipment.

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, how many police forces and other bodies are to be equipped with the L21A1 plastic baton round; what his estimate is of the cost of re-equipping each force; how many L21A1 baton rounds have been ordered in each force and at what cost; how many L104 anti-riot guns have been ordered and at what cost; how many XL18E3 optical sight mechanisms have been ordered for each force and at what cost; and what is his estimate of the cost of retraining each unit to be equipped with new equipment. [158037]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Twenty-four police forces in England and Wales presently have baton guns. No additional baton guns have been ordered, but new sights to adapt the weapons which already exist have been ordered. Those forces which have the weapon will have already been training in its use and no additional training costs are known to have arisen as a result of the new equipment.

I wish to consider further, in consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers, whether information on the holdings of individual forces can be released without prejudicing operational effectiveness.

## Lewes Prison

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the recent report by the Board of Visitors into conditions at Lewes Prison. [158340]

**Mr. Boateng:** This report is currently under consideration and I will be replying shortly to all the issues raised by the Board. When I have done so, I will ensure that a copy of my reply is placed in the Library.

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum seekers in 2000 *(a)* left voluntarily and *(b)* were involuntarily deported. [158272]

**Mrs. Roche:** The number of failed asylum seekers who were removed in 2000 was 8,980. This figure includes 550 people who left under the Voluntary Assisted Returns Programme (VARP). It also includes people who left voluntarily in accordance with arrangements notified to the Immigration Service following the commencement of enforcement action. It is not possible to quantify the latter group. However, with the exception of those leaving under VARP, all recorded removals are enforced to some extent, either by escorting to the final point of destination or by the Immigration Service arranging or monitoring the departure. Information is not available on people who leave voluntarily without informing the Immigration Service.

### Football Policing

**Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what income police authorities in England received from premier league football clubs in 1999–2000. [158273]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The information is not available.

The decision whether to charge for costs of policing at local events is for the local police authority and the Chief Constable. Under Section 25 (1) of the Police Act 1996

> "the Chief Officer of Police may provide, at the request of any person, special police services at any premises or in any locality in the police area for which the force is maintained, subject to the payment to the police authority of charges on such scales as may be determined by that authority".

Home Office guidance is that where police charge for special services arrangements should be made for full recovery of costs. This should include the total cost of a police officer including pay, overtime, national insurance, notional pension charges, rent allowance, compensatory grant, uniform, administration costs, and overheads such as costs of travel to and from the ground etc. This is reflected in the Audit Commission report "Taking care of the coppers" (November 1990) which sets out methodology for charging.

### Prison Inspections

**Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken to ensure that the recommendations for reforming conditions at the Stoke Heath Young Offenders' Institution made by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons following his visit to Stoke Heath last October are fully and promptly carried out; and if he will ensure that frequent, irregular spot checks without prior warning are carried out in future. [158374]

**Mr. Boateng:** A new Governor and Deputy have been appointed and an action plan addressing all the recommendations is required to be produced within 30 working days of publication. This is monitored by line management with progress reports to Ministers nine and 15 months after publication.

In the 2000–01 financial year, the Area Manager made 16 visits to the establishment; Area Managers are normally expected to make eight visits per year to each establishment. There is clear evidence of improvement in regime delivery and management under the new Governor and Deputy. The Area Manager is satisfied that his normal visiting arrangements, which may include unannounced visits, will now be sufficient to monitor the implementation of the action plan.

**Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he has taken to ensure that the safety and proper treatment of young offenders and adult prisoners are not entrusted to the former governor and deputy governor of the Stoke Heath Young Offenders' Institution in Shropshire. [158373]

**Mr. Boateng:** The former Governor of Stoke Heath young offender institution has retired from the Prison Service. There is no evidence that the former Deputy Governor is not capable of performing an operational role under the supervision of a suitable governing Governor.

### Election Mailshots

**Mr. Frank Cook:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the amount necessary to be made available to the Post Office to cover the delivery of post-free election material in 2001. [158216]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** If there is a general election in 2001, we estimate that the delivery costs of candidates' election mailings for that election will amount to around £17.6 million at current rates, though this is dependent on the number of candidates taking advantage of this entitlement. If there were by-elections, the costs would depend on their number and the number of candidates participating.

### Test Purchasing

**Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussion he has had with other Government Departments on the use of children of compulsory school age in undertaking test purchasing on behalf of local authority trading standards departments during school hours; and if he will make a statement; [158493]

(2) what advice his Department issues on the use of children of compulsory school age in undertaking test purchases on behalf of local authority trading standards departments during school hours; and if he will make a statement. [158495]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** Home Office Circular 17/1992 on the provisions of the Children and Young Persons (Protection from Tobacco) Act 1991 included guidance on the use of children to make test purchases. A copy of the Circular is in the Library. We are aware that the Association of London Chief Trading Standards Officers subsequently published a code of practice for use in the London area, covering the enforcement of legislation concerning the sale of age-restricted goods which drew on the guidance in the Circular. The Home Office has not

subsequently had discussions with other Departments with a view to issuing further guidance. It is, however, our intention to do so, and to consult the Local Government Association, in relation to the provisions in the Criminal Justice and Police Bill, once enacted, which authorise the test purchasing of alcohol.

## Departmental Policies (Plymouth)

**Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency, *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency and *(c)* South-West Devon constituency, the effects on the Plymouth unitary authority area of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158030]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, "Home Office Annual Report 2000–01", is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. "Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000" and "Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000" can be found in the Library. The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by Basic Command Unit and Crime and Disorder partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are examples relating to the Plymouth unitary authority area or the immediate locality:

*Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI)*

Under round one of the RBI Devon and Cornwall constabulary in partnership with Plymouth city council have been awarded approximately £171,000 for projects focusing on Houses of Multiple Occupancy in the seven central wards in Plymouth. Interventions include: analysis of burglary patterns and methods of entries relating to multiple occupancy dwellings; improving the standards of security in city-centre and university multiple occupancy dwellings; provide security publicity and advice, and through establishing a Certificate of Home Security and an accompanying inspections regime (through training existing property inspectors). It will encourage the formation of neighbourhood watch schemes among residents in multiple occupancy dwellings and identify and target vulnerable properties through the existing Homesafe target hardening scheme.

Under round two, £70,000 has been awarded to various areas. The main interventions proposed in these areas are target hardening, education and improved detection methodology in an area covering 20 high-crime streets.

*Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)*

Plymouth city council was awarded approximately £114,000 for a scheme to upgrade existing equipment covering the car parks and surrounding areas of Derriford Hospital. Plymouth city council have two bids to a total capital of almost £855,000 shortlisted for further consideration under round two of the CCTV initiative.

*Youth Offending*

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) is currently funding several schemes to tackle youth offending that cover the Plymouth area. The YJB are currently providing funding for five Intervention Schemes, one Bail Supervision scheme, a Youth Inclusion project and Easter and Summer Splash schemes. The Easter and Summer Splash schemes aim to address offending by young people (especially 13 to 17-year-olds) during school holiday periods. The results have been extremely encouraging. The five areas traditionally associated with youth crime—burglary, motor crime, criminal damage, street robbery and juvenile nuisance all showed significant reductions compared with the corresponding period in the previous year. In the Plymouth area, the Barne Barton and Honicknowle areas have been involved in this scheme.

The Youth Inclusion programme seeks to reduce offending, truancy and exclusion on disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The project aims to do this by providing targeted assistance and support to the 13 to 16-year-olds most at risk of offending, truancy or exclusion. The Barne Barton neighbourhood has received £68,500 from the YJB for each year the programme is fully operational. A further £6,500 per project is paid direct to local evaluators. In return the project must match this grant funding with minimum local (partnership) funding in cash or in-kind of £75,000 per full year.

There are five Intervention Schemes being run in the Plymouth area. The FIVE Project (Education, Training and Employment) is a partnership of the Prince's Trust with the Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) and local education authorities in five cities of England and Wales. It works with young offenders and those at risk of offending, aged 14–17, through the provision of two Prince's Trust programmes. These mentoring and education programmes can be used in support of Final Warnings to young offenders. The YJB have contributed approximately £340,000 to this scheme. The YJB are also contributing almost £248,000 to Plymouth Community Justice Project. This restorative justice project includes Family Group Conferencing, Victim Offender Mediation, direct and indirect reparation to the community where possible. The project will involve young people at all stages of the Criminal Justice System (Final Warning, Action Plan Orders, Supervision Order, Detention and Training Orders).

Plymouth Community Justice Project—Mentoring is aimed at Persistent Young Offenders and those on Bail Support programmes, together with other young offenders at risk of further offending or harmful behaviour. The objectives of this project include reducing offending, reducing the risk of offending, increasing the numbers on bail attending court and not offending while on bail, demonstrating an improvement in the young person's self esteem/confidence and contributing to the target Behaviour Support Plan to reduce school exclusions. The YJB are contributing £176,000 to this project.

Plymouth Community Justice Project—Education and Employment Inclusion Programme is receiving £78,000 from the YJB. This targets a wide group of young people, particularly those excluded or at risk of exclusion. The

project seeks to address young people who fall outside of the employment and benefits system. Links have been developed with other appropriate services and also with those professionals responsible for Looked After Children to ensure they access the service. CARA (Children and Adolescent Risk Assessment) is a project providing assessment and basic therapeutic interventions for those children and young people who have committed offences of a sexual nature or who are considered to be at risk of doing so with the objective of preventing further offences. This project has been awarded approximately £104,000 by the YJB.

The YJB are contributing approximately £134,000 to a Bail Support Scheme in the Plymouth area. This scheme aims to reduce re-offending by 10 per cent., to reduce remands in custody by 10 per cent. and to reduce secure remands by 10 per cent.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of the Plymouth unitary authority area to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 49,690 by the end of February 2001; and

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

### Deputy Lieutenants

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what criteria are used to ensure propriety in appointments; [158363]

(2) what powers he has to ensure that appointments of deputy lords lieutenant are not subject to political bias. [158362]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The Lieutenancies Act 1997 requires the lord lieutenant of a county or area to notify to Her Majesty the name of any person whom he proposes to appoint as a deputy lieutenant. A commission as deputy lieutenant is not granted to that person until the lord lieutenant has been informed by the Secretary of State that Her Majesty does not disapprove of the granting of the commission. Appointments are not based on political affiliation, but on place of residence and service to the community. Lords lieutenant are advised to stand aloof from politics in their counties.

Assuming the second question relates to this issue, appointments are made on merit to satisfy these criteria.

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deputy lieutenants there are in Lancashire; to what extent they are representative of all parts of Lancashire; if they are all members of one political party; how many are Lancastrians by birth; and what steps he is taking to reform the system of appointing deputy lords lieutenant. [158365]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** There are 41 lieutenants in Lancashire. They come from all parts of the county. The deputy lieutenants of a county or area are appointed by the lord lieutenant, subject to the Queen not disapproving of the granting of the commission. When considering the appointment of deputy lieutenants, the lord lieutenant looks at the geographical spread, to ensure that all parts of the county are represented. No information about the political affiliation of deputy lieutenants is held, though appointments are based not on political affiliation but on place of residence and service to the community. Information about how many of the county's deputy lieutenants are Lancastrians by birth is not held. Lords lieutenant are specifically advised that within each county or area, deputy lieutenants should be widely representative of its life in social range, gender, ethnic mix and service to the community.

### Illegal Drugs

**Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what measures he judges the success or failure of his policies on the use of illegal drugs. [158221]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** For the first time Departments and agencies nationally and locally have been brought together to work in partnership towards joint performance targets. The Home Office has been at the fore of the 10-year strategy launched in May 1998 to break the link between drugs and crime. The strategy was underpinned with an additional £217 million over three years for anti-drugs activity from the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review. This is in addition to the £1.4 billion spent annually on anti-drug work. The targets for the 10-year strategy as set out in "Tackling Drugs to Build a Better Britain" are:

halving the numbers of young people using illegal drugs, especially heroin and cocaine;

halving the levels of re-offending by drug misusing offenders to protect our communities from drug-related anti-social and criminal behaviour;

doubling the numbers of drug misusers in treatment; and

halving the availability of drugs, especially heroin and cocaine, on our streets.

The Government's anti-drugs strategy clearly recognises that law enforcement continues to be vital in tackling the drugs problem in the United Kingdom. The police service at all levels will continue to concentrate on targeting drug dealers and traffickers and bringing them to justice. There is a particular emphasis on Class A drugs, as these cause the greatest harm. The strategy encourages the police to work with other agencies to disrupt local drug markets and to force drug dealers off our streets, thereby reducing the harm to our communities and the exposure of young people to drugs. The strategy builds on the existing work by the police with the aim of reducing levels of street dealing and the availability of drugs in communities.

The Drug Treatment and Testing Order (DTTO), a community sentence aimed at serious drug misusing offenders, has been available to courts in England and Wales since 1 October 2000. Its main aim is to get offenders to stop re-offending, with the longer-term aim of getting them off drugs for good. The decision was made to roll-out the DTTO in the light of an independent evaluation of three pilot schemes which found that on average there were significant reductions in the spending on illegal drugs and number of crimes committed by

offenders subject to DTTOs. A reconviction study will be undertaken in due course to establish the longer-term impact of the order.

The Government are well on the way to ensuring that all police forces in England and Wales have Arrest Referral Schemes in place to help drug-misusing arrestees to access the treatment they need ahead of our 2002 target. While it is too early to properly measure the success of this scheme, initial feedback from October to December 2000 suggests that half of arrestees seen by arrest referral workers had not accessed treatment previously, which suggests a positive impact on crime.

In the Prison Service, in the short term we look at measures such as the random mandatory drug testing (MDT) rate or the take up of drug treatment. Both show extremely encouraging results with the random MDT rate falling from 20.8 per cent. in 1997–98 to a projected figure of 12.5 per cent. in 2000–01. We expect over 37,000 CARATs (Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare services, the new drug package of treatment services) assessments to have been completed in 2000–01. In the long term, the Prison Service is establishing independent research to measure the effectiveness of its drug strategy in reducing both drug misuse and reoffending rates.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Totnes dated 22 March regarding Ms Olga Maiboroda's application to his Department, made on 20 January; for what reasons the completion of her passport application has been delayed; and if he will explain the loss of her papers. [158282]

**Mrs. Roche:** I wrote to the hon. Member on 20 April 2001.

### Prison Governors

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer on 14 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 176W, on prison governors, when he will write to the hon. Member for Wellingborough concerning changes of governor in prison establishments in the last five years. [158745]

**Mr. Boateng:** I wrote to the hon. Member on 20 April 2001.

### Lord Birt

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to which sections of "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead", Cm 5074, Lord Birt contributed in his capacity as an adviser on crime; and if he will make a statement. [158241]

**Mr. Straw:** Lord Birt's advice spanned the full range of issues tackled in "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead".

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) to which Government policies on crime Lord Birt has contributed personally; [158350]

(2) if Lord Birt continues in his role as a Government adviser on crime; what the duration of his appointment is; and if he will make a statement; [158243]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 206W, on Lord Birt, what firm conclusions have emerged from Lord Birt's work; and how they have been reported to the House. [158271]

**Mr. Straw:** I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Taunton (Ms Ballard) on 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 594W.

### Monica Masiti

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds the Zimbabwean war veteran Monica Masiti is making her application for asylum in the United Kingdom; where she is resident in the United Kingdom; and in what capacity within the NHS she is employed. [158322]

**Mrs. Roche:** At present we can find no trace of a Monica Masiti but in any event information about an individual's immigration status is treated as confidential.

### Electoral Commission

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whom he has consulted, and what representations he has received, about the amount specified in the Electoral Commission (Limit on Public Awareness Expenditure) Order 2001. [158420]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The limit of £1.5 million specified in the Electoral Commission (Limit on Public Awareness Expenditure) Order 2001 reflects the estimate for expenditure under this heading, for 2001–02, proposed by the Commission and approved by the Speaker's Committee in accordance with paragraph 14 of Schedule 1 to the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. As required by section 13(6) of the Act, the Order was made with the consent of the Treasury. We have received no representations about the amount specified in the Order. Consideration will be given to making a further Order in due course to take effect from 1 April 2002.

**Mr. Hawkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the Electoral Commission's rules for making grants under section 13(4)(b) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. [158421]

**Mr. Beith:** I have been asked to reply on behalf of the Speaker's Committee, which is responsible for overseeing the exercise of the Electoral Commission's functions.

Section 13(4)(b), in common with the other provisions of section 13 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, does not come into force until 1 July 2001. I understand from the Chairman of the Electoral Commission that no decisions have yet been made as to how the Commission will exercise its grant-making powers under section 13. No rules have been prepared for this purpose, nor is there any requirement under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act for the Commission to make such rules.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Departmental Expenditure (Scotland)

**Mr. Swinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many *(a)* personal computers, *(b)* laptops, *(c)* servers, *(d)* printers and *(e)* fax machines his Department in Scotland owned in (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [155087]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 23 March 2001]:* The information is in the tables. The office machinery concerned is used to support work done on behalf of claimants not only in Scotland but also in the rest of the UK. Similarly, office machinery located outside Scotland is used to support work done on behalf of Scottish claimants.

*Benefits Agency*

The number of laptops in place is included in the figure provided for PCs.

| | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|
| PCs | 5,209 | 6,016 |
| Printers | 1,144 | 1,427 |
| Servers | 140 | 140 |
| Faxes | 359 | 377 |

*Child Support Agency*

The number of laptops in place is included in the figure provided for Pcs.

| | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|
| Pcs | 480 | 490 |
| Printers | 52 | 52 |
| Servers | 21 | 21 |
| Faxes | 40 | 40 |

The Child Support Agency (CSA) in Falkirk services the whole of Scotland and a substantial part of the north of England. The figures provided by the CSA are inclusive and cannot be separated.

### Disabled People

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the extent to which the benefits system discourages people with disabilities from taking up work. [158087]

**Mr. Bayley:** We know that many disabled people would like to return to work if they are given the right assistance. They may, however, be discouraged from taking up work by lack of awareness of the benefits system, by difficulty in finding suitable employment, and by the fear that they will not be able to return to benefit if their attempt at work is unsuccessful.

We are determined to help people with an illness or disability who want to work to do so. We have put a number of measures in place to remove barriers to work for disabled people. These include higher earnings disregards in the Independent Living Funds and improvements to the linking rules in incapacity benefits. We have extended the linking period from eight to 52 weeks for people who leave Incapacity Benefit to go into paid work or training. From April 2002 we are replacing the therapeutic work rules with new permitted work provisions which will allow all people in receipt of incapacity benefits to try a small amount of work without the fear of losing their benefit entitlement. We have abolished the limit on the number of hours of unpaid voluntary work that can be undertaken. We are also piloting Capability Reports as part of the Personal Capability Assessment, which we introduced in April 2000.

We are extending the New Deal for Disabled People across Great Britain. From July 2001 a national network of Job Brokers will be rolled out jointly by the Department of Social Security and the Department for Education and Employment to offer people receiving incapacity benefits the support, guidance and preparation they need to find paid work and move off benefit dependence, continuing to test and assess what works best.

Alongside the national extension, in early 2002 we will be starting New Deal for Disabled People Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilots jointly with the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Health. These pilots will test the relative effectiveness of different employment and health interventions in reducing the number of people forced to give up work through prolonged illness or disability.

The national extension and Job Retention and Rehabilitation pilots draw on lessons learned from the pilot phase of the New Deal for Disabled People which, by the end of February 2001, had helped over 6,800 people into work.

We have also introduced the Disabled Person's Tax Credit (DPTC) to help make work pay. In the Budget the Chancellor announced an increase in DPTC from June and this, combined with increases in the National Minimum Wage in October, will raise the guaranteed minimum income for a disabled person moving into work of 35 hours per week or more to £170 a week for a single person, and £257 a week for a couple with one child.

### Departmental Policies (Cannock Chase)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Cannock Chase constituency, the effects on Cannock Chase of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158065]

**Mr. Rooker:** The Department's policies and initiatives have made a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10; promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need; and combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

These goals are being pursued nationwide and our achievements are set out in our annual "Opportunity for all" reports. Our second report, "Opportunity for all—One year on: making a difference" (Cm 4865, September 2000) sets out what progress has been made in the past year, as well as highlighting what more needs to be done. Nationwide statistical information is necessarily more complete than data at a local authority level, but the

following provides a comparative guide to the effect of the Department's policies and actions in Cannock Chase since May 1997.

Measures in our five Budgets so far will lift over 1.2 million children nationally out of poverty. These include record increases to child benefit, the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit, increases in the income-related benefits, the minimum wage and tax changes.

Child Benefit is worth £15.50 a week for the eldest child and £10.35 a week for other children from this April: nationally about 7 million families receive Child Benefit, and in Cannock Chase 12,714 families benefit.

We now have the lowest unemployment rate in 25 years. The New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the over 50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. In the period since May 1997 the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance nationally has reduced from 1,562,400 to 960,600; in Cannock Chase the number has reduced from 2,100 to 1,300. Since May 1997 the number of lone parents who claim Income Support has decreased from 1,013,500 to 894,100 nationally; in Cannock Chase the number has decreased from 1,400 to 1,200.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty. So we have introduced Winter Fuel Payments to help with their heaviest fuel bill. Last winter (2000–01), the payment was £200 for households who qualified. Around 16,200 older people in Cannock Chase received a Winter Fuel Payment.

To demonstrate our commitment to combating pensioner poverty, this year we will spend £4.5 billion extra in real terms on pensioners. Some 15,800 pensioners in Cannock Chase will benefit from the substantial increases in the basic state pension this April and next; this year's increase is £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 for couples. In addition we have introduced free TV licences for the over 75s of whom we estimate there are about 5,700 in Cannock Chase. 2,300 pensioner families in Cannock Chase are receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee, which we introduced in April 1999 to help our poorest pensioners. They are now at least £15 a week, or £800 a year, better off in real terms as a result of Government measures since 1997.

To help tomorrow's pensioners, we have introduced the new stakeholder pension which is designed to help those on moderate to higher earnings who do not have access to an occupational pension; lower to moderate earners will benefit when we introduce the State Second Pension in April 2002; and from 2003, the Pension Credit will mean that pensioners will for the first time be rewarded, not penalised, for saving.

### Departmental Policies (Plymouth)

**Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency, *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency and *(c)* South-West Devon constituency, the effects on the Plymouth unitary authority area of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158024]

**Mr. Rooker:** The Department's policies and initiatives have made a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10; promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need; and, combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

These goals are being pursued nationwide and our achievements are set out in our annual "Opportunity for all" reports. Our second report, "Opportunity for all—One year on: making a difference" (CM4865, September 2000) sets out what progress has been made in the past year, as well as highlighting what more needs to be done. Nationwide statistical information is necessarily more complete than data at a local authority level, but the following provides a comparative guide to the effect of the Department's policies and actions in Plymouth, Sutton, Plymouth, Devonport, South-West Devon and the Plymouth unitary authority area since May 1997.

Measures in our five Budgets so far will lift over 1.2 million children nationally out of poverty. These include record increases to Child Benefit, the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit, increases in the income-related benefits, the minimum wage and tax changes.

Child Benefit is worth £15.50 a week for the eldest child and £10.35 a week for other children from this April: nationally about 7 million families receive Child Benefit, in Plymouth, Sutton 9,631 families benefit, in Plymouth, Devonport 13,143 families benefit, in South-West Devon 11,376 families benefit and in the Plymouth unitary authority area 29,365 families benefit.

We now have the lowest unemployment rate in 25 years. The New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the over 50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. In the period since May 1997 the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance nationally has reduced from 1,562,400 to 960,600; in Plymouth, Sutton the number has reduced from 4,600 to 1,900, in Plymouth, Devonport from 3,700 to 1,400, in South-West Devon from 1,300 to 500 and in the Plymouth unitary authority area from 9,000 to 3,700. Since May 1997 the number of lone parents who claim Income Support has decreased from 1,013,500 to 894,100 nationally; in Plymouth, Sutton the number has reduced from 2,400 to 1,800, in Plymouth, Devonport from 2,800 to 2,600, in South-West Devon from 700 to 600 and in the Plymouth unitary authority area from 5,600 to 4,800.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty. So we have introduced Winter Fuel Payments to help with their heaviest fuel bill. Last winter (2000–01), the payment was £200 for households who qualified. Around 16,100 older people in Plymouth, Sutton, 18,700 in Plymouth, Devonport and 18,600 in South-West Devon received a Winter Fuel Payment. Information on the number of Winter Fuel Payments received is not available by local authority area.

To demonstrate our commitment to combating pensioner poverty, this year we will spend £4.5 billion extra in real terms on pensioners. Some 16,000 pensioners in Plymouth, Sutton, 17,500 in Plymouth, Devonport,

17,200 in South-West Devon and 44,000 in the Plymouth unitary authority area will benefit from the substantial increases in the basic state pension this April and next; this year's increase is £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 for couples. In addition we have introduced free TV licences for the over 75s of whom we estimate there are about 7,600 in Plymouth, Sutton, 6,600 in Plymouth, Devonport, 7,100 in South-West Devon and 18,400 in the Plymouth unitary authority area. 3,200 pensioner families in Plymouth, Sutton, 2,800 in Plymouth, Devonport, 1,700 in South-West Devon and 7,000 in the Plymouth unitary authority area are receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee, which we introduced in April 1999 to help our poorest pensioners. They are now at least £15 a week, or £800 a year, better off in real terms as a result of Government measures since 1997.

To help tomorrow's pensioners, we have introduced the new stakeholder pension which is designed to help those on moderate to higher earnings who do not have access to an occupational pension; lower to moderate earners will benefit when we introduce the State Second Pension in April 2002; and from 2003, the Pension Credit will mean that pensioners will for the first time be rewarded, not penalised, for saving.

### Maxwell Pension Schemes

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the expenditure incurred by the National Insurance Fund was in paying the guaranteed minimum pensions of members of Maxwell scheme pensions who suffered as a result of the theft of pension funds. [158198]

**Mr. Rooker:** The value of State Scheme Premiums payable to restore members' rights in the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme is £126.6 million. The Department initially deferred collecting the premiums, but £23.6 million of the debt has been collected to date.

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the agreements between his Department and Maxwell pension schemes for the recovery of national insurance loans and, in each case, *(a)* what the agreed sum to be recovered is, *(b)* how much has been recovered to date and *(c)* what the deadline for repayment is. [158438]

**Mr. Rooker:** The agreement reached with all of the Maxwell pension schemes in the early 1990s was that no scheme would be required to pay any State Scheme Premiums (SSPs) until members' pensions have been secured and there were residual funds available to meet these liabilities.

Information on the agreed sum to be recovered and how much has been recovered to date is in the table.

No deadlines have been set for collecting the outstanding premiums for schemes, where they have become payable.

| *Scheme name* | *Amount paid (£)* | *Amount outstanding (£)* | *Progress* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Mirror Group Pension Scheme | 2,825,000 | 70,377,280 | The SSP bill has been capped at £66 million. A phased and gradually accelerating payment schedule has been agreed. Final payment due in 2020 |
| Maxwell Communications Works Pension Scheme | 20,000,000 | 10,467,802 | It is expected that the scheme will make a final payment for the amount outstanding in the next two months |
| Headington Pension Plan | 727, 109 | 49,236 | Remaining balance is expected to be paid by the scheme |
| Victoria Works | 0 | 313,456 | These three schemes have merged. Some SSPs may be paid |
| AGB | 0 | 10,012,704 | |
| AGB Research | — | 1,338,787 | |
| Maxwell Communications Pension Plan | 0 | 10,168,744 | The scheme is unlikely to make any SSP payment |
| Maxwell Media Pension Plan | 0 | 409,002 | There is no prospect of this scheme making any SSP payment |
| Totals | 23,552,109 | 103,137,011 | |

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much of the expenditure incurred by the National Insurance Fund in paying the guaranteed minimum pensions of members of Maxwell scheme pensions who suffered as a result of the theft of pension funds has been repaid. [158199]

**Mr. Rooker:** A total of £23.6 million of State Scheme Premiums (SSPs) has been paid to the National Insurance Fund by Maxwell schemes. Further substantial payments will be made.

### Occupational Pensions

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of occupational pension schemes which have pensioners whose pensions do not meet the guaranteed minimum pension. [158201]

**Mr. Rooker:** Of the 120,000 occupational pension schemes, around 7,000 are required to pay pensions at least to the value of the Guaranteed Minimum Pension in respect of service between April 1978 and April 1997.

### Housing Benefit

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what representation he has received from ITNet covering their administration of housing benefit; and if he will place all correspondence in the Library. [158585]

**Angela Eagle:** I am aware that ITNet have made a number of representations to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, one of which was copied to me. It is not normal practice to place such correspondence in the Library.

### Independent Living Fund

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects to receive the results of the current inquiry into the Independent Living Fund; and if he will publish the submissions made. [158587]

**Mr. Bayley:** The consultation period for the review of the Independent Living Fund closed on March 16. The results of the review will be announced in the summer. Over 1,800 submissions were received from current individual fund clients and their families and carers and over 60 from organisations including those of, and representing, disabled people. Many of the former contain personal details and full publication would not be appropriate. However an anonymised summary of these comments, together with the full text of other submissions, will be placed in the Library when the results of the review are announced.

### Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158104]

**Mr. Rooker:** For non-judicial public appointments made in the Department no age limits apply. Age is not a criterion of the job or person specification and advertisements make no reference to age. The Department follows the guidance of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments and does not discriminate on the ground of age.

For part-time judicial office-holders, which includes the Pensions Ombudsman and members of the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority, an upper age limit of 70 applies. This is now referred to in advertisements for posts. This upper age limit was introduced following the Lord Chancellor's review of the terms of service of part-time judicial office-holders.

### Widows Pensions

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the effect is on *(a)* entitlement to a widow's pension of a woman aged under 60 and *(b)* entitlement to retirement or widows pension of a woman aged over 60 based on a late husband's contributions, of a woman having paid national insurance contributions at the reduced rate for married women. [158281]

**Mr. Rooker:** None.

### Minimum Income Guarantee

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 17, if he will list the assumptions behind his statement that 9 per cent. more pensioners will be on means-tested benefits in 2003 compared with today. [158695]

**Mr. Rooker:** The primary reason for the increase in overall numbers receiving means-tested benefits between 1999 and 2003–04 is that more people become eligible to the Minimum Income Guarantee as a result of the generous increase in the rates. In May 1999 some 3 million pensioners were in receipt of means-tested benefits. By 2003–04 the number of pensioners forecast to be receiving means-tested benefits is 3.2 million.

*Notes:*

1. Pensioners are defined as where either the claimant or the partner is aged 60 or over.

2. Means-tested benefits for pensioners comprise Minimum Income Guarantee, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit and income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (the latter cases involve men between 60 and 65)

3. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and represent benefit units rather than individuals.

4. Whereas the historical figures represent a certain point in time in the year, forecast figures represent an estimated annual average caseload for the year in question.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Magistrates Courts (London)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the magistrates courts covering the Greater London area. [158577]

**Jane Kennedy:** Information on the magistrates courts in the Greater London area available for use in December 2000 is in the table.

Acton
Balham
Barking (East street)
Barnet
Belmarsh
Bexley
Bow Street
Brent
Brentford
Bromley (London road)
Camberwell Green
City of London
Croydon
Ealing
Enfield
Feltham
Greenwich
Harrow
Hendon
Highbury Corner
Highgate
Horseferry road
Inner London Children and Family Proceedings Court
Kingston-upon-Thames
Marylebone (181 Marylebone road)
Marylebone (185 Marylebone road)
Redbridge
Richmond-upon-Thames
Seymour Place
South Western

Stratford
Sutton
Thames
Tower Bridge
Uxbridge
Waltham Forest
West London
Wimbledon
Woolwich.

## Fines

**Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much money was collected by the Treasury via the Consolidated Fund in respect of all court and police imposed fines in each year since 1997 for *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* the United Kingdom. [158528]

**Jane Kennedy:** Figures for fines alone could be obtained for England, Wales and Northern Ireland only at disproportionate cost. Questions concerning fines imposed in Scotland are outside the Lord Chancellor's jurisdiction and should be referred to the Scottish Executive.

The police do not impose fines.

Figures available for total amounts of fines, fees, confiscation orders, contributions to legal aid and other amounts collected by the courts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and remitted to the Consolidated Fund are set out in the table.

£

| | *Amounts collected by courts in* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *England* | *Wales* | *Northern Ireland* |
| April 1997-March 1998 | [1]— | [1]— | 6,382,000 |
| April 1998-March 1999 | [1]— | [1]— | 6,089,000 |
| April 1999-March 2000 | 226,175,023 | 15,606,246 | 6,464,000 |
| April 2000-December 2000[2] | 157,863,584 | 11,062,441 | [2]— |
| April 2000-March 2001 | [3]— | [3]— | [4]6,235,000 |

[1] Not available
[2] Latest actual figures available for England and Wales based on three quarters worth of data
[3] Not yet available
[4] The Northern Ireland figure for the year April 2000-March 2001 is an estimate

## Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158130]

**Jane Kennedy:** For appointments as members of the Law Commission in England and Wales, no mention is made of any age limit in the advertisement, but in the information pack sent to applicants it states that the Lord Chancellor will consider applications from candidates up to the age of 65. Law Commissioners work full-time and this is the normal age of retirement.

For the Lord Chancellor's non-departmental public bodies administered by the Northern Ireland Court Service, there is no age limit for appointment to the Legal Aid Advisory Committee. For the other advisory committees, save in exceptional circumstances, a member will not be appointed over the age of 65 and the retirement ages are as follows:

Chairman and members of Advisory Committees on General Commissioners of Income Tax (GCIT) in Northern Ireland: 75 if a Lord Lieutenant, if not a Lord Lieutenant 75 if appointed prior to 1996, 70 if appointed after then.

Chairman of an Advisory Committee on JPs in Northern Ireland: 75.

For the other appointments in Northern Ireland the retirement age is 70.

For the equivalent advisory committees on JPs and on GCITs in England and Wales, appointments cannot normally extend beyond a person's 70th birthday.

Otherwise, no age limit is placed on the non-judicial appointments the Lord Chancellor makes to his non-departmental public bodies. However, where the appointment is to be held by someone who is a serving member of the judiciary, including JPs, the retirement ages for judges will be borne in mind.

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for what reason his Department advertises part-time appointments with an age limit for applicants of 62. [158061]

**Mr. Lock:** A normal upper age limit of 62 for applicants to part-time judicial posts is principally set to take account of the retirement age for judicial offices, which for part-time judicial office holders is 65. In setting the upper age limit at 62 the Lord Chancellor has taken into account the expectation that office holders should be able to complete a reasonable period of service before reaching the compulsory retirement age.

However, in exceptional circumstances the age limits set for appointment may be relaxed at the Lord Chancellor's discretion. The Lord Chancellor's discretion may be invoked, for example, where an otherwise well-qualified candidate has had a career break or started his or her career later than usual. Other factors that the Lord Chancellor would take into account, in considering whether or not to exercise his discretion, would include evidence of a previous judicial appointment, or that the applicant was particularly well qualified for the post applied for.

## Homelessness (Appeals)

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations he has received in relation to the time limit for homeless applicants to appeal to the county court under section 204 of the Housing Act 1996; what research his Department has commissioned relating to this issue; what its findings were; and if he will make a statement. [158071]

**Mr. Lock:** I have received correspondence from both Shelter and the Law Society about this. Although this research has not been specifically undertaken into this issue, it was considered in this Department's Research Report No. 9/99, "A Regional Study of Local Authority and Court Processes in Homelessness Cases", which was published in 1999 and recommended that further consideration should be given to the time limit. We are considering issues arising out of the research in the context of the Homes Bill, which is currently in another place.

### Adults with Learning Difficulties

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what specific assistance is available within the legal system to adults with learning difficulties. [158079]

**Jane Kennedy:** Court Service staff have been given training on helping people with learning difficulties. This includes explaining terminology and jargon in simpler terms; and advising the judge of any known effect the learning difficulty may have on a hearing. The Court Service also operates a free helpline providing advice on how disabled customers can be helped to use the courts.

Training seminars for judges include dedicated sessions and case studies on disability issues, of which learning disabilities form a part. A new section of the Equal Treatment Bench Book for judges, entitled "Disability", was published in January 2001. This section includes material on learning disabilities and a chapter on the provisions of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 relating to witnesses with learning disabilities.

These measures in this Act include new powers to clear the court when the witness is giving evidence. The timetable for implementation in the Crown court and the magistrates courts is under consideration.

The criminal law recognises that those with severe mental impairment require protection from sexual offences. The report of the Review of Sexual Offences makes several recommendations to Government for changes in the law to improve this protection. Responses to public consultation on this report are now being analysed.

The Police and Criminal Act 1984, and Code of Practice C made under that Act, also provide specific protections for adults with learning difficulties who may be suspected of committing a criminal offence. The interests of justice test for determining applications for criminal legal aid takes account of the inability of the defendant to understand proceedings.

The Official Solicitor provides assistance in litigation for an adult with such severe learning disabilities as to be unable to manage his or her property and affairs and there is no other person suitable or able to do so.

### Departmental Policies (Ribble Valley)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Ribble Valley constituency, the effects on Ribble Valley of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157853]

**Mr. Lock:** The Lord Chancellor's Department is responsible for the administration of the courts and for legal services. We have taken steps to improve the management and effectiveness of the services we provide and to meet customer needs, including working closely with other agencies to provide a fair, swift and effective system of justice, improve the availability of affordable and good quality legal services and to improve the lives of children and help build and sustain strong families.

In particular, the Ribble Valley constituency is covered by the East Lancashire Community Legal Service Partnership. As at 11 April 2001, the Legal Services Commission had let Community Legal Service contracts to 42 solicitors' offices and three Not for Profit (NfP) organisations. The expected expenditure value in the financial year 2001–02 of solicitor-type contracts is £1,385,000; for the NfP-type contracts it is £290,000. The contracts cover a range of categories, including family, welfare benefits, debt and immigration.

As at 18 April 2001, 25 firms in Ribble Valley had signed Criminal Defence Service contracts for 2001–02. During the year, the total value of payments for work done under these contracts is expected to be approximately £4,633,000.

### Departmental Policies (Tiverton and Honiton)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Tiverton and Honiton constituency, the effects on Tiverton and Honiton of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157815]

**Mr. Lock:** The Lord Chancellor's Department is responsible for the administration of the courts and for legal services. We have taken steps to improve the management and effectiveness of the services we provide and to meet customer needs, including working closely with other agencies to provide a fair, swift and effective system of justice, improve the availability of affordable and good quality legal services and to improve the lives of children and help build and sustain strong families.

In particular, Tiverton and Honiton constituency is covered by the Devon Community Legal Service Partnership. As at 11 April 2001 the Legal Services Commission had let Community Legal Service contracts to 17 solicitors' offices and one Not for Profit (NfP) organisation in the constituency. The expected expenditure value in the financial year 2001–02 of the Solicitor-type contracts is £315,000; for the NfP-type contracts it is £45,000. The contracts cover a range of categories, including family, housing, consumer issues and mental health.

As at 18 April 2001, 10 firms in the constituency had signed Criminal Defence Service contracts for 2001–02. During the year, the total value of payments for work done under these contracts is expected to be approximately £744,000.

### Family Visit Appeals

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* oral and *(b)* paper only family visit appeals were received by the Immigration Appellate Authority in March. [157969]

**Jane Kennedy:** In March 2001, the Immigration Appellate Authority received 136 cases for oral hearing and 144 cases for paper-only hearing.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many family visit appeals were *(a)* determined, *(b)* allowed and *(c)* dismissed by the Immigration Appellate Authority (i) at an oral hearing and (ii) on the papers only in March. [157970]

**Jane Kennedy:** The breakdown of family visit appeals determined, allowed and dismissed by the Immigration Appellate Authority in March 2001 is shown in the table.

| | *Determined* | *Allowed* | *Dismissed* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Oral cases | 65 | 39 | 26 |
| Paper cases | 138 | 35 | 103 |

### Family Graduated Fees Scheme

**Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Family Graduated Fees Scheme will be reviewed; and what form it will take. [157967]

**Jane Kennedy:** The Lord Chancellor has agreed to an overall review of the Family Graduated Fees Scheme after a fixed period of operation. It is intended that the review will take place 12 to 18 months after implementation, to allow sufficient time for data collection. It will assess the impact of the scheme and will include a review of the level of rates paid within the scheme, on a cost per case basis, to determine the actual percentage reduction in fees.

## HEALTH

### German Beef

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recent discovery of contaminated shipments of German beef in Northern Ireland. [147859]

**Ms Stuart:** I am advised on questions of food safety by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). The shipments of German beef in question were found to include a small number of beef forequarters to which pieces of spinal cord remained attached. Under the European Union-wide rules on specified risk material (SRM), the spinal cord should have been removed from the carcases at the abattoir at which the animals were slaughtered.

The presence of SRM on imported meat is clearly unacceptable. I have raised the issue personally with the Federal German Minister of Consumer Protection, Food and Agriculture on several occasions to stress the importance of effective implementation of the SRM rules and to press for remedial action at the abattoirs concerned. The FSA has also raised the matter with the European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Protection, who also expressed his concern to the German authorities. I am satisfied that the German authorities fully recognise the importance of effective SRM controls and are taking appropriate steps when breaches of these controls are discovered.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Cotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Weston-Super-Mare of 10 May 2000 and subsequent reminders regarding waiting times for neurological tests at Frenchay hospital. [150796]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* A reply to the hon. Member's letter was sent on 9 April 2001.

I apologise for the unacceptable delay in replying to the hon. Gentleman's correspondence and previous parliamentary question. I know the Department's Permanent Secretary/Chief Executive of the National Health Service has written to the hon. Member apologising for the unacceptable delay in replying to his correspondence.

### Departmental Policies (North-East Derbyshire)

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the North-East Derbyshire constituency, the effect on North-East Derbyshire of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150886]

**Yvette Cooper:** Detailed information on the impact of Department of Health policies nationally is set out in the Department of Health Annual reports. A copy of the most recent report "Department of Health—Government Expenditure Plans 2000–01" is available in the House of Commons Library and on the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/dhreport.

The impact of policies is not examined by constituency and statistics collected centrally by the Department are not collected on a constituency basis.

My hon. Friend's constituency falls within the geographical area covered by North Derbyshire health authority and Derbyshire county council social services.

The increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02 for North Derbyshire HA are set out in the table.

*Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02*

| | *Increase* |
|---|---|
| Cash (£ million) | 70.1 |
| Real Terms (£ million) | 44.2 |
| Cash (Percentage) | 37.43 |
| Real Terms (Percentage) | 21.76 |

*Note:*

Increases for 1999–2000 onwards are for unified allocations which cover hospital and community health services, prescribing and discretionary family health services. Those for previous years cover hospital and community health services only.

In addition to the SSAs referred to, Derbyshire county council received additional funding in the form of a number of special and specific grants as set out in the table.

£000

| | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 | 2000–01 | 2001–02 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Special Transitional Grant[1] | 5,063 | — | — | — |
| Partnership Grant[2] | — | 3,590 | 3,135 | 4,350 |
| Prevention Grant[2] | — | 268 | 404 | |
| Carers Grant[3] | — | 272 | 628 | 884 |
| Children's Grant[3] | — | 604 | 957 | 2,476 |
| MH Core Grant | 662 | 1,117 | 1,397 | [4]1,735 |
| Training Support Grant | 450 | 514 | 658 | [4]534 |

[1] The special transitional grant ended in 1998–99
[2] The partnership and prevention grants have been combined in 2001–02 and called the promoting independence grant
[3] The carers' and children's grants were introduced in 1999–2000
[4] Indicative allocation

North Derbyshire health authority has also received additional funding for certain policies. This includes:

£155,000 for accident and emergency modernisation between 1997–98 and 2000–01.

£71,000, £138,000, £194,000 and £125,000 for improving cancer services (breast colorectal, lung and cancer outpatients) in 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 respectively.

£4,804 million to reduce waiting lists and times between 1997–98 and 2000–01.

£641,000 to expand critical care services in 2000–01.

£810,000 to deal with winter pressures and delayed discharges in 2000–01.

£139,000 for heart disease services between 1997–98 and 2000–01.

£139,500 invested into dentistry between 1997–98 and 2000–01.

In addition, my hon. Friend's constituents will benefit from the centralisation of waiting list management processes at the Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital NHS Trust. This project, which is an NHS Beacon, provides a whole systems approach to waiting list and waiting time management.

£235,000 was provided from the New Opportunities Fund in January 2001 for the Holmewood and Heath Healthy Living Centre Project.

Derbyshire county council's personal social services standard spending assessment (SSA) for 2001–02 compared with 1996–97 is set out in the table.

| | | Percentage increase | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | £ million | Real | Cash |
| 1996–97 | 118.872 | — | — |
| 2001–02 | 118.717 | –11.6 | –0.1 |

*Note:*
The SSA has decreased because of boundary changes resulting from local Government re-organisation

### Departmental Policies (High Peak)

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the High Peak constituency of his Department's policies and actions since May 1997. [156783]

**Yvette Cooper:** Detailed information on the impact of Department of Health policies nationally is set out in the Department of Health Annual reports. A copy of the most recent report "Department of Health—Government Expenditure Plans 2000–01" is available in the Library and on the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/dhreport.

The impact of policies is not examined by constituency and statistics collected centrally by the Department are not collected on a constituency basis.

My hon. Friend's constituency falls within the geographical area covered by North Derbyshire Health Authority and Derbyshire county council social services.

Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02 for North Derbyshire Health Authority are shown in the table.

*Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02*

| | Increase |
|---|---|
| £ million (cash) | 70.1 |
| £ million (real terms) | 44.2 |
| Percentage (cash) | 37.43 |
| Percentage (real terms) | 21.76 |

*Note:*
Increases for 1999–2000 onwards are for unified allocations which cover hospital and community health services, prescribing and discretionary family health services. Those for previous years cover hospital and community health services only.

North Derbyshire Health Authority has also received additional funding for certain policies. This includes: £155,000 for accident and emergency modernisation between 1997–98 and 2000–01; £71,000, £138,000, £194,000 and £125,000 for improving cancer services (breast, colorectal, lung and cancer outpatients) in 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 respectively; £4,804 million to reduce waiting lists and times between 1997–98 and 2000–01; £641,000 to expand critical care services in 2000–01; £810,000 to deal with winter pressures and delayed discharges in 2000–01; £139,000 for heart disease services between 1997–98 and 2000–01; and £139,500 invested into dentistry between 1997–98 and 2000–01.

Derbyshire county council's personal social services standard spending assessment (SSA) for 2001–02 compared with 1996–97 is set out in the table:

| | | Percentage increase | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | £ million | Real | Cash |
| 1996–97 | 118.872 | — | — |
| 2001–02 | 118.717 | –11.6 | –0.1 |

*Note:*
The SSA has decreased because of boundary changes resulting from local government re-organisation

In addition to the SSAs referred to, Derbyshire county council received additional funding in the form of a number of special and specific grants as set out in the table.

£000

| | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 | 2000–01 | 2001–02 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Special Transitional Grant[1] | 5,063 | — | — | — |
| Partnership grant[2] | — | 3,590 | 3,135 | 4,350 |
| Prevention grant[2] | — | 268 | 404 | — |
| Carers grant[3] | — | 272 | 628 | 884 |
| Children's grant[3] | — | 604 | 957 | 2,476 |
| Mental Health core grant | 662 | 1,117 | 1,397 | [4]1,735 |
| Training Support Grant | 450 | 514 | 658 | [4]534 |

[1] The special transitional grant ended in 1998–99
[2] The partnership and prevention grants have been combined in 2001–02 and called the promoting independence grant
[3] The carers' and children's grants were introduced in 1999–2000
[4] Indicative allocation

## Departmental Policies (Eccles)

**Mr. Ian Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Eccles constituency, the effects on Eccles of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157283]

**Mr. Denham:** Detailed information on the impact of Department policies nationally is set out in the Department's annual reports. A copy of the most recent report "Department of Health—Government Expenditure Plans 2000–2001" is available in the Library and on the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/dhreport.

The impact of policies are not examined by constituency and statistics collected centrally by the Department are not collected on a constituency basis.

My hon. Friend's constituency falls within the geographical area covered by Salford and Trafford health authority and Salford and Trafford social services authorities.

Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02 for Salford and Trafford health authority are shown in the table.

*Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02*

| | *Increase* |
|---|---|
| £ million (cash) | 95.0 |
| £ million (real terms) | 60.0 |
| Percentage (cash) | 37.5 |
| Percentage (real terms) | 21.8 |

*Note:*
Increases for 1999–2000 onwards are for unified allocations which cover hospital and community health services, prescribing and discretionary family health services. Those for previous years cover hospital and community health services only.

Salford and Trafford health authority has also received additional funding for certain policies. This includes: £1.35 million for accident and emergency modernisation between 1997–98 and 2000–01; £35,000, £155,000, £259,000 and £191,000 for improving cancer services (breast, colorectal, lung and cancer outpatients) in 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 respectively; £3.1 million recurrently in 1999–2000 and £2.6 million recurrently in 2000–01 to reduce waiting lists and times; £70,000 in 1997–98, £3.7 million in 1998–99, £214,000 in 1999–2000 and £172,000 in 2000–01 non-recurrently to reduce waiting times and lists; £1.1 million to expand critical care services in 2000/01; £1 million in 1997–98, £1.7 million in 1998–99, and £2.2 million in 2000–01 to deal with winter pressures; £0.8 million in 2000–01 and £0.9 million in 2001–02 for developing intermediate care services; £165,000 was allocated for earmarked additional heart disease services in 2000–01. For 2001–02, the authority plans to spend an additional £1.8 million on heart disease services, including drugs, from the real terms funding increase highlighted above; £46,700 was made available through investing in dentistry grants. £574,000 has been allocated for additional expenditure in the personal dental service in 2000–01. A further £110,900 has been paid to dentists to reward their commitment to the general dental service.

In addition, my hon. Friend's constituents will benefit from the £114 million redevelopment of the Hope hospital.

Salford local authority's personal social services standard spending assessment for 2001–02 compared with 1996–97 is set out in the table.

| | | *Percentage increase* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *£ million* | *Real* | *Cash* |
| 1996–97 | 40.341 | — | — |
| 2001–02 | 53.402 | 17.3 | 32.4 |

In addition to the SSAs referred to, Salford local authority received additional funding in the form of a number of special and specific grants as set out in the table.

*£000*

| | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *2001–02* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Special Transitional Grant[1] | 2,183 | — | — | — |
| Partnership grant[2] | — | 1,544 | 1,303 | 1,753 |
| Prevention grant[2] | — | 113 | 167 | |
| Carers grant[3] | — | 112 | 282 | 390 |
| Children's grant[3] | — | 426 | 669 | 1,722 |
| MH Core grant | 398 | 478 | 552 | [4]652 |
| Training Support Grant | 313 | 335 | 336 | [4]333 |

[1] The special transitional grant ended in 1998–99.
[2] The partnership and prevention grants have been combined in 2001–02 and called the promoting independence grant.
[3] The carers' and children's grants were introduced in 1999–2000.
[4] Indicative allocation.

## Staff Numbers

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS vacancies there were for *(a)* doctors, *(b)* health visitors, *(c)* professions allied to medicine and *(d)* nurses and midwives; and how many such posts in each category have been vacant for three months in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [151300]

**Mr. Denham:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 26 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 426–30W.

## GP Referrals

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in enabling GPs to refer patients to the hospital or specialist of their choice. [153479]

**Mr. Denham:** Regional specialised commissioning groups comprised of representatives from health authorities, National Health Service acute trusts and regional offices and increasingly primary care trusts meet quarterly and ensure the effective commissioning of specialised services for particular locales. NHS trusts and health authorities draw up service agreements covering specific specialised services. This systematic approach facilitates equitable access to clinically effective, first class services.

Primary care trusts and health authorities are free to set up service level agreements with any secondary care provider of their choice based on discussion at local level and which they believe provides the most appropriate services.

## Long-term Sickness

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many long-term sick people returned to work during the last 12 months. [153761]

**Mr. Hutton:** Data for long-term sick absence are not collected centrally but held at a local level by employers.

## Royal Shrewsbury Hospital

**Mr. Paul Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total waiting list for the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital was on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* on the latest date for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [154703]

**Yvette Cooper:** In 1997 waiting list data were collected quarterly, rather than monthly, and therefore figures for May 1997 are not available. The table shows the in-patient waiting list figures for the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital National Health Service Trust, for March 1997 and the most recent available figures (February 2001).

| *Date* | *Patients on waiting list* |
|---|---|
| March 1997 | 4,245 |
| February 2001 | 4,294 |

*Source:*
KH07 quarterly return/monthly waiting times returns.

## Meat Imports

**Mr. Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many imported carcases containing specified risk material were identified in each of the last 12 months. [155289]

**Ms Stuart** *[holding answer sent 23 March 2001]:* The number of consignments of imported beef found to contain carcases with specified risk material still attached, and the number of carcases involved, in each of the last 12 months, is set out in the table.

| *Month* | *Number of consignments* | *Number of carcases* |
|---|---|---|
| *2000* | | |
| April | 1 | 1 |
| May | 0 | 0 |
| June | 0 | 0 |
| July | 0 | 0 |
| August | 1 | 1 |
| September | 1 | 3 |
| October | 0 | 0 |
| November | 0 | 0 |
| December | 0 | 0 |
| *2001* | | |
| January | 3 | 5 |
| February | 2 | 3 |
| March | 9 | 65 |

## Primary Care Trusts

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health in respect of each primary care trust in the Dorset health authority area how many *(a)* applied for, *(b)* were shortlisted and *(c)* were appointed for the posts of (i) Chairman and (ii) non-executive board members broken down by party of political activity indicated in each case. [155833]

**Ms Stuart** *[holding answer 27 March 2001]:* The information requested is given in the table.

| | *Total* | *Con* | *Lab* | *Lib Dem* | *Other* | *None* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Bournemouth*[1] | | | | | | |
| Appointed—Chair | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Appointed—Non-officer member | 5 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 3 |
| *North Dorset*[1] | | | | | | |
| Appointed—Chair | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Appointed—Non-officer member | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| *Poole Bay*[1] | | | | | | |
| Appointed—Non-officer member | 3 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| *Poole Central*[1] | | | | | | |
| Appointed—Chair | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Appointed—Non-officer member | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| *South and East Dorset* | | | | | | |
| Applications received—Chair | 29 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 24 |
| Applications received—Non-officer member | 37 | 3 | 3 | 7 | 0 | 24 |
| Shortlisted for interview—Chair | 5 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 | 2 |
| Shortlisted for interview—Non-officer member | 25 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 16 |
| Appointed—Chair | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Appointed—Non-officer member | 4 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| *South West Dorset* | | | | | | |
| Applications received—Chair | 15 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 11 |
| Applications received—Non-officer member | 36 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 31 |
| Shortlisted for interview—Chair | 4 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 1 |
| Shortlisted for interview—Non-officer member | 24 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 21 |
| Appointed—Chair | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Appointed—Non-officer member | 5 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 5 |

[1] Information about candidates considered for these appointments is no longer available as they were destroyed in an administrative error

### Beef Imports

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the countries from which the import and sale of beef is considered unsafe on human health grounds; and if he will make a statement. [156383]

**Ms Stuart** *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* Fresh meat, including beef, may be imported into the European Union only from specific third countries which have been approved by the EU on the basis of compliance with a range of animal health and public health criteria. Moreover, fresh meat imported from such countries must have been produced in plants specifically approved for the purpose by the EU. The list of approved countries and approved meat plants (by category) is published by the European Commission on its website. Fresh meat may not, therefore, be imported from meat plants and/or countries not appearing on the approved list.

All consignments of fresh meat imported from third countries must be accompanied by appropriate veterinary certification confirming that the meat has been produced in accordance with EU animal health and public health requirements.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if beef over 30-months-old from *(a)* Argentina, *(b)* Australia, *(c)* Botswana, *(d)* Brazil, *(e)* Mauritius, *(f)* Namibia, *(g)* New Zealand, *(h)* Paraguay, *(i)* Poland, *(j)* South Africa, *(k)* Switzerland, *(l)* Uruguay, *(m)* USA and *(n)* Zimbabwe is considered safe for importation into and sale in the United Kingdom on human health grounds; and if he will make a statement. [156380]

**Ms Stuart** *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* The hon. Member is referring to the list of countries that are exempt from the generally applicable ban on the sale for human consumption of beef from cattle aged over 30 months at slaughter. They are countries that traditionally supplied the United Kingdom and in which there was no history of BSE. There have been no confirmed cases of BSE in any of them and I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that any risk to public health from over 30-month beef from these sources would be very small.

However, the FSA is currently reviewing the list of exempt countries in the light of recently strengthened European Union BSE controls, including assessments of geographical BSE risk. A further statement will be made when I receive the FSA's advice.

### NHS Student Support Arrangements

**Ms Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review NHS student support arrangements; and if he will make a statement. [156856]

**Mr. Denham:** As a result of the review we considered a range of options for change to the existing arrangements taking full account of representations received from students, their representative bodies and others. Following the announcement in the Budget of a substantial package of additional funding for the National Health Service over the next three years, the decision was made to provide additional help for students using an across the board increase in the NHS Bursary. From September 2001 student nurses studying at diploma level will receive a £500 (10.4 per cent.) increase in their bursary, the biggest increase since introduction of bursaries in the late 1980s. This increase contrasts sharply with practice through much of the 1990s when the bursary was frozen, before the present Government introduced a policy of annual uplifts in 1998.

My ministerial colleagues and I continue to take a close interest in the effective operation of student support arrangements, including the NHS Bursary scheme.

### Pharmaceutical Pricing

**Mr. Peter Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the prevalence in the pharmaceutical sector and the cost to the NHS of the practices criticised by the OFT following its investigation of Napp Pharmaceutical's pricing policies; and if he will make a statement; [157089]

(2) what steps he proposes to take to reduce the costs to the NHS which arise from pricing practices of drug companies which have been condemned by the Office of Fair Trading following its investigation of the conduct of Napp Pharmaceuticals Ltd. [157400]

**Ms Stuart:** The investigation carried out by the Office of Fair Trading relates to one product from one company, which was the subject of a specific complaint. Ministers are examining closely the implications of the decision of the Director-General of Fair Trading and of the direction which he may give to correct the practices which he has criticised, taking into account any appeal which the company may make.

The Department keeps the level of competition in the pharmaceutical sector under review, and has mechanisms in place to prevent profiteering. It secures value for money through the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme (PPRS) which controls the profits which companies make from the supply of branded medicines to the National Health Service. Under this scheme a high price for one product may be balanced against a low one for another, provided that the company's overall profits remain within the limits permitted by the scheme.

### European Food Authority

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when proposals to establish a European Food Authority were published and by whom; what steps Her Majesty's Government have taken to publicise this decision; when it agreed to it; what consultations it has had; and on what Treaty base the Authority is expected to be established. [157326]

**Ms Stuart:** The European Commission introduced a proposal, dated 8 November 2000, for a "Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing a European Food Authority (EFA), and laying down procedures in matters of food safety (COM (2000) 716 final)."

In December 2000 the Food Standards Agency began a formal consultation on the EC's proposal. This consultation is open and ongoing and details may be found on the FSA's website www.foodstandards.gov.uk. The FSA has held meetings with stakeholders and sends out letters reporting on negotiations in Brussels.

The establishment of the EFA is not yet agreed. Negotiations on the EC's proposal are continuing in Brussels.

As drafted, the EC's proposal gives the Treaty base for the establishment of the EFA as Articles 37 (Common Agricultural Policy), 95 (internal market), 133 (common commercial policy) and 152(4)(b) (public health).

### Fuel Poverty

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has carried out into the links between fuel poverty and excess winter deaths; and if he will make a statement on links between the level of winter deaths and the number of households in fuel poverty since 1997. [157453]

**Yvette Cooper:** It is estimated there were some 5.5 million fuel poor households in the United Kingdom in 1996. Further analysis suggests this may have fallen to around 4.5 million by 1999. In 2000 every pensioner household received £200 winter fuel allowance providing further help to cut fuel poverty. In the UK from December to March, there are on average between 20,000–50,000 excess deaths compared to the rest of the year. We are committed to ending the blight of fuel poverty for vulnerable households by 2010 and launched our fuel poverty strategy as a consultation document on 23 February 2001.

Links have been established between cold, damp housing and increased ill-health. However, the relative contributions of cold homes, outdoor temperatures and other factors to excess winter deaths are complex and not fully understood.

The Department has commissioned a systematic review of the effect of cold on otherwise healthy individuals, particularly older people. It will address: 1) the effect of cold exposure on mortality and morbidity; and 2) the effect of cold exposure on physiological changes and risk factors associated with coronary heart disease.

Additionally, the Department, together with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, has funded a pilot project to look at the impact of cold homes on health. This will help determine what further research may be considered.

The Department of Health has already initiated a number of measures to help combat excess winter deaths. The "Keep Warm, Keep Well" campaign, which runs from October to March each year, gives advice to the public and health professionals on staying warm in winter. Additionally, this winter the 'flu vaccine on the National Health Service was extended to include everyone aged 65 and over. The vaccine can prevent complications from influenza. There is also a vaccine against pneumococcal disease which can be given at the same time as the 'flu vaccine to people in high-risk groups which can help prevent pneumococcal pneumonia among other conditions.

### General Dental Council

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the extent to which the composition of the General Dental Council reflects the interests of patients. [157448]

**Mr. Hutton:** We have welcomed proposals from the General Dental Council for increasing its lay membership. Amendments to the Dentists Act 1984 would be required which we plan shortly to submit for scrutiny and debate by Parliament under section 60 of the Health Act 1999.

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the General Dental Council's decision not to allow dental patients access to professionals complementary to dentistry, with particular reference to clinical dental technicians. [157447]

**Mr. Hutton:** Currently only two groups of professionals complementary to dentistry are registered by the General Dental Council (GDC): Dental therapists and dental hygienists. The GDC has agreed that additional groups should be registered including clinic dental technicians whom the GDC proposes should be allowed to work remote from the dental practice, but to the prescription of a dentist. Amendments to the Dentists Act 1984 would be required which we plan, in due course, to submit for scrutiny and debate by Parliament under section 60 of the Health Act 1999.

### Food Supplements

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what impact the proposed EU directive on food supplements will have on the availability of *(a)* herbal and vitamin remedies and *(b)* information about the properties of such remedies; and if he will make a statement. [157774]

**Ms Stuart:** The draft directive would not change the status of products which are regulated by medicines legislation. Its purpose is to establish a framework for regulation of supplements, including those containing herbal substances and vitamins, sold under food law.

Our view is that, in the interests of consumer choice, the market should be open to all products which are safe and properly labelled. The Food Standards Agency, which is representing us in discussions on the proposal, is pressing this case in negotiations.

### NHS Pension Scheme

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to compensate present and former part-time employees of the NHS who were excluded from the NHS Pension Scheme; and on what date part-time employees were accepted into the scheme. [157955]

**Mr. Denham:** There are no proposals to make compensation payments. Part-time National Health Service employees who become entitled to backdated membership of the NHS pension scheme will be expected to pay their share of the arrears of scheme contributions.

Between 1 April 1973 and 31 March 1991, part-time employees, working at least half the standard number of whole-time hours for their grade, were entitled to scheme membership. From 1 April 1991, all part-time employees have been able to join the scheme, irrespective of the number of hours worked.

### GP Services

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued on the ability of GPs to charge residential care and nursing homes for GP services; and if he has that guidance under review. [157104]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* General practitioner services are, and must be, free for patients, including residents of nursing homes. All patients in nursing homes should be registered with a GP practice.

GPs sometimes contract with nursing homes to provide additional services, for example, training for staff. That is different from individual, direct patient services, for which GPs should not be charging their registered patients.

We will investigate any allegations of abuse within the system.

### Child Protection

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into any association there is between drug use and misuse by those with the care of children and the placing of children on (i) risk of neglect and (ii) child protection registers. [157836]

**Mr. Hutton:** "Children's needs—parenting capacity", published by the Department in 1999, draws on a wide range of research, and examines how factors such as drug misuse may impact on children and may affect parental capacity to respond to children's needs.

In addition, a number of studies in the programme of research on the Children Act 1989 have explored the link between drug misuse by those caring for children and the risk of abuse and neglect, in particular "Family support in cases of emotional maltreatment and neglect" and "Making care orders work: A study of their implementation". These two studies will be summarised in a forthcoming Department overview of contemporary research, entitled "The Children Act now: Messages from research". They are being used to inform our key initiatives to improve children's services, in particular quality protects.

We have also recently commissioned research to explore the reasons why increased numbers of children are being looked after by local authorities. This study will provide an opportunity to explore in greater depth the link between drug misuse by those with the care of children and children experiencing neglect and entering local authority care. It is about to start and plans to report by the end of the year.

### District Nurses

**Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will review the mileage allowances paid to district nurses; and if he will make a statement. [157822]

**Mr. Denham:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate) on 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 396W.

### Hearing Aids

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) 5 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 115W, on digital hearing aids, when the proposed modernising hearing aid services project will commence. [157950]

**Mr. Hutton:** The timing to roll-out the "modernising NHS hearing aid services" project and announcements on funding are being kept under review until the results of the Institute of Hearing Research evaluation of the project can start to be taken into account. The Department anticipates £25 million will be available for National Health Service hearing aid services in 2003–04.

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to ensure that audiology departments are implementing the NICE guidance on hearing aids. [157949]

**Mr. Hutton:** All National Health Service bodies and clinicians are expected to give due weight to guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) and to the evidence on which it is based. Initial monitoring of the implementation of NICE's guidance will take place through the established Quarterly Monitoring Review, supplemented through other data sources available to the Department. We will be looking to the Commission for Health Improvement to provide some authoritative information in due course.

### NHS Administration

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many managers and administrators were employed by the NHS in each of the last five years; at what cost; what the total cost to the NHS was of management and administration in each of those years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [157322]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The available information is contained in the tables.

*Numbers of managers and administrators: National Health Service Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Managers within the administration and estates staff group in England as at 30 September each year*

*Headcount*

| | *Senior Manager* | *Manager* |
|---|---|---|
| 1996 | 7,310 | 13,960 |
| 1997 | 7,530 | 14,640 |
| 1998 | 7,990 | 14,710 |
| 1999 | 8,880 | 15,410 |
| 2000 | 8,890 | 16,370 |

The apparent increase is partly accounted for by the fact that managers in primary care groups and primary care teams were not previously recorded in the figures when working for general practitioner fundholders. Even so, nursing numbers have increased by far more than these figures.

*Costs*

Paybill costs of staff in senior management, management and administrative and clerical grades are not a reliable indicator of overall administration costs because for example, they do not include the non-staff costs of management, such as health authority accommodation.

Expenditure against the published definition of NHS management costs is the most reliable indicator of the cost of management and administration in the NHS. The

definition of management costs includes the staff costs of managers in health authorities, Primary Care Groups and NHS Trusts, as well as non-staff costs of HAs and PCGs.

*Management costs at 1999–2000 prices*

| | £ million |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 1,981 |
| 1997–98 | 1,857 |
| 1997–98[1] | 1,935 |
| 1998–99 | 1,874 |
| 1999–2000 | 1,799 |

[1] Rebased

*Note:*
The definition of management costs was revised for 1998–99 to capture some management activity previously excluded, mainly related to NHS Trusts purchasing private sector support services. To provide a consistent time series, the 1997–98 figure was rebased on the new definition.

*Source:*
Health authority and NHS trust annual accounts

### Shared Clinical Services

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if shared clinical services can continue between two NHS trusts; [157455]

(2) if he will take steps to ensure the NHS trusts with separate identities but integrated services remain as separate trusts. [157456]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The overarching requirement in providing services is to ensure that they are configured to meet the needs of the local population. The Chorley and South Ribble National Health Service Trust and Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust have an excellent record of providing a range of acute services to their locality. However, it is recognised that there is a need for more specialised services to be provided to a larger population through managed clinical networks. Organisational arrangements must reflect the most effective way of providing access to the full range of acute services. Sharing and integrating the services of the two trusts should be encouraged and built upon.

### Chemically Dependent Patients

**Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors have been prevented from prescribing to long-term chemically dependent patients by the Interim Orders Committee of the General Medical Council; and how many are awaiting hearings. [157954]

**Mr. Denham:** There are currently 14 doctors with conditions imposed on their registration by the General Medical Council (GMC) which relate to the drugs which they can prescribe, or which prevent them from treating chemically dependent patients. On 10 April 2001 there were two cases awaiting hearing by the GMC's Interim Orders Committee which involved issues relating to prescribing.

**Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what alternative procedures he has put in place to provide treatment for long-term chemically dependent patients whose doctor is prevented from prescribing to them by the Interim Orders Committee of the General Medical Council. [157951]

**Mr. Denham:** It is the responsibility of health authorities to assess the health care needs of their population, to draw up strategies and commissioning plans in collaboration with local people and other organisations, and to secure a range of health services to meet those needs, with contingency planning and alternative operational procedures where necessary.

### Drug Patients

**Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ensure that community drug teams and drug dependency units are capable of coping with a substantial and sudden influx of patients. [157953]

**Ms Stuart:** We have set up a new national treatment agency to set standards for the provision of drug treatment services in England. The performance of local agencies will be monitored against these standards, and we expect that contingency planning for variations in demand would be one measurement of their efficiency.

### Cancelled Operations

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled in each of the last five years *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in North Durham Trust, Dryburn. [157825]

**Mr. Hutton:** The Department collects information on the number of operations cancelled at the last minute for non-medical reasons, and breaches of the standard to readmit patients within one month following such cancellations. This information is collected on a quarterly basis at health authority level only and the results are routinely placed in the Library. The latest figures cover the five quarters up to Quarter three (October to December 2000) of the 2000–01 financial year.

The specific information requested relating to Dryburn Hospital, Durham should be available from the Chairman of the North Durham National Health Service Trust.

### Durham Health Authority

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the per capita expenditure by Durham health authority was in each of the last six years. [157826]

**Mr. Hutton:** The total expenditure by weighted head of population for County Durham and Darlington health authority for 1996–97 to 1999–2000 can be found in the table.

£

| *Year* | *Expenditure* |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 591.82 |
| 1997–98 | 564.10 |
| 1998–99 | 602.19 |
| 1999–2000 | 688.56 |

*Note:*
The expenditure per weighted head figures in the table do not reflect real changes in the resources available for spend on healthcare locally over the period or provide robust comparisons between health authorities.

*Sources:*
The accounts of health authorities for 1996–97, 1997–98 and 1998–99.
The summarisation schedules of health authorities 1999–2000.
Weighted population estimates for 1996–97, 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000.

## GP Incomes

**Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average earnings of a general practitioner in England and Wales was in *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1996 and *(c)* 2000. [157840]

**Mr. Denham:** The table shows General Practitioners' (unrestricted principals) intended average net income for the provision of general medical services. Figures are for Great Britain.

*Intended average net income*

£

| Year | Average GP (full and part-time) | Average GP (full-time) |
|---|---|---|
| 1992–93 | 40,010 | [1]— |
| 1996–97 | [2]44,483 | [2]46,808 |
| 2000–01 | 54,220 | 57,940 |

[1] Not available.
[2] The 1996–97 pay award was staged. The figure shown is the weighted average for the year.

GPs also received additional earnings from higher target payments, as follows: 1992–93 £2,338 (gross), 1996–97 £3,330 (gross), and 2000–01 £3,975 (gross).

## Consultants

**Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many hours per week on average consultants who work both in the NHS and the private health sector spend on *(a)* NHS work and *(b)* private work; [157819]

(2) what percentage of consultants in 2000 worked in both the NHS and the private health sector. [157841]

**Ms Stuart:** Information is not held centrally on the number of hours worked by consultants in either the National Health Service or for the private sector. Information on the types of contract held by consultants is available and is set out in the table.

*Hospital, public health medicine (PHM) and community health service (CHS) medical and dental consultants by nature of contract England at 30 September 2000*

*Numbers and percentage*

| | Consultant | Percentage of all consultant contract |
|---|---|---|
| All contracts | 24,306 | 100 |
| Whole time | 13,877 | 57 |
| Maximum part-time | 5,750 | 24 |
| Part-time | 3,005 | 12 |
| Honorary | 1,674 | 7 |

*Source:*
Department of Health 2000 medical and dental workforce census

*Definition:*
Maximum part time contract—means that the consultant foregoes one eleventh of whole-time salary, in return for the removal of restrictions on private practice earnings. However, there is still a clear contractual obligation to devote "substantially the whole" of their professional time to their NHS duties.

## Residential Care

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average weekly spending money given to people living in residential care is. [158086]

**Mr. Hutton:** When assessing a person's ability to pay for residential or nursing home accommodation, councils are required to ensure that they retain an amount for personal expenses. The current amount allowed is £16.05 per week.

## Learning Difficulties

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if doctors are required to consult parents and carers before making decisions affecting people with a severe learning disability. [158080]

**Mr. Hutton:** The Department has recently issued guidance to health professionals on the legal and good practice requirements for seeking valid consent from patients for proposed examinations or treatment—"Reference Guide to Consent for Examination or Treatment". Where an adult patient is mentally able to give or withhold consent to proposed treatment, consent must always be sought directly from the patient himself or herself. It is good practice to involve those close to the patient, such as family, carers and friends, in the decision-making process if the patient wishes for such involvement.

In some cases, patients may be so severely disabled that they are not able to give, or withhold, consent for a proposed examination or treatment. In such cases, health professionals may legally provide the treatment if it is in the patient's best interests to receive it. Although the health professional concerned is ultimately responsible for the decision as to whether or not treatment is in the patient's best interests, those close to the patient (parents, carers and others) should be fully involved in any discussions, unless the patient has made clear that particular individuals should not be involved in their care.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of women with learning difficulties over the age of 50 are eligible to receive breast screening services; [158093]

(2) what percentage of women with learning difficulties receive cervical cancer screening. [158092]

**Mr. Hutton:** The information requested is not held centrally. We recognise that in the past women with a learning disability may not have had the information and support they needed to decide whether or not to attend for breast or cervical screening. This is why the Department published good practice guidance for women and their families, supporters and health care professionals. The guidance was developed in consultation with women with a learning disability and was published in November 2000.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many day centres for people with learning difficulties have been closed in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [158084]

**Mr. Hutton:** Information on closures of day centres is not collected centrally. Set out in the table are the numbers of day centres for people with learning disabilities during a survey week in September for 1995 to 1998 for England. Collection of data on numbers of day care centres ceased in 1998.

| Year | Day centres for people with learning disabilities |
|---|---|
| 1995 | 1,030 |
| 1996 | 1,020 |
| 1997 | 1,270 |
| 1998 | [1]2,600 |

[1] For 1998 the figures also include the number of residential care homes which provide day care to non-residents.
*Source:*
DH form DC3

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been undertaken on the assistance that people with severe learning difficulties and their carers receive in order to take short-term breaks. [158090]

**Mr. Hutton:** The Department is not currently funding any research in this area.

The White Paper "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability in the 21st Century", published on 20 March, confirmed that the Department will be funding a £2 million research initiative, "People With Learning Disabilities: Services, Inclusion, and Partnerships" starting later this year and lasting for four years. Research proposals are currently being considered; support for carers is a possible area of research.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with learning disabilities are resident in long-stay hospitals. [158094]

**Mr. Hutton:** Approximately 1,500 learning disabled people remain in long-stay places. Our recent White Paper "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" includes a commitment to enable all people currently living in long-stay hospitals to move into more appropriate accommodation in the community by April 2004.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with severe learning difficulties live with their parents. [158088]

**Mr. Hutton:** Information about the precise number of people with severe learning disabilities who live with their families is not held centrally. It is estimated that some 60 per cent. of all adults with learning disabilities live with their parents.

During 2001–02, the Department will commission a national survey of people with learning disabilities in contact with social services to improve our knowledge and provide a stronger baseline against which to evaluate the impact of the recently published White Paper, "Valuing people, a new strategy for learning disability for the 21st century".

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people with learning difficulties do not have a day centre placement for *(a)* all and *(b)* part of the week. [158083]

**Mr. Hutton:** On 31 March 2000 an estimated 49,600 adults with learning disabilities were in receipt of day care services. Information is not available about how many people do not receive services.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent estimate he has made of the proportion of people with learning difficulties that have been sexually abused. [158078]

**Mr. Hutton:** Information about the proportion of people with learning disabilities who have been sexually abused is not held centrally. The White Paper, "Valuing People, A new Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" says that local councils will need to ensure that learning disability services are represented on the local adult protection management committees, and that information about incidents of abuse of people with learning disabilities is gathered and recorded. This will improve our knowledge about the incidence of abuse.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many parents over the age of 60 years care for children with severe learning difficulties. [158089]

**Mr. Hutton:** Information about the precise number of parents over the age of 60 who care for their sons and daughters with severe learning disabilities is not held centrally. It is estimated that a third of people with learning disabilities living in the family home are living with an older carer (aged 70 or over).

In the recently published White Paper, "Valuing people, a new strategy for learning disability for the 21 century" we announced our intention to introduce a performance indicator, percentage of carers aged 70 or over for whom a person centred plan, which has been agreed. This will be monitored as part of the arrangements for monitoring the White Paper.

## Departmental Policies (Camden)

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the effects, with statistical information on *(a)* Hampstead and Highgate and *(b)* the London Borough of Camden of his Department's policies since 2 May 1997. [158013]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington North (Ms Buck) on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 335W.

## Mid Essex Hospital Trust

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish for the Mid Essex Hospital Trust area the most recent figures for *(a)* those waiting for inpatient treatment and *(b)* those waiting 13 or more than 13 weeks to see a consultant. [158192]

**Mr. Denham:** The information requested is given in the tables.

*Patients waiting for hospital treatment at Mid Essex Hospital Services National Health Service trust in February 2001*

| Month | Total number of patients waiting |
|---|---|
| February 2001 | 9,288 |

*Source:*
Monthly waiting list returns

*Patients waiting 13 weeks or more for an out-patient appointment at Mid Essex Hospital Services National Health Service trust in Quarter 3 2000/01(December 2000)*

| Month | Number of patients waiting over 13 weeks |
|---|---|
| December 2000 (Q3 2000–01) | 2,349 |

*Source:*
QM08 quarterly return

### Independent Living Fund

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the advice given by his Department on the method of calculation of local authority payments to those also assisted by the Independent Living Fund. [158586]

**Mr. Hutton:** Local councils may make direct payments to people whom they have assessed as needing support, whether or not the individual also receives assistance from the independent living extension fund or the 1993 independent living fund. Copies of the policy and practice guidance on direct payments have been widely distributed and are also available on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk. In determining the extent of a user contribution to the cost of social services support, councils should treat alike those receiving direct payments and those receiving council-commissioned services. The Department has recently consulted on draft guidance for local councils, "Fairer charges for home care and other non-residential social services", which includes advice on any assessment of ability to pay charges for people who are also assisted by the independent living fund.

### Waiting Lists

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting for treatment in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* March 2001; and what the percentage change was. [158519]

**Mr. Denham:** On 31 March 1997 the total number of patients awaiting admission to hospital in England was 1,158,004. This is the waiting list we inherited. At the end of February 2001, the latest month for which information is presently available, there were 1,032,755 patients awaiting admission to hospital. This is a reduction of 10.8 per cent. and is over 25,000 more than our election promise to reduce waiting lists by 100,000.

### Remicade

**Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the availability of Remicade is on the NHS. [158466]

**Mr. Denham:** Remicade is currently being appraised by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). Until NICE has completed its appraisal, National Health Service bodies have been advised to use their existing arrangements to determine local policies on the publicly available evidence.

### Nutriprem 2

**Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received from *(a)* right hon. and hon. Members, *(b)* medical practitioners and *(c)* others about the prescription status of Nutriprem 2. [158191]

**Ms Stuart:** We have had fewer than 15 representations, including nine from right hon. and hon. Members.

### Endometriosis

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about NHS services available to women suffering from endometriosis. [158188]

**Mr. Denham:** Endometriosis is the second most common gynaecological condition in this country, affecting about 2 million women. The prevalence of endometriosis is such that managing and treating it should be part of the routine work of every gynaecology department. Treatments range from managing the symptoms to surgery. The right treatment will be that which suits a particular woman's condition and needs. This will be achieved only by a woman discussing her needs fully with her doctor.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has produced clinical guidelines on "The Investigation and Management of Endometriosis". These bring together the latest evidence-based knowledge and best practice on the diagnosis and treatment of endometriosis, and examine options for treatment in the light of the presenting symptoms. The guidelines have been distributed to all of the Royal College's Fellows and members working in the health service.

### MRSA

**Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what MRSA infections occurring in NHS hospitals are reportable to his Department. [158291]

**Mr. Denham:** Until April this year reports of incidents of MRSA came only through specimens submitted voluntarily by trusts for specialist microbiological tests. From April 2001 all acute trusts will be required to collect data on MRSA blood stream infections and the information will be published from April 2002. Work is under way to extend the national surveillance system to cover other areas such as surgical site infections focusing initially on orthopaedic surgery.

**Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS hospitals carry out MRSA screening and which do not. [158288]

**Mr. Denham:** The information requested is not available centrally. Policy on appropriate screening arrangements will vary from hospital to hospital depending on local circumstances, the nature of any infection, risk and other factors. These decisions are best determined locally.

**Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many legal cases arising from infections by MRSA while in hospital have been brought against the NHS in each of the past five years; [158286]

(2) how much compensation has been paid by the NHS to patients who have been infected by MRSA in each of the past five years. [158287]

**Mr. Denham:** The National Health Service litigation authority received reports of 70 claims between April 1995 and July 2000 where MRSA is mentioned in the incident details. The outcome of those claims is not known and so the cost of claims to the NHS cannot be quantified. Information on compensation paid specifically as a result of infection with MRSA is not held centrally.

**Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on current research into developing new drugs that will combat MRSA and on the extent of Government funding in such research. [158290]

**Mr. Denham:** Considerable funding is provided for research to develop new drugs by the pharmaceutical industry, including work contracted to the Public Health Laboratory Service. The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC). In order to encourage research in the broad area of antimicrobial resistance, the MRC has issued a highlight notice welcoming proposals. My Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the National Health Service and will shortly publish its own call for research in the antimicrobial resistance field for which there is central funding of £2.5 million.

**Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish a list of antibiotics that are effective against MRSA. [158289]

**Mr. Denham:** Different strains of MRSA vary in the pattern of resistance shown to other anti-staphylococcal antibiotics. Therefore, there is no definitive list of antibiotics that are effective against MRSA.

Most MRSA that occur in the United Kingdom are still sensitive to, and may be treated with, vancomycin, teicoplanin, linezolid, or quinupristin/dalfopristin. They may also be sensitive to rifampicin, fluoroquinolone antibiotics (such as ciprofloxacin), chloramphenicol and to some other antibiotics. Decisions on the antibiotic(s) appropriate for the treatment of any one patient must, therefore, depend on microbiological laboratory testing of the individual bacterium.

### Formula Milk

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the provision on prescription to low income mothers of special nutritional formulae for pre-term infants once they are discharged from hospital. [158318]

**Ms Stuart:** Our current policy is that infant formulae are not prescribable except for children with carbohydrate intolerances. If a product is prescribable, it is prescribable regardless of the income of the child's parents or carers.

### Cancer

**Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the standardised mortality ratio for all cancers in *(a)* England, *(b)* the north west, *(c)* north Cheshire and *(d)* Halton was in the last year for which figures are available. [157820]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Derek Twigg, dated 23 April 2001:*

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what the standardised mortality ratio for all cancers in (a) England, (b) the North West, (c) North Cheshire and (d) Halton was in the last year for which figures are available (157820).

These figures are given in the table below. They are presented for the combined years of 1997 to 1999, using England and Wales death rates as the standard of comparison.

*Standardised Mortality Ratios (SMRs) for deaths from cancer ICD9 140–208[1] for 1997–99[2]*

| *Area of usual residence* | *SMR* |
|---|---|
| England and Wales | 100 |
| England | 100 |
| North West Health Regional Office | 109 |
| North Cheshire Health Authority | 115 |
| Halton Unitary Authority | 132 |

[1] International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision, codes 140–208—all malignant neoplasms

[2] Pooled deaths registered in years 1997–99

## TREASURY

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what consideration he has given to *(a)* postponing the census for the duration of the foot and mouth outbreak and *(b)* having census forms delivered by post in rural areas at risk from foot and mouth disease; [158416]

(2) what instructions are being given to census personnel on precautions to minimise the risk of the spread of foot and mouth disease by the distribution of census forms in rural areas. [158417]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Michael Fabricant, dated 23 April 2001:*

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent questions on what consideration has been given to postponement of the Census and delivery of Census forms by post during the foot and mouth outbreak, as well as the instructions being given to Census personnel to minimise the risk of spread of the disease (158416,158417).

The impact of delaying the Census because of current outbreak of foot and mouth was assessed against the public concerns expressed about conducting the census in affected areas. I have been very conscious of the distress and difficulty the disease is causing, but I am certain that we shall do nothing in conducting the Census that might contribute to its spread.

People in rural England and Wales have responded particularly well in past Censuses, and this makes it possible to introduce a much more flexible approach to counting people in these parts of the country, in response to the outbreak.

On 2 April I released a statement outlining our plans for conducting the Census in affected areas. I attach a copy of the statement.

This explains that the Census-takers working in the countryside have been instructed to respect all foot and mouth restrictions, and the wishes of the farming community. New arrangements are in place so that Census forms can be delivered to farms and households by mail, or, where practical, to an agreed point such as a farm boundary. Completed forms will be returned by mail.

Specific guidance for enumerators has been drafted in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and has been endorsed by the National Assembly for Wales, as well

as by the National Farmers Union. Details of the procedures have been delivered to area and district managers, and are incorporated in the training of census-takers.

*Census and foot and mouth statement—Monday 2 April 2001*

National Statistician Len Cook today expressed confidence that the Census in England and Wales scheduled for 29 April can be conducted safely and efficiently despite the restrictions imposed to combat foot and mouth disease.

Census-takers working in the countryside have been instructed to respect all foot and mouth restrictions, and the wishes of the farming community. New arrangements are being put in place so that Census forms can be delivered to farms and households by mail, or, where practical, to an agreed point such as a farm boundary. Completed forms will be returned by mail.

The special instructions, drafted in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, have been endorsed by the National Assembly for Wales, as well as by the National Farmers Union. Details of the procedures have been delivered to area and district managers, and are incorporated in the training of census-takers.

Mr. Cook said today "Senior Census officials last week visited teams in the regions worst affected by foot and mouth. They confirmed the practicality of the special arrangements for delivering Census forms in rural areas where there are restrictions.

I am certain that, with these arrangements in place, the Census can be carried through without danger of contributing to the spread of the disease.

I am very conscious of the distress and difficulty foot and mouth disease is causing and we shall do nothing that might contribute to its spread".

Census Director Graham Jones, who on Tuesday visited the North of England and met field staff from Cumbria, Northumberland and Yorkshire, today said: "The people at the sharp end say the revised procedures are entirely practical, and can be applied sensibly and flexibly by census-takers in the countryside".

Alex Clark, Deputy Census Director, had meetings with field staff in Wales and Devon, and reported a similar positive reaction. In many places, area managers are liaising with local authorities to ensure compliance with local restrictions.

Forms are scheduled for delivery to households between 9 and 20 April. Delivery in areas where there are restrictions may be delayed by a few days, but forms will reach households in time for the Census on 29 April.

If necessary the deadline for returning forms will be extended.

"The information made available by the Census is essential to the planning activities of a whole range of private and public sector bodies", Mr. Cook said, "It will help determine resource allocation decisions on billions of pounds of public expenditure, which will be vitally important for the rural community and the rural economy. In these extremely difficult circumstances we are delighted by the co-operation we are receiving".

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if compensation payments to farmers in respect of foot and mouth disease will be subject to income tax. [157374]

**Mr. Andrew Smith** *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir. M. Spicer) on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 301W.

## Climate Change Levy

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* private sector and *(b)* public sector enterprises are eligible to pay the climate change levy in the Salisbury constituency. [157788]

**Mr. Timms** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* We do not hold the information requested. The climate change levy is payable on all business use of energy, except energy covered by the domestic exemption, non-business use by charities, and by exemptions such as those applying to renewable energy and energy supplied from a good quality combined heat and power plant.

## Outsourcing (VAT Ruling)

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications of the recent VAT tribunal ruling in respect of the outsourcing of investment management by Prudential Assurance on the outsourcing of vehicle repairs by insurance companies; and if he will make a statement. [157900]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Tribunal's decision that the management of an authorised unit trust scheme is exempt, whoever provides the services has no implications for suppliers of other services to insurance companies.

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of VAT refunds to be paid to the financial services industry following the VAT tribunal ruling against Customs and Excise in respect of the outsourcing of investment management; and if he will make a statement. [157899]

**Dawn Primarolo:** No refunds are being paid as Customs have appealed the VAT Tribunal's decision to the Court of Session.

## National Audit Office

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what plans he has to extend the powers of the National Audit Office to examine accounts and records of contractors to central Government; [158299]

(2) if he will seek to extend the powers of the National Audit Office to audit all organisations which are completely owned by the Government, with special reference to *(a)* research and development organisations, *(b)* art galleries, *(c)* museums, *(d)* Remploy, *(e)* the Student Council Trust and *(f)* the Student Loan Company; [158300]

(3) if he will seek to extend the powers of the National Audit Office to audit all non-departmental public bodies, with special reference to *(a)* the Housing Corporation, *(b)* the Environment Agency and *(c)* regional development agencies. [158301]

**Mr. Timms:** These matters are being considered in the context of the Government's forthcoming response to Lord Sharman's recent Review of Audit and Accountability for Central Government, "Holding to Account".

## Foundation Schools

**Mr. Pickles:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the effects of corporation tax on the income from *(a)* school letting and *(b)* interest on school bank accounts on foundation schools. [157957]

**Dawn Primarolo:** No such estimate has been made. But income received by schools will usually be exempt from corporation tax.

## Income Tax

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the *(a)* cost,

*(b)* absolute gains and *(c)* relative gains by income decile of increasing the amount of income subject to basic rate tax by £1,000; and if he will make a statement. [158073]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The full-year cost of increasing the income tax basic rate limit by £1,000 in 2001–02 is estimated to be £½ billion. All gainers would be in the top income decile. They would gain £175 on average, which represents a 1 per cent. reduction in their tax liability.

These estimates are based on the survey of personal incomes and consistent with the March 2001 Budget.

### Amateur Sports Clubs

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to publish details of the proposed scheme for the provision of relief against business rates for amateur sports clubs; when he intends to commence the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [158120]

**Dawn Primarolo:** In the light of representations received following the introduction of the package of enhanced tax reliefs for charities in Budget 2000, Budget 2001 announced that the Government would consider the best way for tax relief to help community amateur sports clubs that a make a positive contribution to their local communities. The Government will work with key organisations from sport and the voluntary sector to draw up detailed proposals over the next few months, which we will then publish for a period of wider consultation later this year. The Government will announce firm proposals in the light of consideration of the responses we receive.

### Motorcycle Excise Duty

**Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what factors underlay his decision to raise motorcycle excise duty by £5. [158407]

**Mr. Timms:** The Chancellor announced in Budget 2001 that rates of vehicle excise duty for motorcycles would be frozen until at least 2002.

Budget 2000 announced that the general rate of vehicle excise duty for cars would rise by £5 to £160, but deferred the increase until 1 March 2001. Alongside this, the rate of vehicle excise duty for motorcycles with engines over 400 cc rose by £5 per annum. This was the first increase, since the Government were elected, for motorcycles of this engine size. There was no increase in vehicle excise duty for motorcycles below 400 cc.

### Audio Books and Newspapers

**Mr. Efford:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the annual cost would be to the Exchequer of zero-rating audio books and audio newspapers from VAT. [157533]

**Dawn Primarolo:** No accurate estimate is available.

### Children's Tax Credit

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what year of income is being used as the basis for assessing people's entitlement to the children's tax credit. [155434]

**Dawn Primarolo** *[holding answer 26 March 2001]:* The children's tax credit to which an individual is entitled is based on his or her income for that tax year.

### Commemorative Coins

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the numbers of each commemorative coin issued since May 1997 and the cost of minting each such coin. [156975]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The number of UK standard commemorative coins issued since May 1997 is set out. The cost of minting each coin is commercially sensitive.

*million pieces*

| *Coin design* | *Purchases* |
|---|---|
| *1997* | |
| Golden Wedding £5 | 0.834 |
| *1998* | |
| Prince Charles £5 | 0.775 |
| UK's EU Presidency 50p | 5.048 |
| 50th Anniversary NHS 50p | 5.001 |
| *1999* | |
| Princes Diana £5 | 1.796 |
| Rugby World Cup £2 | 4.900 |
| *2000* | |
| Millennium £5 | 1.932 |
| Queen Mother £5[1] | 2.744 |
| Public Libraries 50p | 11.263 |
| *2001* | |
| Queen Victoria £5 | [2]— |
| Marconi £2 | [2]— |

[1] The number of coins sold has not yet been confirmed and may be subject to change over the next few months.
[2] These coins have only just been issued and no sales figures are currently available.

### Cancer Statistics

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the five year survival rate was for each main group of cancer sufferers in each region and nation of the United Kingdom for each of the years from 1990 to 1996. [156911]

**Miss Melanie Johnson** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Karen Dunnell to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 23 April 2001:*

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question asking for the five year survival rates for each main group of cancer sufferers, in each region and nation of the United Kingdom for each of the years 1990 to 1996 (157036). I am replying in his absence.

For England, the latest available data on the survival of patients diagnosed with cancer, which are for cases diagnosed in the three year period 1992–94 and followed up to 31 December 1999, were published on the National Statistics website, www.statistics.co.uk on 31 January 2001 for eight common cancers.

The most recent published figures by health regional office area are for cancers of the female breast, lung, cervix and colon diagnosed in 1991–93. These were published in *Quality and Performance in the NHS: NHS Performance Indicators* which can be found at www.doh.gov.uk/nhsperformanceindicators. Comparable figures for

cancers of the stomach, prostate and bladder were made available in the House of Commons Hansard of 28 November 2000 (Number 169, Volume 357, Column 594 W).

The latest available data for Wales are available in the publication *Cancer Registration and Survival in Wales 1985–1994* and are for patients diagnosed in 1985–89.

The Scottish Cancer Intelligence Unit published their latest survival data for patients diagnosed in 1991–95 by cancer in *Trends in Cancer Survival in Scotland 1971–1995*.

Comparable information is not available for Northern Ireland.

## Earnings

**Barbara Follett:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the average hourly earnings were of female part-time employees as a percentage of *(a)* total female full-time hourly earnings and *(b)* total male hourly earnings in each year from 1975 to 2000; [157697]

(2) what the median hourly earnings were of female part-time workers as a percentage of *(a)* female full-time workers and *(b)* male full-time workers at the latest date for which figures are available. [157698]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Barbara Follett, dated 23 April 2001:*

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions about the average and median hourly earnings of female part-time employees. (157697, 157698)

The tables attached provide information on average and median hourly earnings of female part-time employees as a percentage of both female and male full-time hourly earnings, drawing upon the New Earnings Survey (NES). Percentages based on total male earnings, (as opposed to full-time male earnings), are not available on a consistent basis back to 1975.

*Table 1: Average hourly earnings of female part-time employees as a percentage of:*

| | *Female full-time hourly earnings* | *Male full-time hourly earnings* |
|---|---|---|
| 1975 | 83 | 58 |
| 1976 | 81 | 59 |
| 1977 | 82 | 60 |
| 1978 | 81 | 59 |
| 1979 | 81 | 58 |
| 1980 | 81 | 58 |
| 1981 | 79 | 58 |
| 1982 | 79 | 57 |
| 1983 | 79 | 57 |
| 1984 | 78 | 57 |
| 1985 | 78 | 57 |
| 1986 | 76 | 57 |
| 1987 | 76 | 56 |
| 1988 | 75 | 56 |
| 1989 | 75 | 57 |
| 1990 | 75 | 57 |
| 1991 | 75 | 58 |
| 1992 | 74 | 59 |
| 1993 | 74 | 59 |
| 1994 | 74 | 59 |
| 1995 | 75 | 60 |
| 1996 | 72 | 58 |
| 1997 | 73 | 59 |
| 1998 | 73 | 59 |
| 1999 | 74 | 60 |
| 2000 | 75 | 61 |

*Notes:*
1. 1984–2000 full-time females and full-time males aged 16 and over.
2. 1975–1983 full-time females aged 18 and over and full-time males aged 21 and over.

*Table 2: Median hourly earnings of female part-time workers as a percentage of:*

| | *Female full-time hourly workers* | *Male full-time hourly workers* |
|---|---|---|
| 2000 | 69 | 58 |

*Source:*
New Earnings Survey

## Motorcycling (VAT)

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer, 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 527W, on VAT, if he will list the EU statutory provisions on which his response was based. [158576]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The list of supplies of goods and services which may be subject to reduced rates of VAT is at annexe H of the Sixth Council Directive of 17 May 1997 (77/388/EEC) as amended.

## Departmental Policies (Plymouth Unitary Authority)

**Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency, *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency and *(c)* South-West Devon constituency, the effects on the Plymouth Unitary Authority area of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158031]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** Plymouth, along with the rest of the United Kingdom, is benefiting from the long-term action we have taken to build economic stability and secure high and stable levels of growth and employment. Since the general election, the levels of claimant, youth and long-term unemployment in the three constituencies have changed as follows:

*Percentage changes: April 1997 to March 2001*

| *Constituency* | *Claimant unemployment* | *Youth unemployment* | *Long-term unemployment* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Plymouth, Sutton | –58 | –91 | –77 |
| Plymouth, Devonport | –59 | –88 | –81 |
| South-West Devon | –62 | –88 | –85 |

Macroeconomic stability is being complemented at the microeconomic level by the Government's policies to ease the transition from welfare into work and make work pay. To the end of January 2001, the total number of young people who have started the New Deal for 18–24-year-olds and found employment in each of the three constituencies was as follows:

| *Constituency* | *Total starts* | *Total into employment*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| Plymouth, Sutton | 1,807 | 1,006 (56) |
| Plymouth, Devonport | 1,454 | 824 (57) |
| South-West Devon | 460 | 284 (62) |

[1] Percentage of starts in brackets.

The working families tax credit (WFTC), introduced in October 1999, is helping to make work pay for low and middle income families. In November 2000, 2,000 families in Plymouth, Sutton, 3,500 in Plymouth, Devonport and 1,300 in South-West Devon constituencies were benefiting from WFTC.

The Government are also committed to policies that enable pensioners to share in the country's rising prosperity. All pensioners, including 16,000 in Plymouth, Sutton, 17,500 in Plymouth, Devonport and 17,200 in South-West Devon, have received an above-inflation increase in the basic state pension from April 2001. Single pensioners receive an extra £5 a week, and couples receive an extra £8 a week. All pensioners aged 75 or over have also been entitled to a free TV licence since November 2000—including around 7,600 in Plymouth, Sutton, 6,500 in Plymouth, Devonport and 7,200 in South-West Devon.

## MRSA

**Mr. Wilshire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many death certificates have given MRSA as *(a)* the primary and *(b)* a contributory cause of death in each of the past five years. [158285]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Wilshire, dated 23 April 2001:*

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of death certificates which have given MRSA as the primary and contributory cause of deaths in each of the last five years (158285).

I refer you to the answer given to a question from Tony Wright in Hansard of 10 January 2001 (Number 15, Volume 360, Column 571).

## Public Spending

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* limits and *(b)* restraints are placed upon UK (i) public spending and (ii) public capital expenditure by arrangements with the European Union; what formulae apply; what are the total sums in each case; and what are the actual planned spending totals in each case. [158349]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** Under Council Regulation (EC) No.1467/97, the UK should

"endeavour to avoid excessive deficits".

## European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff employed by the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products are eligible for Chapter II funding. [158327]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** Details of the staff of the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMEA) can be found on its website: www.emea.eu.int.

## Euro

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will issue guidance to businesses on the legal status of the euro in the UK after 1 January 2002. [158393]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** On 29 March the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that, in consultation with business, the Government were authorising an enhanced small business information campaign, to include an updated website, so that British business is prepared for the introduction of euro notes and coins in 2002. The material available includes case studies and factsheets, all available through the website: www.euro.gov.uk.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what position he will adopt on the Solidarity Initiative During the Changeover to the Euro Currency (European Parliament Session Document BS-0029/01) in the Council of Ministers; and if he will make a statement. [158325]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The Solidarity Initiative is a motion for a European Parliament resolution, and is a matter for the European Parliament.

## Equitable Life

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department was warned before Equitable Life Assurance Society closed itself to new business that the company was potentially unable to meet its contractual commitment to its policy holders; and if he will make a statement. [158567]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The Financial Services Authority made it clear when the Equitable Life Assurance Society closed to new business that the society continued to meet statutory solvency requirements. The FSA is continuing to monitor closely the operations of Equitable Life.

## Annuity Pension Arrangements

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the Government's policy towards annuity pension arrangements; [158423]

(2) what discussions he has had recently with groups seeking reform of annuity pension arrangements. [158424]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** I refer my hon. Friend to Section 5.66 to 5.69 of the Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report published on Budget day, copies of which are in the Library. This sets out the Government's views on annuity pension arrangements.

## Customs and Excise

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the figures for each year since 1985 for the numbers of Customs and Excise officers specialising in border control operations. [158447]

**Dawn Primarolo:** HM Customs and Excise does not collect data in the form specified. Figures are, however, available for the number of staff years spent by Customs and Excise Officers undertaking Customs duties (which would include a range of both frontier and inland activity). These figures are available in the annual reports of the Board of Customs and Excise in the Library of the House.

### IR35

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Professional Contractors Group since the recent court judgment on the IR35 case. [158446]

**Dawn Primarolo:** A meeting is currently being arranged between the Inland Revenue and representatives of the Professional Contractors Group to discuss practical issues arising out of the application and operation of the IR35 legislation.

### European Commission (Tax-raising Powers)

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proposals have been made by the Belgian Government through *(a)* the Council, *(b)* the Finance Ministers of the European Community and *(c)* otherwise, for providing powers to the Commission to raise tax revenue by direct levy, (A) as part of and (B) additional to existing means of providing resources for the Union. [158394]

**Dawn Primarolo:** We have received no such proposals.

### Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158114]

**Dawn Primarolo:** There are no upper or lower age limits for appointments to public bodies of the Chancellor's departments. Appointments are made on merit by matching the abilities, experience and qualities of applicants with the needs of the bodies concerned. The Chancellor's departments have set plans with goals and objectives for increasing the representation of under-represented groups on public bodies as part of the Government's commitment to equality of opportunity and to increasing the diversity of those appointed to public bodies.

### Illegally Imported Foodstuffs

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the responsibilities of Customs and Excise officers who enforce border inspection rules, with particular reference to illegally imported meat and other foodstuffs. [158448]

**Dawn Primarolo:** There are two main aspects to Customs role at the UK's border: processing declarations of commercial consignments being moved into and out of the country; and detecting attempts to evade the prohibitions and restrictions on items being moved either commercially or privately.

Commercial imports and exports of goods from or to locations outside the European Union must be declared to Customs to help ensure any revenues due are properly accounted for and that restrictions are complied with. Declarations of meat and meat products are identified from Customs systems and referred to a MAFF approved border inspection post. The goods are only released from Customs control on receipt of notification from the border inspection post that any necessary checks are complete.

Customs detection activity at the border is focused on finding and dealing with irregularities across the full range of contrabands; these include controlled drugs, high revenue items such as alcohol and tobacco, cash linked to drug trafficking, paedophile pornography and illicit weapons. When the detection systems find travellers carrying meat products outside the MAFF allowance (one kilogram of cooked meat products in a sealed container) the material is seized and disposed of in accordance with procedures agreed with MAFF and the local port health authority.

### Church Repairs (VAT)

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will zero-rate church repairs for VAT. [158224]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Chancellor announced in his Budget that he is introducing a UK-wide grant scheme to help with the cost of repairing listed places of worship. The effect of the grant will be to reduce the VAT cost to 5 per cent. for new work undertaken from 1 April 2001.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Tuesday 24 April 2001*

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Female Prisoners (Shackling)

**Jackie Ballard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on shackling female prisoners. [155153]

**Mr. Boateng:** I have written to the hon. Member.

### Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visits abroad were made by him and his Ministers on departmental business in the *(a)* three years ending 30 April 1997 and *(b)* 12 months ending 30 April 1997. [157617]

**Mr. Straw:** Departmental records contain the following information:

(a) between 1 May 1994 and 30 April 1997 Home Office Ministers made 66 overseas visits on departmental business, 44 of which were within the European Union.

(b) between 1 May 1996 and 30 April 1997 Home Office Ministers made 23 overseas visits on departmental business, 13 of which were within the European Union.

### Citizens Advice Bureaux

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which citizens advice bureaux have been invited to join one of the National Asylum Support Service's regional stakeholder groups; and on which dates the invitations were sent to the bureaux concerned. [157974]

**Mrs. Roche:** Regional Consortia, grant funded by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS), have been established to help deliver support at the local level. It is part of their remit to have strategies and procedures in place to co-ordinate services at both regional and local levels. They manage regional stakeholder groups and accordingly are responsible for membership. The groups should include the full spectrum of organisations and agencies involved and may include the Citizens Advice Bureau.

### Family Visit Appeals

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the net income from fees for family visit appeals has been since 2 October 2000; and what proportion of this net income relates to appeals which are currently outstanding. [157973]

**Mrs. Roche:** We calculate that the net income from fees for family visitor appeals in the period 2 October to 11 April 2001 is about £60,000. Of this, 40 per cent. relates to appeals which are currently outstanding and which may result in further refunds.

### Fee Fraud Letters

**Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many advanced fee fraud letters he estimates have come to the UK from *(a)* overseas and *(b)* Nigeria in each of the last five years; and what powers he has, in the case of operations known to the police, to intercept such letters before they reach their intended recipients. [158356]

**Mr. Straw** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Figures for the number of advance fee fraud letters which arrive in the United Kingdom are not held centrally.

Under section 5 of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, the Secretary of State may authorise the interception of postal items where this is necessary in the interests of national security; for the purpose of preventing or detecting serious crime; or of safeguarding the economic well-being of the United Kingdom.

### Bajram Zeqiri

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) of 16 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 768W, if the Government intend to petition the House of Lords for leave to appeal against the Court of Appeal's judgment in the case of Bajram Zeqiri. [158744]

**Mrs. Roche:** The Government's petition for permission to appeal against the Court of Appeal judgment in the case of Bajram Zeqiri was lodged with the House of Lords on 12 April 2001.

### Police Operations (Cleveland)

**Dr. Kumar:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will call for a report from the Chief Constable of Cleveland on the amount of time he has spent on *(a)* Operation Lancet, *(b)* Operation Dallas and *(c)* Operation Eagle since May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [158131]

**Mr. Charles Clarke** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* No, it would not be appropriate to do so.

### Lord Birt

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reports Lord Birt has submitted to him in his capacity as an adviser on crime; and if he will make a statement. [158236]

**Mr. Straw:** I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) on 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 594W.

### Electoral Register

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made in producing draft regulations to ensure that registered political parties, elected representatives and candidates receive copies of updates of the electoral register. [158794]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** We have decided to bring forward self-contained regulations for this purpose and a draft was laid yesterday.

## ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

### Biffa Waste Disposal Site

14. **Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the use of the Biffa waste disposal site in Abbey Village, Chorley for animals slaughtered under the welfare slaughter scheme. [157194]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Environment Agency has identified licensed landfill sites which are suitable for the disposal of carcases from the Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme. I understand that uninfected sheep and pig carcases from the scheme are being disposed of at this site under a contract agreed between the site operators and the Intervention Board Executive Agency.

### Rail Projects

15. **Mr. Spring:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which rail projects listed in the Strategic Rail Authority's plans have a start date; and if he will make a statement. [157195]

**Mr. Hill:** The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Agenda identified a range of potential investment projects for the development of the rail network. The stage of development of these projects varies depending on their origins; but some are already under way. The authority is reviewing the future rail investment programme and expects to provide more information in its strategic plan about costs and timings of projects to be taken forward. The strategic plan is expected to be published in the autumn.

### Rural Coach Travel

16. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the role of coach operators in meeting transport needs in rural areas. [157196]

**Mr. Meacher:** We fully appreciate that coach operators have a significant role to play in helping to meet the transport needs of those living in or wishing to visit rural areas.

### Kyoto Protocol

17. **Mr. David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the need for further discussions on the Kyoto protocol following President Bush's decision to withdraw from it. [157197]

18. **Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with his US counterparts regarding the Kyoto protocol. [157198]

24. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on discussions between his Department and the US Administration concerning the Kyoto climate change agreement. [157205]

34. **Dr. Whitehead:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future of the Kyoto protocol. [157215]

35. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's policies for future climate change negotiations. [157216]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Kyoto protocol is an important step in setting the framework for dealing with climate change. We will continue to work for an agreement at the next round of talks in July which will enable us and others to ratify Kyoto, with the aim of bringing it into force by 2002. We are also keen to continue a constructive dialogue with the US as it is important that they remain engaged in global efforts to tackle climate change.

### Mobile Telephone Masts

19. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he plans to implement the recommendations of the Stewart report on mobile phone masts. [157200]

**Mr. Raynsford:** On 16 March 2001 I announced a series of important changes to the planning system on the siting of mobile phone masts that significantly strengthen public consultation requirements.

### Rail Procurement

20. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will discuss rail procurement with Railtrack. [157201]

**Mr. Hill:** The spending plans set out in our 10-year plan, together with the post-Hatfield re-railing programme, should mean that there is no shortage of demand for rail. Procurement decisions are commercial matters for Railtrack.

### Private Landlords

21. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to introduce licences for private landlords. [157202]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** We set out in the Housing Green Paper, "Quality and choice: a decent home for all", a proposal to introduce licensing of the whole private rented sector in limited areas of low demand for housing in England. Following a positive response, we intend to consult further later this year.

### Park and Ride Schemes

22. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the locating of park and ride schemes on green belt sites; and if he will make a statement. [157203]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Revised policy in respect of proposals to locate park and ride schemes on green belt sites is set out at paragraph 62 and at Annexe E to Planning Policy Guidance Note 13: "Transport", which was issued on 27 March. It provides that, in some circumstances, park and ride schemes may be permissible in the green belt where assessment shows such locations to be the most sustainable of the available options. A draft of PPG13 was issued for consultation in October 1999 and the majority of respondents commenting on the proposed changes were supportive.

## Foot and Mouth

23. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Environment Agency's priorities for the disposal of foot and mouth infected carcases. [157204]

**Mr. Meacher:** It is essential that appropriate use is made of all the available options to dispose of the substantial number of carcases from the current epidemic. The priority in each case is to prevent the spread of the disease and to minimise the risk to public health and the environment. In broad terms, the preferred hierarchy of disposal options is rendering for all carcases; incineration in authorised facilities for all carcases; disposal in licensed landfill sites for sheep, pigs and, with the agreement of the licence holder, cattle born after 1 August 1996; burning for all carcases; and burial of sheep, pigs and cattle born after 1 August 1996.

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what account he took of the need to minimise the possibility of spreading foot and mouth disease in deciding to authorise two sites in West Sussex for disposal of animals culled as part of the exercise to control that disease. [158342]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The Environment Agency has identified a number of licensed landfill sites which are suitable for the disposal of animal carcases. The carcases consigned to these sites are those which MAFF authorise for disposal under Article 5(2) of the Animal By-Products Order 1999. The objective of the authorities responsible for the disposal arrangements is to ensure that carcases are transported for disposal *(a)* within infected areas or *(b)* within non-infected areas—but not from one area to another unless necessitated by factors such as the location of abattoirs or landfills.

I understand that landfill sites at Small Dole and Warnham in West Sussex have been identified by the Environment Agency as suitable for carcase disposal but, in the event of their being used, only carcases from the local area will be consigned to them. Any such disposal of carcases will be carried out on the basis of a Best Practice Document (the Protocol) agreed between the Environment Agency, MAFF and the Environmental Services Association (ESA). A copy has been placed in the Library and is available on the Agency's website: http://www.environment-agency.gov.uk/envinfo/fmd/protocol.pdf.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the owners of holiday units available to rent will be eligible for rate relief under the Government's measures to help businesses affected by foot and mouth disease. [158265]

**Mr. Meacher:** Owners of any business paying rates, including holiday units available to rent, are able to apply for hardship rate relief. A hardship rate relief scheme, where local authorities are able to grant discretionary rate relief of up to 100 per cent. to any business suffering hardship, can be made available by any authority. However, as a consequence of the current foot and mouth disease outbreak, we have now extended the central Government contribution to the cost of the relief from 75 per cent. to 95 per cent. in cases where the business is located in one of the 151 eligible rural districts and has a rateable value of £12,000 or less. This higher rate of support is available initially for three months to 30 June 2001.

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to visit Montgomeryshire to discuss the effects of the foot and mouth outbreak with local business people. [158682]

**Mr. Meacher:** I have no plans to visit Montgomeryshire. The National Assembly and the Wales Office are represented on the Rural Taskforce and the National Assembly is leading on monitoring the impact of foot and mouth disease and action to alleviate it in Wales.

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how much trade has been lost, in total, by individuals and organisations as a result of foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement; [158680]

(2) what assessment he has made of the amount of financial support that would be required to prevent the closure of 5 per cent. of businesses which have been affected by the foot and mouth outbreak; and if he will make a statement. [158681]

**Mr. Meacher:** It is clear that the crisis has adversely affected many organisations and individuals and we have already announced a number of measures to alleviate their difficulties. We do not at present have comprehensive information about the scale and scope of the impact on individuals and organisations, the losses they have sustained and the number of businesses which may have to close directly as a result of foot and mouth disease, although we have been actively seeking it. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has, however, estimated that the cost to English tourism is currently around £140 million per week.

We are collecting further data and will continue to monitor the situation closely.

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultations he has had with Mid-Wales farmers and businesses regarding the degree of compensation required to support the region without business closures during the foot and mouth outbreak; and if he will make a statement. [158685]

**Mr. Meacher:** The National Assembly for Wales is leading on monitoring the impact of foot and mouth disease and action to alleviate it in Wales. Farmers and businesses in Wales also benefit from UK-wide initiatives such as measures allowing the deferment of tax and National Insurance contributions and the extension to the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme. In addition the National Assembly and the Wales Office are represented on the Rural Taskforce.

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with insurance companies to ensure fast payment of claims arising as a direct result of the foot and mouth outbreak; and if he will make a statement. [158724]

**Mr. Meacher:** I plan to meet representatives of the insurance industry to discuss the impact of the foot and mouth outbreak as soon as possible.

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he has taken to provide information on a daily basis to individuals and firms who are not farmers but whose livelihoods are directly affected by the foot and mouth infection; and if he will make a statement. [158683]

**Mr. Meacher:** Information is being provided daily through Government websites such as the National Co-ordination Centre website at www.co-ordination.uk together with those at my Department, the Countryside Agency, DCMS, MAFF, DfEE and DSS.

In addition information for small firms is available through the Small Business Service (SBS) and the network of Business Links, and a rural helpline—0845 600 9006—is operational. The Government have issued a number of newspaper advertisements and radio fillers and has leafleted Post Offices, tourist offices and many major visitor attractions.

**Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to promote the reopening of wildlife parks which have been closed as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak. [158229]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Government have taken every opportunity to make clear that the countryside is open for business. A list of those zoos and wildlife parks that are open to the public has been posted on the DETR website, which is updated weekly. The address is www.wildlife-countryside.detr.gov.uk/ruraltf/zoos/index.htm. MAFF have provided advice to zoos on the precautions to be taken to reduce the risk of susceptible animals catching the disease, details of which can be found at www.maff.gov.uk/animalh/diseases/fmd/animals.htm. Members of the public can also contact a telephone hotline (08456 071071) to discover what attractions are open or visit the open Britain website (www.openbritain.gov.uk). Finally, an extra £6 million has been made available to promote tourist attractions, which will include zoos and wildlife parks.

**Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if wildlife parks are eligible to claim for the foot and mouth preliminary financial compensation package, as announced by the Minister for the Environment on 20 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 191–210. [158230]

**Mr. Meacher:** Wildlife parks, like other businesses affected by foot and mouth disease, may apply for assistance under the measures to help rural businesses that I announced on 20 March and subsequently, and for the extended Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme announced on 6 April, where they meet the qualifying criteria.

## Land Drainage

25. **Mr. Brazier:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what changes in planning guidance and planning law he is planning with regard to land drainage; and if he will make a statement. [157206]

**Mr. Raynsford:** The Government have recently consulted on a revised draft of the new Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 25 "Development and flood risk" and intend to issue the PPG in May.

This PPG advises on the planning consideration of all aspects of land drainage and flood defence. It complements the flood defence policies of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

## Affordable Housing (South-east)

26. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to increase the supply of affordable housing in the south-east. [157207]

**Mr. Raynsford:** We have made available additional public investment and fiscal instruments to help increase the provision of affordable housing. In particular, we have almost doubled funding to the Housing Corporation through its approved development programme and have set up the Starter Homes Initiative. Furthermore, Regional Planning Guidance for the south-east (RPG9) sets out ways in which local authorities can identify and respond to local housing need.

## Air Traffic Control

27. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the future arrangements for air traffic control. [157208]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** As announced on 27 March 2001, the Government have selected the Airline Group as their strategic partner in the public-private partnership for National Air Traffic Services. Subject to certain conditions, including clearance under the European Commission Merger Regulation, our aim is for the Airline Group to take operational control of NATS on 1 June.

## Private Finance Initiative

29. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the total value of the capital projects which have been funded by private finance arrangements since May 1997. [157210]

**Ms Armstrong:** My Department has signed or provided financial support to private finance contracts with a capital value of £1,045 million since May 1997. In addition DETR has allocated PFI credits with a value of £1,112 million to 56 local authority PFI projects in this period.

## Road Crashes

30. **Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the estimated cost is to public funds of a road crash involving *(a)* a fatality, *(b)* serious injury and *(c)* slight injury. [157211]

**Mr. Hill:** The values attributed in 1999 to the avoidance of road accidents are *(a)* fatal £1,089,130, *(b)* serious £146,890, and *(c)* slight £14,540. These amounts are the values to be used in cost benefit analysis. They take account of medical costs, lost production, human costs based on willingness to pay for reduction of risk, the costs of police and courts, insurance administration, and property damage. Included in these values are the sums of £5,970, £10,380, and £890 for fatal, serious and slight accidents respectively, for the cost to public funds for hospital and ambulance costs and the

costs of police and courts. The lost production element includes social security costs but these are not separately estimated. Further information is available in Highways Economic Note No. 1 "1999 Valuation of the Benefits of Prevention of Road Accidents and Casualties" a copy of which is in the Library of the House.

### Council Tax

31. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment has been made of the benefits of increasing the number of council tax band rates. [157212]

**Ms Armstrong:** We believe that the council tax is working well as a local tax. In our Green Paper on modernising local government finance, which we published in September 2000, we explained that the banding system makes tax bills predictable and stable. A number of respondents to the Green Paper proposed that additional council tax bands should be created. We are considering what they had to say in the context of preparing a White Paper on local government finance, which we intend to publish later this year.

37. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about the change in band D council tax in the last year. [157218]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The average increase in band D council tax in England between 2000–01 and 2001–02 was 6.4 per cent.

### Runcorn-Widnes Bridge

32. **Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the resources allocated in 2001–02 for the maintenance of the Runcorn-Widnes bridge. [157213]

**Mr. Hill:** I announced in November 2000 that as part of the local transport plan allocation for Halton borough council for 2001–02, £1 million is being made available towards maintenance of the Runcorn-Widnes bridge. Further funding will be provided during the period of the local transport plan to meet in full the maintenance scheme for this bridge.

### Housing (Southwark)

33. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much money was requested by the London borough of Southwark for housing capital works in the year 2001–02; and how much has been allocated. [157214]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The London borough of Southwark has been allocated £52,920,634 for housing in 2001–02 under the Housing Investment Programme and the Major Repairs Allowance. It is for the local authority to decide how this funding is prioritised. A further £1,225,554 housing capital funding has been allocated under SRB, through Peckham Partnership.

### Railway Maintenance

36. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the line refurbishment works being undertaken by Railtrack and the Strategic Rail Authority. [157217]

**Mr. Hill:** Railtrack has nearly completed its programme of replacement of rail and points in line with its national recovery plan. The company is separately taking forward a series of enhancement projects to increase the capacity of the network, including the west coast route modernisation. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced on 2 April that future major enhancement projects would be taken forward through public-private partnerships involving the Strategic Rail Authority and third parties.

### Regeneration (Falmouth and Camborne)

38. **Ms Atherton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the regeneration projects funded by his Department in the Falmouth and Camborne constituency. [157219]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The Department is contributing funds to a wide range of projects in the Falmouth and Camborne constituency. Camborne, Pool and Redruth is the South West Regional Development Agency's first priority area for regeneration in Cornwall. Current RDA commitments in the constituency total nearly £18 million of investment, including in a new Tolvadden Energy Park, in transformation of derelict buildings at West End Stores and Alma Place in Redruth into social housing and a new Cornish Studies Centre, and in the Falmouth Maritime project. My Department has awarded a total of £7.8 million in Single Regeneration Budget funding in Rounds 4 to 6 to schemes in west Cornwall that include the Falmouth and Camborne constituency. In October 2000, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced that Kerrier District is one of four areas in the south-west that will benefit from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund to help improve housing, raise school standards, reduce crime and improve health in our most deprived communities.

### Standard Spending Assessment

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans to review the local government standard spending assessment formula. [157209]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** We received over 16,000 responses to last September's Green Paper on modernising local government finance. A White Paper setting out our decisions on the future of the revenue grant distribution system will be published later this year.

### Road Traffic

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what changes there have been to the volume of road traffic in England since May 1997. [158471]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The annual percentage changes to the volume of road traffic in England since 1997 are shown in the table.

*Road traffic in England*

| *Year* | *Percentage change* |
|---|---|
| 1998 | 1.7 |
| 1999 | 1.3 |

### South West Development Agency

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the grant given by the South West Development Agency to Business Links to combat the effects of foot and mouth disease in the region is for *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans to businesses; and what the deadline for its distribution is. [158588]

**Mr. Meacher:** The £3.5 million package of support announced by the South West Development Agency on 9 April included assistance for Business Links organisations to provide enhanced advice and guidance to businesses. Other RDAs have taken similar measures. To supplement these I announced on 11 April a further £15 million funding package for RDAs to expand existing programmes so as to provide additional short term practical help to business in the worst affected areas and in particular Devon, Cumbria and parts of the north-east and Welsh borders. This additional aid will be split between the RDAs for these areas with the south-west and north-west RDAs each receiving £5 million and the North East and West Midlands RDAs each receiving £2.5 million. This support can be used to provide a wide range of direct and indirect assistance, including grants to help sustain business by supporting marketing, reskilling and other activities, promotional campaigns, and regeneration projects.

### Rent Tribunals

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to increase opportunities for a wider range of people to sit on rent tribunals. [158731]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** All appointments to rent tribunals are now made following advertising and open competition. Advertisements encourage women and members of ethnic minorities to consider applying for appointment. Since the last general election, we have appointed 52 lay members to sit on rent tribunals in England, 10 of these are from ethnic minorities.

### Driving Licences (Asylum Seekers)

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he *(a)* has had and *(b)* is planning with refugee organisations and others about acceptable evidence of identity for asylum seekers applying for a driving licence. [158462]

**Mr. Hill:** The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) has been in correspondence with the Commission for Racial Equality and the Refugee Council regarding applications for photocard driving licences from asylum seekers. DVLA will shortly write again to these organisations to explain revised arrangements for those asylum seekers who cannot produce a passport, birth certificate or Home Office documentation to support their application for a photocard driving licence.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what evidence of identity is acceptable for asylum seekers applying for a driving licence. [158461]

**Mr. Hill:** The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) will accept a passport, birth certificate or Home Office issued travel document or naturalisation papers in support of an application for a photocard driving licence. If none of these documents is available, DVLA will consider whatever alternative evidence of identity an individual can submit.

### Planning Appeals

**Mr. Denis Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many appeals were made to the Planning Inspectorate against local authority planning decisions in each of the last five years; and how many were successful. [158458]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The provision of information on planning appeals is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked the Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Chris Shepley to Mr. Denis Murphy, dated 23 April 2001:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about planning appeals made and decided in each of the past five years.

The table below gives the number of appeals made in each year from 1996/97 and, of those decided, the number allowed.

*Number of appeals*

| *Year* | *Made* | *Decided* | *Number allowed* | *Percentage allowed* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 13,742 | 12,026 | 4,211 | 35 |
| 1997–98 | 14,163 | 13,075 | 4,690 | 36 |
| 1998–99 | 14,380 | 12,976 | 4,563 | 35 |
| 1999–2000 | 14,285 | 12,506 | 4,508 | 36 |
| 2000–01 | 15,333 | 12,912 | 4,487 | 35 |

**Mr. Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of planning appeals decided *(a)* by hearings, *(b)* by inquiries and *(c)* by written representations have been determined within (i) 22, (ii) 26 and (iii) 30 weeks for each year since 1996–97 in (A) England and Wales and (B) the Yorkshire and Humber Government Office region. [158275]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The provision of information on planning appeals is the responsibility of the Planning Inspectorate. I have asked the Inspectorate's Chief Executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Chris Shepley to Mr. Jon Trickett, dated 23 April 2001:*

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about the handling times of planning appeals decided since 1996–97.

The percentage of planning appeals decided within the times you specified are enclosed.

| Years | Decided within 22 weeks | Decided within 26 weeks | Decided within 30 weeks |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Percentage of planning appeals in England, decided within given times:* | | | |
| *1996–97* | | | |
| Written | 65.48 | 82.30 | 90.55 |
| Hearings | 4.16 | 6.14 | 10.96 |
| Inquiries | 10.16 | 13.60 | 16.35 |
| *1997–98* | | | |
| Written | 82.02 | 90.80 | 94.11 |
| Hearings | 12.39 | 18.89 | 27.52 |
| Inquiries | 12.34 | 19.31 | 28.00 |
| *1998–99* | | | |
| Written | 93.89 | 96.55 | 97.78 |
| Hearings | 59.69 | 77.27 | 86.01 |
| Inquiries | 26.67 | 39.89 | 52.28 |
| *1999–2000* | | | |
| Written | 94.79 | 96.90 | 97.88 |
| Hearings | 82.70 | 91.98 | 94.73 |
| Inquiries | 39.34 | 59.48 | 74.47 |
| *2000–01* | | | |
| Written | 96.94 | 98.45 | 99.05 |
| Hearings | 86.96 | 94.05 | 96.34 |
| Inquiries | 39.25 | 62.87 | 77.32 |
| *Percentage of planning appeals in Wales, decided within given times:* | | | |
| *1996–97* | | | |
| Written | 93.87 | 96.57 | 97.31 |
| Hearings | 60.92 | 70.11 | 87.36 |
| Inquiries | 14.52 | 33.87 | 51.61 |
| *1997–98* | | | |
| Written | 93.00 | 96.84 | 99.10 |
| Hearings | 73.15 | 87.96 | 95.37 |
| Inquiries | 32.26 | 45.16 | 70.97 |
| *1998–99* | | | |
| Written | 93.07 | 96.43 | 98.95 |
| Hearings | 71.65 | 86.61 | 93.70 |
| Inquiries | 8.55 | 42.11 | 66.67 |
| *1999–2000* | | | |
| Written | 96.16 | 97.99 | 98.65 |
| Hearings | 86.96 | 94.78 | 95.65 |
| Inquiries | 21.40 | 46.00 | 73.81 |
| *2000–01* | | | |
| Written | 98.42 | 99.32 | 99.55 |
| Hearings | 80.32 | 88.52 | 94.26 |
| Inquiries | 6.52 | 21.74 | 63.04 |
| *Percentage of planning appeals in the Yorkshire and Humberside Government Office region, decided within given times:* | | | |
| *1996–97* | | | |
| Written | 67.69 | 82.96 | 90.52 |
| Hearings | 3.32 | 4.32 | 6.98 |
| Inquiries | 6.58 | 8.55 | 13.16 |
| *1997–98* | | | |
| Written | 80.67 | 89.93 | 93.79 |
| Hearings | 8.86 | 14.18 | 24.30 |
| Inquiries | 7.78 | 16.77 | 26.35 |
| *1998–99* | | | |
| Written | 94.19 | 96.47 | 97.72 |
| Hearings | 57.78 | 76.00 | 87.11 |
| Inquiries | 26.55 | 40.11 | 48.02 |
| *1999–2000* | | | |
| Written | 95.41 | 95.52 | 97.88 |
| Hearings | 81.74 | 97.11 | 97.88 |
| Inquiries | 42.07 | 58.54 | 74.39 |
| *2000–01* | | | |
| Written | 97.18 | 98.56 | 99.14 |
| Hearings | 89.37 | 95.91 | 97.55 |
| Inquiries | 47.66 | 73.44 | 83.59 |

## Rail Safety

**Mr. Nicholls:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what reports he has received about the impact on safety of the grades of steel used in railway tracks since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [158248]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* This is an operational matter for Railtrack. I understand from Railtrack that the choice of the grade of steel to be used in railway tracks has not changed for many years and certainly not since 1997.

## Energy Efficiency

**Mr. Efford:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to require commercial property owners to improve the energy efficiency of their buildings. [157107]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Achieving greater energy efficiency in commercial buildings was the subject of an Adjournment debate on 24 January. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment represented the Government on that day. My right hon. Friend will be writing shortly to my hon. Friend to follow up the debate and to set out his plans in this respect. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

## Container Ports

**Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement about anticipated increases in container port capacity in Harwich, Felixstowe and on the Shell Haven site in Essex. [157108]

**Mr. Hill:** The three cases, and any others, are or are likely to be subject to formal public inquiries before they are decided by the Secretary of State. On the general question of container port capacity, I refer to my answer to the hon. Member on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 141.

## Half-fare Scheme

**Mr. Rapson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when men aged over 60 years will be able to benefit from the national half-fare scheme. [157199]

**Mr. Hill:** As soon as we are able to amend the relevant legislation, which currently links entitlement to travel concessions to the state pension age.

### Bus Lanes

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to allow licensed minicabs to use bus lanes. [158748]

**Mr. Hill:** It is for the relevant highway authority, usually the local authority, to decide what classes of vehicles, if any, other than buses should be allowed to use bus lanes.

My Department provides guidance for local authorities on bus priority measures in Local Transport Note 1–97 "Keeping Buses Moving". The use of bus lanes by licensed minicabs is not recommended. When a wide range of vehicles are allowed access, enforcement can be more difficult and the benefits to buses reduced. In particular, where licensed minicabs do not have obvious features to identify them as minicabs, it is difficult to distinguish them from private cars and this can encourage more widespread violation as other cars follow them into a bus lane.

Local highway authorities would need to consider these issues, in liaison with the police, in deciding whether to allow licensed minicabs to use a particular bus lane.

### London Underground

**Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he intends Transport for London to assume full responsibility for London Underground before 7 June. [157182]

**Mr. Hill:** It is the Government's intention to transfer London Underground to the control of Transport for London once the framework is in place to deliver the massive long-term investment that the Underground requires. Our view is that the best way to do this is through the PPP. London Underground is making every effort to conclude the PPP as speedily as possible, consistent with the paramount requirement to maintain and improve safety and deliver best value, but it will be some months before contracts can be signed.

### Environmental Health Inspectors

**Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many full-time equivalent staff have been employed as environmental health inspectors in British *(a)* airports and *(b)* ports in each of the last 10 years. [157032]

**Ms Stuart:** I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for employing environmental health officers at airports and ports rests with the local authorities which have responsibilities for the ports' health work. The number of enforcement officers is determined by the local authorities. The numbers of such officers are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Electricity Demand

**Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assumptions have been used for growth in electricity demand in table 1 on page 53 of Climate Change, The UK Programme. [157606]

**Mr. Hain:** I have been asked to reply.

The energy projections which underlie the UK's Climate Change Programme were published as Energy Paper 68 in November 2000. Energy Paper 68 presents baseline energy demand projections. These do not take account of measures set out in the Climate Change Programme.

The growth in electricity demand between 2000 and 2010 is projected to be around 1 per cent. per annum, before taking account of measures in the Climate Change Programme. Further details are given in chapter 5 of Energy Paper 68. Energy Paper 68 is available in the Library of the House.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Basic State Pension

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost to the Treasury of uprating the basic state pension by *(a)* £5 per week for a single pensioner and *(b)* £8 per week for a pensioner couple. [158765]

**Mr. Rooker:** I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer I gave to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 30 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 138–39W.

### Council Tax

**Ms Harman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the percentage was of average income paid in Council Tax by Londoners *(a)* in 1996 and *(b)* on the latest date for which figures are available. [157894]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The information that is available is as follows:

*Average net Council Tax bill as a percentage of average gross household income*

| | *London (per cent.)* |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 1.9 |
| 1999–2000 | 2.0 |

*Notes:*

1. The source of the data in the table is the Family Resources Survey (Great Britain). The latest year for which data are available is 1999–2000.
2. For the purposes of this analysis, Council Tax is taken to be net of Council Tax discount and any deductions to the bill resulting from the receipt of Council Tax Benefit.
3. Those households who do not pay Council Tax (such as students) have not been included in this analysis.
4. The estimates are based on sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using grossing factors that control for region, Council Tax band, tenure and a number of demographic variables. Estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.
5. Estimates of the size of small changes between one year and another, as shown in the table, may be particularly vulnerable to estimating error.
6. All percentages have been rounded to the nearest 0.1 per cent.

### Housing Benefit

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the contractors for each London borough who are responsible for the administration of

Housing Benefit; how many complaints have been received in the past year about each contractor; and what inspections he has authorised. [158653]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The administration of Housing Benefit is the responsibility of local authorities, regardless of whether or not it is contracted out.

From May, we will be collecting information on local authorities who contract out Housing Benefit work.

The following table represents, to the best of our current knowledge, the London boroughs that currently contract out this work and the contractors (two are in-house). The table also shows the number of written complaints we have received about the contracting-out of the administration of Housing Benefit in these boroughs, but not all specifically mention the contractor.

| *London borough* | *Contractor* | *Number of complaints* |
|---|---|---|
| Bexley | Capita | 0 |
| Brent | EDS | 0 |
| Bromley | Capita | 0 |
| Croydon | CSL | 0 |
| Ealing | Vertex Datasciences Ltd. | 0 |
| Hounslow | ITNet | 0 |
| Islington | ITNet | 2 |
| Lambeth | Capita | 3 |
| Lewisham | In-house | 0 |
| Newham | CSL | 0 |
| Southwark | CSL | 1 |
| Tower Hamlets | In-house | 0 |
| Waltham Forest | ICL | 1 |
| Westminster | Capita | 4 |

We also received two complaints relating to the administration of Housing Benefit in Hackney by ITNet (the contract was terminated on 31 March 2001).

All of the boroughs in the table except Bexley and Hounslow have been inspected by the Benefits Fraud Inspectorate (BFI). These inspections were undertaken as part of a programme of inspections in England, Scotland and Wales which included local authorities which have contracted-out the administration of Housing Benefit and those which have not.

### Child Support Agency

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans his Department has to introduce a more rigorous assessment procedure on the part of the Child Support Agency. [158125]

**Angela Eagle:** Our reforms of the child support system will make both assessment and collection procedures more clearly focused on the needs of children and their parents—and on ensuring that maintenance due becomes maintenance paid. We intend to introduce the reformed scheme for new cases by April 2002, with existing cases transferring once the new system is shown to be working well.

### Stakeholder Pensions

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's research on businesses' understanding of stakeholder pensions which he referred to on BBC Radio on 6 April. [158686]

**Mr. Darling:** The 2000 Survey of Employers' Pension Provision commissioned by the Department will be completed and published later this year. However, initial findings into employer awareness of stakeholder pensions show that 90 per cent. of firms with more than 12 employees were aware of stakeholder pensions, 60 per cent. of firms with between five and 12 employees were aware, as were more than 50 per cent. of firms with fewer than five employees.

### Pension Credit Consultation

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the results of the pension credit consultation will be placed in the Library. [158691]

**Mr. Rooker:** We will be announcing our response to the pension credit consultation in due course.

### Winter Fuel Payment

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of newly eligible men who made a successful claim for the 2000–01 Winter Fuel Payment by 30 March. [157055]

**Mr. Rooker:** The administration of benefits is a matter for the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency, Alexis Cleveland. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 23 April 2001:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking if he will estimate the number of newly eligible men who made a successful claim for the 2001–01 winter fuel payment by 30th March.

Current records show that we have received over 1 million claims in respect of winter 2000 from men of which around 12,000 were unsuccessful, in the first instance. If a customer feels that the decision on their claim is incorrect they can ask for it to be looked at again. We do not hold statistics on successful claims following such reconsiderations.

Information regarding claims received between 8 March and 30 March is not currently available in the format required.

I hope this is helpful.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Business Questions

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the President of the Council, pursuant to her oral answer of 5 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 502, what the source was of the information pertaining to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning); and if she will make a statement. [158344]

**Mrs. Beckett:** Information was provided by the Labour party.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Prime Minister what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158115]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to then answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Cabinet Office on Monday 23 April, *Official Report*, columns 120–21W.

### Government IT

**Maria Eagle:** To ask the Prime Minister when he will make an announcement about the continuing implementation of the recommendations contained within the "Successful IT: Modernising Government in Action", report. [158890]

**The Prime Minister:** I have decided that ministerial and official responsibility for continuing the implementation of these recommendations will move to HM Treasury and the Office of Government Commerce. This will provide greater synergy with the work that OGC already does with Departments on IT-enabled projects.

It should be clear that both ministerial and official responsibility for the performance of individual projects remains with each Department.

### Lord Birt

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Prime Minister how many reports Lord Birt has submitted to him in his capacity as an adviser on crime; and if he will make a statement. [158280]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the Home Secretary to the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard) on 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 594W.

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions, and on what dates, he has met Lord Birt in his capacity as an adviser on crime; and if he will make a statement about the contribution of Lord Birt to Government policy on crime. [158240]

**The Prime Minister:** As part of his work, Lord Birt has met Ministers and officials from relevant Departments, including myself. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide precise details of all such meetings.

## HEALTH

### Childminders

**Mr. Hinchliffe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many childminders were registered with English local authorities in each year since 1995. [157282]

**Ms Hodge:** I have been asked to reply.

The information about registered childminders is shown in the table. Over the same time period the number of registered day nurseries has increased from 4,800 to 7,100, the number of registered holiday schemes from 2,900 to 9,300 and the number of registered out of school clubs from 1,300 to 3,700.

*Number[1] of registered childminders for children under eight: 1995–2000*

| | *Number of registered childminders*[2] |
|---|---|
| March 1995 | 96,000 |
| March 1996 | 101,300 |
| March 1997 | 97,100 |
| March 1998 | 93,300 |
| March 1999 | 80,000 |
| March 2000 | 74,800 |

[1] These figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.
[2] Excluding childminders provided by the local authority.

The responsibility for day care provision transferred from the Department of Health to the Department for Education and Employment in March 1998.

### Specified Risk Material

**Mr. Dawson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further action he plans to take to ensure that specified risk material does not enter the domestic food chain from abroad. [155834]

**Ms Stuart** *[holding answer 27 March 2001]:* Under European Union single market rules only meat which has been produced in accordance with relevant EU meat hygiene and BSE protection rules may be marketed for human consumption within the EU. These rules include European Commission Decision 2000/418/EC, which requires the removal of specified risk material (SRM) from cattle and sheep carcases at the slaughterhouse. Single market rules do not permit border controls at points of entry in respect of meat imported from other EU member states, although random checks at points of destination are permissible. The importation of fresh meat containing SRM into the United Kingdom from third countries is prohibited by virtue of the SRM Order 1997. Meat imported directly into the UK from a third country is subject to official checks at the border inspection post to ensure that it complies with all relevant EU and national public and animal health requirements.

In the UK such checks have shown that the vast majority of consignments of meat imported from other EU member states have complied with the relevant EU rules. A small number of consignments, however, have been found to contain carcases with small pieces of SRM still attached. The majority of these consignments (12 out of 14) were destroyed with the remaining two returned to the export approved plant in January 2001.

As a result of these findings, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has, in each case, taken up the matter vigorously with the national Government of the exporting country concerned and with the EC. The FSA has also put in place risk-based enhanced checks on meat imported from other EU member states. The Meat Hygiene Service, and its equivalent in Northern Ireland, has been instructed to check all consignments of imported carcase beef originating from those slaughterhouses which have previously exported carcases with SRM still attached. Since half of the findings of SRM have involved meat imported from Germany, the FSA has instructed that every consignment of carcase beef imported from

Germany arriving at a licensed meat plant in the UK must be checked by the relevant authority for the presence of SRM. Local authorities throughout the UK have been advised to make extra checks at meat plants under their supervision known to receive imports of carcase beef, and to check every consignment of carcase beef imported from Germany for the presence of SRM.

In addition, because of the disruption of British meat supplies arising from the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, enforcement authorities have been instructed by the FSA to step up levels of inspection of all types of imported meat, on a risk assessment basis, in order to ensure that all relevant public health requirements are met.

The enhanced checks on meat imported from other EU member states, and the enhanced level of inspection of all imported meat, will be maintained for as long as the FSA considers such measures to be justified. The FSA will continue to monitor the situation.

### Prescription Charges

**Mr. Ian Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will extend exemption from prescription charges to patients who have had an organ transplantation and require lifelong medication. [158069]

**Ms Stuart:** People including those recovering from organ transplants are entitled to free prescriptions if they are aged under 16, or under 19 and in full-time education, or are aged 60 or over, or they (or their partner) are receiving Income Support, income based Jobseeker's Allowance or full tax credit (with net income up to £11,543). They may also claim help under the National Health Service low income scheme. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

**Mr. Oaten:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to provide free prescription charges for people on Incapacity Benefit. [158234]

**Ms Stuart:** No. Incapacity Benefit is not income related and it would not, therefore, be appropriate to extend automatic exemption from prescription charges to recipients of this benefit.

### Orphan Medicinal Products

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the definition is of orphan medicinal products referred to in Chapter 20 of the statement of revenue and expenditure of the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products for 2001. [158355]

**Ms Stuart:** An orphan medicinal product is one used to treat a rare disease. A rare disease is defined by the Regulation (EC No. 141–2000) as one affecting not more than five people per 10,000 in the European Community.

### Nicotine Replacement Therapies

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has collated on the effectiveness of the investment of smoking cessation services set up following the White Paper, "Smoking Kills". [158353]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply that I gave to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on 5 April 2001, *Official Report,* column 267W.

Nicotine replacement therapy, as announced on 14 March, is now available on National Health Service prescription from 17 April in England. This fulfils our commitment made in the NHS Plan last year.

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much public funding has been allocated for *(a)* nicotine replacement therapies and *(b)* bupropian (Zyban), for (i) 2000–01 and (ii) 2001–02. [158343]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) on 26 March 2001, *Official Report,* column 452W.

### Honey

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list cases of honey sold in the United Kingdom found to contain GM pollen. [158503]

**Ms Stuart:** I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that it is not aware of any cases of honey containing genetically modified (GM) pollen on sale in the United Kingdom. Research commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has shown that GM pollen, if present, would represent no more than 0.00000000003g to 0.000000005g in a 500g jar of honey.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish guidance on the public health aspects of disposal of carcases of animals slaughtered as a result of the foot and mouth disease epidemic. [158892]

**Mr. Milburn:** I have today published guidance on measures to minimise the risk to public health from the slaughter and disposal of animals. The guidance will be issued to Regional and Health Authority Directors of Public Health, along with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and military personnel responsible for implementing the policy on slaughter and disposal.

Copies of the guidance are available in the Library.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### School Achievement Awards

**Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools were misinformed by his Department about school achievement awards in England *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each local education authority. [157309]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* The information requested has been placed in the Library.

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answers of 20 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 160–64W, on school achievement awards, which of the schools have since been found not to have been entitled to awards and which schools have been added to the list; and if he will make a statement. [157098]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt) on 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 842W. The information requested has been placed in the Library.

### Learning and Skills Council

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of appointees to *(a)* each Learning and Skills Council and *(b)* Learning and Skills Councils in total have declared political activity for (i) the Labour party, (ii) the Conservative party, (iii) the Liberal Democrats and (iv) other parties. [157508]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* Appointments to the LSC and its local arms have been made through fair and open competition, in accordance with guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA). We have sought to attract applications from individuals with a wide range of appropriate experience, regardless of any political affiliation they may have.

We wrote to all English MPs last year, asking them to encourage suitable candidates to apply. The great majority of applicants for LSC membership and of those appointed as members declared that they were not politically active within the last five years.

Of the 16 members appointed to the national Learning and Skills Council, five (31 per cent.) declared political activity with the Labour party. There were no declarations in respect of other parties.

141 of the 641 people who have been appointed and remain as members of the local Learning and Skills Councils declared political activity. These figures exclude Executive Directors of local Learning and Skills Councils as they were not required to declare political activity when applying for these posts. A breakdown by political party is set out in the table:

| | *Appointed* | *Percentage of politically active members* |
|---|---|---|
| Conservative | 21 | 14.9 |
| Labour | 107 | 75.9 |
| Liberal Democrat | 10 | 7.1 |
| Other | 3 | 2.1 |
| Total | 141 | 100 |

As a percentage success rate, based on the number of applications by party, this breaks down as: 24 per cent. for Labour; 21 per cent. for the Conservatives; 13 per cent. for the Liberal-Democrats; and 12 per cent. for other parties.

The table shows the percentage of appointees to each of the 47 local LSCs who have declared political activity, by party:

| *English region/local LSC area* | *Labour* | *Conservative* | *Liberal Democrat* | *Others* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *North East* | | | | |
| County Durham | 1 (7%) | — | — | 1 (7%) |
| Northumberland | 1 (9%) | — | — | — |
| Tees Valley | 4 (33%) | 1 (8%) | — | — |
| Tyne and Wear | 3 (21%) | — | — | — |
| *East Midlands* | | | | |
| Derbyshire | 6 (46%) | — | — | — |
| Leicestershire | 2 (17%) | 1 (8%) | — | — |
| Lincolnshire and Rutland | 1 (7%) | — | 1 (7%) | 1 (7%) |
| Northamptonshire | 2 (15%) | 1 (8%) | — | — |
| Nottinghamshire | 2 (17%) | — | — | — |
| *Yorkshire and Humberside* | | | | |
| South Yorkshire | 4 (31%) | — | — | — |
| North Yorkshire | — | 2 (15%) | — | — |
| Humberside | 2 (14%) | — | — | — |
| West Yorkshire | 3 (25%) | — | — | — |
| *West Midlands* | | | | |
| Birmingham and Solihull | 4 (31%) | — | — | — |
| The Black Country | 2 (15%) | — | — | — |
| Coventry and Warwickshire | 3 (25%) | — | — | — |
| Herefordshire and Worcestershire | 2 (18%) | — | — | — |
| Shropshire | 2 (17%) | — | 1 (8%) | 1 (8%) |
| Staffordshire | 4 (27%) | — | — | — |

| English region/local LSC area | Labour | Conservative | Liberal Democrat | Others |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *North West* | | | | |
| Cheshire/Warrington | 2 (13%) | — | 1 (7%) | — |
| Cumbria | 2 (13%) | — | — | — |
| Lancashire | 4 (27%) | — | — | — |
| Greater Manchester | 5 (33%) | — | — | — |
| Greater Merseyside | 4 (27%) | — | 1 (7%) | — |
| *South West* | | | | |
| Devon and Cornwall | — | — | 1 (7%) | — |
| Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole | — | — | 2 (14%) | — |
| Gloucestershire | 1 (8%) | — | — | — |
| Somerset | 1 (7%) | 1 (7%) | 1 (7%) | — |
| Wiltshire and Swindon | 1 (8%) | 2 (15%) | 1 (8%) | — |
| The West of England | 2 (14%) | — | — | — |
| *East of England* | | | | |
| Bedfordshire and Luton | 2 (13%) | 1 (7%) | — | — |
| Cambridgeshire | 2 (13%) | — | 1 (7%) | — |
| Essex | 3 (21%) | 2 (14%) | — | — |
| Hertfordshire | 1 (7%) | 1 (7%) | — | — |
| Norfolk | 2 (14%) | 1 (7%) | — | — |
| Suffolk | 4 (29%) | 1 (7%) | — | — |
| *South East* | | | | |
| Berkshire | — | — | — | — |
| Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and IOW | 1 (7%) | — | — | — |
| Kent and Medway | 2 (13%) | 3 (20%) | — | — |
| Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Bucks | 2 (13%) | — | — | — |
| Surrey | 1 (7%) | 1 (7%) | — | — |
| Sussex | 2 (13%) | — | — | — |
| *London* | | | | |
| London Central | 4 (31%) | 2 (15%) | — | — |
| London East | 4 (26%) | — | — | — |
| London North | 2 (14%) | — | — | — |
| London South | 2 (18%) | 1 (9%) | — | — |
| London West | 3 (21%) | — | — | — |
| Total | 107 (75.9%) | 21 (14.9%) | 10 (7.1%) | 3 (2.1%) |

### Education Maintenance Allowance (Camden)

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme in the London borough of Camden; and how many students have taken up the allowance since its introduction. [158019]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* I am pleased to say that the progress of the Education Maintenance Allowance scheme in the London borough of Camden is good with 367 students receiving the allowance. Applications are still being received and these are processed within 48 hours. Over £162,000 has been paid to students this year. This includes end of term attendance bonuses of £7,750.

### Departmental Policies (Cannock Chase)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Cannock Chase constituency, the effects on Cannock Chase of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158068]

**Mr. Wills:** Details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the Cannock Chase constituency and Staffordshire local education authority have been placed in the Library.

### Students (Funding)

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much funding is available to help full-time students who are in financial difficulties *(a)* this year and *(b)* in each of the last five years. [157823]

**Mr. Wicks:** The total amount available through higher education Access and Hardship Funds to help students in financial difficulty in 2000–01 is £87 million, almost four times the amount available in 1997–98. Both full and part-time students are eligible to apply for help, and the total includes £13 million for the fee waiver scheme introduced in 1998 specifically for part-time students on benefit or low incomes. Additionally, since 1998 full-time students have been able to apply for a discretionary Hardship Loan of up to £500 each year.

The Government have made available a range of further education learner support funds for students facing

financial difficulties in further education. Discretionary funding has been massively increased to support the most disadvantaged students. In addition, we are piloting Education Maintenance Allowances (EMAs) in 56 local education authority areas to provide weekly support to further education students assessed on the basis of parental income.

Table 1 shows the amounts available through the higher education Access and Hardship Funds since the 1995–96 academic year. The Funds were doubled in 1998–99 when part-time students became eligible to apply for help. The funding provided to meet fee waivers for part-time students since 1998–99 is separately identified.

Table 2 shows the increase in discretionary funding available to disadvantaged students in further education over the same period.

Table 3 shows the levels of funding made available up to 31 March 2001 for Education Maintenance Allowances. These figures relate to financial years since September 1999, when the pilots began.

*Table 1*

*£ million*

| *Academic year* | *Access and Hardship Fund* | *Fee waivers for part-time students* |
|---|---|---|
| 1995–96 | 22 | — |
| 1996–97 | 22 | — |
| 1997–98 | 22 | — |
| 1998–99 | 46 | 2 |
| 1999–2000 | 75 | 12 |
| 2000–01 | 87 | 13 |

*Table 2*

*£ million*

| *Academic year* | *Discretionary funding* |
|---|---|
| 1995–96 | 6 |
| 1996–97 | 6 |
| 1997–98 | 6 |
| 1998–99 | 13 |
| 1999–2000 | 53 |
| 2000–01 | 101 |

*Table 3*

*£ million*

| *Financial year* | *Education maintenance allowances* |
|---|---|
| 1999–2000 | 11 |
| 2000–01 | 81 |

## Nursery Vouchers

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he has taken to inform parents of the availability of nursery vouchers; how they may be applied for; and if he will make a statement. [158465]

**Ms Hodge** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Nursery education vouchers were replaced in 1997 by a system of payments to nursery education providers. This system emphasises co-operation, rather than competition, between providers and is a more effective way of ensuring parents have access to the nursery education they want for their children.

All four-year-olds have had access to a free nursery education place since September 1998. From September 2004, all three-year-olds will be entitled to a free nursery education place. Total spending on nursery education will double from £1 billion in 1996–97 to £2 billion by 2003–04. It is intended to fund 200,000 more free places for three and four-year-olds in 2001–02 than in 1997–98.

To help parents choose suitable nursery education, they can obtain information about the early education and childcare provision in their area by contacting their local Childcare Information Service. There is also the ChildcareLink national freephone information line (0800 096 0296) and a website www.childcarelink.gov.uk from which parents can obtain details of provision in England and Scotland. We are also working with several major retailers and other organisations to enable parents to access this information in public places.

## Pre-school Groups

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many pre-school groups there were in *(a)* West Sussex and *(b)* the Chichester parliamentary constituency in 1997; and how many there are at present. [158594]

**Ms Hodge:** Data on pre-school groups are not available at constituency level. In March 1997 there were 353 registered pre-school groups in the West Sussex area and in March 2000 there were 309. In the light of changing patterns of demand, many pre-school groups are diversifying and expanding their provision into daycare and nursery education

Over the same time period the number of registered day nurseries has increased from 79 to 90, the number of registered holiday schemes from 66 to 213 and the number of registered out of school clubs from 31 to 66. Free nursery education places for three and four-year-olds have increased from 8,245 in 1997 to 9,501 in 2001.

£300 million is being made available nationally between April 2001 and March 2004 for the creation of new Neighbourhood Nursery centres in disadvantaged areas and many pre-schools may want to take advantage of this. We are making £986 million available over the years 2001–02 to 2003–04 for the provision of free nursery education places for three-year-olds, and other early years initiatives. Playgroups, along with other early education providers will benefit from this expansion. In addition, £6 million in capital between 2002–04 and

£4 million in revenue this year is also being made available specifically to help playgroups and maintained schools expand into childcare.

We have also made available a total of £1.75 million in the three-year period 1998–2000 for special grants to voluntary pre-schools and playgroups facing short-term financial difficulties, to give them breathing space to consider their longer term plans. To date over 2,000 pre-schools and playgroups have received grants.

### Bonded Labour

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the Government's planned approach to the United Nations International Labour Organisation meeting on bonded labour in June. [158284]

**Ms Jowell:** The Government fully support the ILO's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up. We actively encourage member states to fulfil their obligations and work towards ratifying and implementing the provisions of the Conventions covered by the Declaration which include the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour, including bonded labour, the subject of the June Conference discussion.

**Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the Government will support the setting up of the monitoring unit for bonded labour under the International Labour Organisation Technical Co-operation Unit. [158119]

**Ms Jowell:** The Government fully support the follow-up process to the International Labour Organisation (ILO)'s Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. We actively encourage member states to fulfil their obligations and work towards ratifying and implementing the provisions of the Conventions covered by the Declaration including those on forced and bonded labour.

### Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158111]

**Mr. Wills:** There is no such limit placed on appointments to public bodies in this Department.

### Full-time Education (Wiltshire)

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the percentage of 16-year-olds in full-time education was in Wiltshire in 1999. [157789]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* At the heart of our drive to improve participation and attainment is the new Connexions Service which is being phased in from this month. The service will provide information, advice, support and access to personal development opportunities for all 13 to 19-year-olds, whatever their needs and circumstances, to keep them learning. Latest figures show that the numbers of 16 to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training in England fell by 28,000 from 185,000 in 1998 to 157,000 in 1999.

Participation rates by LEA for 16 and 17-year-olds are published in Statistical Bulletin 11/00: Participation in education and training by young people aged 16 and 17 in each local area and region, England, 1994–95 to 1998–99.

The percentage of 16-year-olds in full-time education in Wiltshire local education authority was 73 per cent. in 1998–99, the latest year for which figures are available.

### Further Education (Burnley)

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children have gone on to *(a)* higher education and *(b)* further education since leaving secondary school in Burnley in the latest year for which figures are available. [158398]

**Mr. Wicks:** At the heart of our drive to improve participation and attainment is the new Connexions Service which is being phased in from this month. The service will provide information, advice, support and access to personal development opportunities for all 13 to 19-year-olds, whatever their needs and circumstances, to keep them learning. Latest figures show that the numbers of 16 to 18-year-olds not in education, employment or training in England fell by 28,000 from 185,000 in 1998 to 157,000 in 1999.

Data on the percentage of students continuing in post-compulsory education at age 16 are not calculated for areas smaller than LEAs. Participation rates by LEA for 16 and 17-year-olds are published in Statistical Bulletin 11/00: Participation in education and training by young people aged 16 and 17 in each local area and region, England, 1994–95 to 1998–99.

The percentage of 16-year-olds in further education for Lancashire LEA, which includes the constituency of Burnley, was 76 per cent. in 1998–99, the latest year for which figures are available.

Figures for the number of school leavers from Burnley who go on to higher education are not available centrally.

### Education Investment

**Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the average total education investment per state school pupil was in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001; and what he estimates it will be in (i) 2002 and (ii) 2003. [158124]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** The information requested is set out in the table.

£

| *Financial year* | *Per pupil funding in cash terms* | *Per pupil funding in real terms* | *Year on year increase* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1999–2000[1] | 2,860 | 2,860 | — |
| 2000–01[2] | 3,110 | 3,050 | 190 |
| 2001–02[3] | 3,390 | 3,250 | 200 |
| 2002–03[3] | 3,610 | 3,380 | 130 |

[1] Actual
[2] Provisional
[3] Planned

## WALES

### Gross Domestic Product

**Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will present figures for the gross domestic product per head at basic prices in Wales in *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000 on the same basis as that used in table 5.29 of the 2000 edition of "Social Trends". [155457]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** The figures in table 5.29 of the 2000 edition of Social Trends are at factor cost. More recent figures are calculated at basic prices and reflect changes in the European System of Accounts used in calculating gross domestic product. Figures for 1989 up to 1999 at basic prices were published on 27 February 2001 in the Office for National Statistics news release "Regional gross domestic product" and are available in the March 2001 edition of "Economic Trends", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. Figures for the year 2000 will be published on the same basis during the Spring.

### Single Rail Franchise

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions regarding the commencement date for the single rail franchise for Wales; and if he will make a statement. [158095]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** I have regular discussions with my Cabinet colleagues about a range of issues affecting Wales.

On 15 February, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) announced that Arriva plc in conjunction with Connex Transport UK Limited, FirstGroup plc, National Express Group plc, and Serco Rail had been shortlisted to compete for the Wales and Borders franchise. It will be for the SRA to determine a commencement date for the franchise.

### Waste Recycling (Wales)

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much of Wales' waste has been recycled for each of the last five years. [156349]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** Figures for Wales alone are available only in respect of municipal waste. These are as follows:

1996/97—4 per cent.

1997/98—4 per cent.

1998/99—5 per cent.

Information on recycling since 1 July 1999 is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

### Departmental Policies

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Ynys Môn constituency, the effects on Ynys Môn of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997; [154962]

(2) if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Caernarfon constituency, the effects on Caernarfon of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997; [154964]

(3) if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Meirionnydd Nant Conwy constituency, the effects on Meirionnydd Nant Conwy of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154965]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** As these questions were originally addressed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, my response concentrates on the effects of my Department's policies and actions on health services prior to 1 July 1999, when responsibility for their provision transferred to the National Assembly for Wales.

Because of the way in which health services are organised, it is not practicable to provide information which is specific to individual constituencies. The timing of financial and statistical exercises also means that some of the figures quoted relate to periods ending shortly before or shortly after 30 June 1999.

In October 1997, an additional £2.2 million was made available to North Wales health authority, over and above its financial allocation for the year, to provide enhanced patient care. The authority's basic allocation for 1998–99, at £381.3 million, represented a year-on-year cash increase of £13.6 million. This was further enhanced by £4.1 million in April 1998 to address waiting list issues, and £2.6 million in November for dealing with winter pressures.

Between annual counts taken in September 1997 and September 1999, the number of directly employed NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff in the area of the North Wales health authority increased by 267.4 in full-time equivalent terms. Over the same period, medical and dental staff increased by 29.8.

Health services in these constituencies will also have benefited from a range of important all-Wales policy initiatives which were developed between May 1997 and June 1999. These include:

Delivering Care-Meeting Need—a comprehensive package of measures for primary and community health care (1997);

Putting Patients First—which promoted a series of reforms for the NHS in Wales, such as the abolition of the internal market and GP fundholding, and the introduction of new structures such as Local Health Groups and Health Improvement Programmes (1998);

Better Health, Better Wales—a strategy for improving public health (1998);

Quality Care and Clinical Excellence—a programme for clinical effectiveness (1998);

Reconfiguration of NHS Trusts—a programme of mergers which reduced the total number of NHS Trusts from 29 to 16 (1999).

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Ceredigion constituency, the effects on Ceredigion of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [154963]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** As this question was originally addressed to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, my response concentrates on the effects of my

Department's policies and actions on health services prior to 1 July 1999, when responsibility for their provision transferred to the National Assembly for Wales.

Because of the way in which health services are organised, it is not practicable to provide information which is specific to an individual constituency. The timing of financial and statistical exercises also means that some of the figures quoted relate to periods ending shortly before or shortly after 30 June 1999.

In October 1997, an additional £1.8 million was made available to Dyfed Powys health authority, over and above its financial allocation for the year, to provide enhanced patient care. The authority's basic allocation for 1998–99, at £283.4 million, represented a year-on-year cash increase of £9.6 million. This was further enhanced by £3.0 million in April 1998 to address waiting list issues, and £1.9 million in November for dealing with winter pressures.

Between annual counts taken in September 1997 and September 1999, the number of directly employed NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff in the area of the Dyfed Powys health authority increased by 20.9 in full-time equivalent terms. Over the same period, medical and dental staff increased by 28.3.

Health services in Ceredigion will also have benefited from a range of important all-Wales policy initiatives which were developed between May 1997 and June 1999. These included:

Delivering Care—Meeting Need—a comprehensive package of measures for primary and community health care (1997);

Putting Patients First—which promoted a series of reforms for the NHS in Wales, such as the abolition of the internal market and GP fundholding, and the introduction of new structures such as local health groups and health improvement programmes (1998);

Better Health, Better Wales—a strategy for improving public health (1998);

Quality Care and Clinical Excellence—a programme for clinical effectiveness (1998);

Reconfiguration of NHS Trusts—a programme of mergers which reduced the total number of NHS Trusts from 29 to 16 (1999).

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Cosmetics (Animal Testing)

**Mr. Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government support a ban on the sale of cosmetics tested on animals. [158496]

**Dr. Howells** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The Government are seriously committed to ensuring the protection of animal welfare and to improving animal welfare standards. Currently the UK has a voluntary ban on animal testing for cosmetic products. The proposed 7th Amendment to the Cosmetics Directive introduces a mandatory testing ban on cosmetic products and their ingredients throughout the European Union. If adopted, it will help advance the protection of animal welfare in every member state of the European Union.

### Miners' Compensation

**Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many widows are awaiting their claims to be resolved for their late husbands' mining compensation scheme for *(a)* Barnsley and *(b)* Doncaster. [158195]

**Mr. Hain:** To date, in the Barnsley area, as defined by the postcodes S70, S72 and S73, there are 644 claims associated with miners' widows. A bereavement award is made in cases where the death certificate cites one of the following eight qualifying descriptors: emphysema; chronic obstructive airways disease; chronic obstructive lung disease; chronic airways disease; chronic airflow limitation; chronic airflow obstruction; chronic bronchitis; chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. These qualifying conditions were agreed between the Department and the solicitors representing the claimants. In Barnsley, 188 widows have received bereavement awards, totalling £1.6 million.

In the Doncaster areas, as defined by the postcodes DN1, DN3–5 and DN9, there have been 269 claims in relation to miners' widows. Of these 184 have received bereavement awards totalling £1.5 million.

**Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the medical assessment rate per month is for claims that are waiting to be completed for the miners' compensation scheme for *(a)* Barnsley and *(b)* Doncaster. [158194]

**Mr. Hain:** Claimants are usually invited to attend an appointment to undergo the Medical Assessment Procedure, MAP, at a centre within a 25-mile radius of their residence. In the Barnsley area, as defined by the postcodes S70, S72, S73 and S75, there is a test centre serving residents and the surrounding 25-mile region. Claimants residing in Doncaster are served by centres in Huddersfield, Leeds, Mexborough, Pontefract and Sheffield. Each centre, when fully resourced with a respiratory specialist, lung function technician and administration staff, is capable of carrying out a minimum of 20 appointments per week, 40 in the case of Barnsley. The table shows the number of MAPs undertaken and appointments booked to date at each centre:

| *Test centre* | *MAPs undertaken* | *Appointments booked* |
|---|---|---|
| Barnsley | 523 | 163 |
| Leeds | 284 | 3 |
| Huddersfield | 37 | 6 |
| Mexborough | 408 | 181 |
| Sheffield | 443 | 115 |
| Pontefract | 586 | 214 |

The number of MAPs undertaken per week depends largely on the availability of respiratory specialists. Over the next three months, two new respiratory specialists working a minimum of 10 sessions per week each are scheduled to start work in Yorkshire and north-east England. Three more specialists working between six and 10 sessions per week each are also scheduled to start over this period.

**Mr. Denis Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much compensation has been paid to miners, ex-miners and miners' families in respect of chronic bronchitis and emphysema in the Wansbeck constituency. [158460]

**Mr. Hain:** To date, IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have registered 2,315 claimants in the Wansbeck constituency, as defined by the postcodes NE22 and

NE61–64. There have been 524 individual payments, including interims and full and final settlements, totalling £2.1 million.

### Offshore Windfarms

**Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of United Kingdom electricity generation is expected to be represented by the offshore windfarm sites announced on 6 April. [158135]

**Mr. Hain:** Depending on the proportion which go ahead and their capacity, these initial projects might contribute around 1 per cent. of UK electricity generation by 2010.

### Trading Standards (Test Purchases)

**Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with other Government departments on the use of children of compulsory school age in undertaking test purchasing on behalf of local authority trading standards departments during school hours; and if he will make a statement. [158494]

**Dr. Howells:** I have had no discussions with other Government Departments on this matter. However, as Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs I have always made it clear that the primary responsibility for avoiding illegal sales to children rests with retailers. They need to be aware of their legal obligations, and can help themselves to stay within the law by displaying notices detailing age restrictions; by asking a person's age if they have even the slightest doubt; and by being more ready to insist on seeing some form of proof of age.

### Nuclear Power

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government are taking to reduce the contribution of nuclear power to generating electricity as a proportion of the United Kingdom's energy supply. [158655]

**Mr. Hain** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The Government have no plans to reduce the contribution of nuclear power to the nation's electricity supply needs. Generators can continue to operate nuclear plant as long as it remains safe and economical to do so.

### MOX Fuel

**Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the notifications he has received from BNFL of contracts secured for the importation of irradiated MOX fuel for each of the last 10 years, in each case indicating *(a)* the originating company and country and *(b)* the quantity of material. [158412]

**Mr. Hain:** BNFL provides information to DTI, as its shareholder, about the company's commercial activities, including new contracts.

Since 1990, BNFL has concluded reprocessing contracts with customers in Europe which include provision for a proportion of the fuel to be reprocessed to be MOX. The details and quantities of individual contracts are commercial matters for BNFL and its customers.

**Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the applications he has received from BNFL in each of the last 10 years for the reprocessing of irradiated MOX fuel, in each case indicating *(a)* the originating company and country and *(b)* the quantity of material and the decision he has made on the application. [158413]

**Mr. Hain:** My Department has received no such applications. BNFL will need to satisfy the relevant regulators before reprocessing irradiated MOX.

## TREASURY

### Minimum Wage (Witney)

**Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* employees and *(b)* women in Witney have had their pay increased as a result of the minimum wage. [158123]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Shaun Woodward, dated 24 April 2001:*

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of employees and women in Witney who have had their pay increased as a result of the national minimum wage (NMW) (158123).

The Office for National Statistics has published estimates of the number of jobs paid at less than NMW rates for 1998, 1999, and 2000. These include estimates for the UK broken down by gender. These estimates are based on an improved methodology using data from the New Earnings Survey (NES) and Labour Force Survey (LFS). This methodology provides the best estimates for the number of jobs in the UK paid below low hourly rate thresholds and was developed to overcome the deficiencies inherent in using the NES and LFS separately for measuring low pay.

Estimates for the United Kingdom and Government Office Regions are posted on the National Statistics website at: www.statistics.gov.uk/nsbase/themes/labour_market/nmw_lowpay_tables.asp

Estimates for Parliamentary Constituencies of numbers of jobs paid below NMW rates are not available on the basis of the methodology applied for producing the national and regional level figures.

### Agricultural Suicides

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many suicides there have been of individuals identified with the agricultural industry in each month since January 2000; and if he will make a statement. [158719]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Lembit Öpik, dated 24 April 2001:*

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of suicides of those identified with the agriculture industry in each month since January 2000 (158719).

The figures requested are not yet available. Two sets of annual mortality data are routinely released each year. Figures for deaths registered during 2000 are due to be published in May 2001. Figures for deaths which occurred during 2000 are due to be published in October 2001. For some deaths, including suicides, where the death

has been referred to the coroner, there is a delay between the occurrence of the death and the subsequent registration. As a result of this delay, figures based on registration data do not provide an accurate indication of the number of suicides which occur each month.

### Church Repairs (VAT)

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of churches which will benefit from the reduced rate of VAT on church repairs; and if he will make a statement. [158764]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Government are introducing a new grant scheme for listed buildings used as places of worship.

Accurate information on numbers of potential beneficiaries is not available.

### Child Poverty

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the calculations on which the Government's claim that around 1 million children may have been lifted out of poverty since 1997 is based. [158694]

**Dawn Primarolo:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 14 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 609W, and to the answer given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 19 May 2000, *Official Report*, column 296W.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 526W, on Working Families Tax Credit, if he will waive the requirement that reviews are six months apart for those affected by foot and mouth disease. [158575]

**Dawn Primarolo:** Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) is designed to provide medium to longer-term support for working families. Awards are based on the family's normal weekly income and last for 26 weeks. These basic rules keep the system simple and provide families with the security of a guaranteed and regular source of income for a substantial period. They are the basis of the current system, which provides much valued support to 1.17 million working families.

### Landfill Tax

**Mr. Beith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many registered environmental bodies *(a)* have and *(b)* have not made landfill tax grants in respect of the conservation of buildings, including places of worship. [R] [158408]

**Mr. Timms:** The regulator of the Landfill Tax Environmental Bodies Credit Scheme, ENTRUST, records details reported by the enrolled environmental bodies (EBs) of the expenditure against the various objects of the scheme. Object E covers restoring and repairing buildings which are for religious worship, or of architectural or historical interest. 270 EBs have reported spending contributions on object E projects and 2,164 EBs have not.

### Village Halls (Climate Change Levy)

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the application of *(a)* VAT and *(b)* the climate change levy on activities in village halls. [158464]

**Dawn Primarolo** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The activities of a village hall are generally business and are subject to the normal VAT rules. Climate change levy is not charged on the domestic use of energy or non-business use by charities.

## DEFENCE

### Pay and Personnel Agency

**Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Pay and Personnel Agency for 2001–02. [158795]

**Dr. Moonie:** The chief executive of the Pay and Personnel Agency (PPA) is responsible for providing pay and personnel information services for the Ministry of Defence as defined in the agency framework document. During 2001–02 the PPA will be set the following challenging key performance targets.

1. To make 100 per cent. of all payments to staff by the due date (excluding late payments caused by invalid claims or late notification outside the control of the Agency).
2. To keep error rates within the following limits:

   six per 1,000 payments of industrial and non-industrial pay

   15 per 1,000 awards for pensions

   five per 1,000 payments of expenses.
3. By 31 March 2002 to have set up a Customer Service Centre covering 70 per cent. of PPA business operations.
4. By 31 March 2002 to have provided direct access for customers through their communication channel of choice.
5. By 31 March 2002 to have provided customers with electronic input for the eight most often used forms.
6. To answer 95 per cent. of written complaints within 20 working days of receipt.
7. To constrain expenditure on the business tasks of the Agency within the funding for those tasks agreed between DUS(CM) and PPA in their Service Level Agreement.
8. To gain approval for a costed customer service improvement programme which delivers better value for the MOD.

### Defence Estate

**Mr. Russell Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress his Department has made towards meetings its targets for the disposal of surplus property from the Defence Estate. [158796]

**Dr. Moonie:** In the financial year 2000–01 the Ministry of Defence achieved receipts amounting to £209 million from the disposal of surplus land. Although less than the record £287 million achieved in 1999–2000, this is a significant contribution to the achievement of the target set in the Strategic Defence Review of property disposals amounting to £700 million by 2002, and to the wider target set in Spending Review 2000 of disposals of over £600 million of assets by March 2004.

### Joint Strike Fighter

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will enumerate the items on which the £600 million to be expended on UK specific requirements for the Joint Strike Fighter are to be spent. [157734]

**Mr. Hoon:** The items on which the £600 million is to be spent are: procurement of weapons and their supply to the US Engineering and Manufacturing Development Prime Contractor for test purposes in support of design activities for the integration of the UK weapons currently identified as initial fit requirements; ensuring JSF is fully operable in the UK and NATO Command, Control, Communications, Computers and Intelligence environments; compliance with UK aircraft and weapons safety, environmental and acceptance processes, and integration design activities and supply of weapons for test purposes for post-initial fit UK weapons.

### Warships

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which major mechanical faults have been reported on Royal Navy warships in each of the past three years; and which Royal Navy vessels have been involved in *(a)* collisions with other vessels and *(b)* groundings in each of the past three years. [157743]

**Mr. Spellar:** Details of those defects relating specifically to major mechanical faults in each of the past three years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Royal Navy vessels involved in collisions with other vessels, and those vessels involved in groundings, in each of the past three years are shown in the table. There were no reported groundings during 1999.

| *Collisions* | *Groundings* |
|---|---|
| *2000* | |
| HMS Guernsy | HMS Raider |
| HMS Grimsby | HMS Sandown |
| RFA Fort Victoria/RFA Sir Bedivere | HMS Grafton |
| LCVP (HMS Ocean) | HMS Triumph |
| HMS Manchester | HMS Victorious |
| HMS Puncher | |
| *1999* | |
| HMS Endurance | |
| HMS Chidingford/HMS Nottingham | |
| HMS Ranger | |
| HMS Cardiff | |
| HMS Bristol | |
| HMS Pembroke | |
| HMS Tracker | |
| HMS Shetland | |
| *1998* | |
| HMS Manchester | RFA Black Rover |
| HMS Cornwall | RFA Sir Galahad |
| HMS Exploit | |

### Missile Defence Systems

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence further to his answer of 3 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 110–11W, on missile defence systems, if he will publish a report on the progress of the Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme. [158075]

**Mr. Hoon:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 293W.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence further to his answer of 3 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 111W, on national missile defence, for what reason it is premature to decide to acquire a ballistic missile defence for UK territory or forces deployed overseas. [158076]

**Mr. Hoon:** Our current judgment that it would be premature to decide on acquiring a ballistic missile defence capability for either UK territory or forces deployed overseas is based on our assessment of the threat, the rapidity with which relevant defensive technologies are changing, and the need to evaluate further the potential role of missile defences as one element of a broad-ranging defence response to missile proliferation.

### Type 45 Destroyer

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the Type 45 destroyers will be provided with *(a)* Phalanx and *(b)* another close-in range defensive capability; and if he will make a statement; [157731]

(2) what lessons he has drawn for the capability and assessment of the Royal Navy's Type 45 destroyers from the USS Winston Churchill; and if he will make a statement; [157733]

(3) if the Type 45 destroyer will be provided with *(a)* an anti-ship and *(b)* a land attack capability; and if he will make a statement; [157748]

(4) if the Type 45 destroyers will be provided with anti-submarine armament other than the torpedoes carried by their Lynx helicopter; and if he will make a statement. [157732]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Type 45 destroyer is primarily intended to provide effective area air defence against aircraft and missiles and will be equipped with the world-beating Principal Anti-Air Missile System. This will provide the Royal Navy with a significant increase in capability from the outset when it comes into service in 2007. In accordance with Smart acquisition practice, the Type 45 has been designed so that its capability can be upgraded throughout its life to take advantage of changes in defence requirements and technological advances.

In addition to its primary role, the Type 45 will have an anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capability. Details of this capability were provided in answer to an earlier

question raised by the hon. Member on 30 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 98W. It includes sonar, Lynx HMA Mk 8 helicopter carrying Stingray anti-submarine torpedoes, Ship Surface Torpedo Defence System (SSTD) towed and expendable acoustic decoys and, in the longer term, enhanced SSTD countermeasures. Should additional ASW armament be required to that provided by the Stingray torpedoes carried by the Lynx helicopter, the Type 45 design allows for the later fitting of a double-tubed Magazine Torpedo Launch System.

The Type 45's anti-surface ship capability will be provided by the Sea Skua missile, fitted to its Lynx helicopter, together with the ship's medium range gunnery system, the 4.5" Mk 8 Mod 1 gun, and two 30 mm guns. The Type 45 design also allows for the fitting of a Surface to Surface Guided Weapon.

To provide a close range defensive capability, it is planned to fit Phalanx Close-In Weapon Systems to each Type 45. Should the requirement for the Type 45 class to have a land attack capability arise, provision has also been made in Type 45 designs either for fitting a Vertical Launch System for missiles, or for a larger calibre gun to be used.

Through our close collaboration with the United States, we naturally look to see what lessons can be drawn from their equipment procurement and operating experience, including that of ships such as the USS Winston Churchill and its systems.

### NewDERA

**Mr. Bruce George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost was of the new name and logo selected for NewDERA. [157333]

**Mr. Hoon:** DERA announced on 5 April that its new name, when it becomes a plc in July, will be QinetiQ. The name will also serve as a logo.

The process for generating and deciding on a new name cost £42,000. The design work needed to devise an associated corporate identity for all areas of NewDERA where the name will be used has cost a further £365,000.

The application of this design work to new stationery, signs, marketing literature, etc. is still on-going with a view to formal introduction when the plc is formed on 1 July.

It is too early to calculate the final cost of this. It is important to note, however, that even if the name had not been changed, such work would in any case have been required in order to adapt NewDERA to its new status as a plc.

### Submarine Communications

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he intends to provide the Royal Navy submarine fleet with an extra high frequency communications capability compatible and interoperable with that now used by the US Navy in their submarine communications; and if he will make a statement. [157737]

**Mr. Spellar:** The Ministry of Defence has identified a requirement for the Royal Navy's submarine fleet to be fitted with a satellite communications capability that is compatible and interoperable with the US Navy's next generation Extremely High Frequency (EHF) system. Options to meet the requirement are being evaluated as part of the SKYNET 5 programme.

Related studies to address the integration of EHF satellite communications terminals into submarines are just getting under way.

### India

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings he has had with his Indian counterpart in the past year. [157745]

**Mr. Hoon:** George Fernandes, the former Indian Defence Minister, and I met on two occasions in the past year. Our first meeting was during his official visit to the UK in June 2000, the second was during my visit to India last December as a guest of the Indian Government.

I have also met the new Defence Minister, Jaswant Singh, three times in the past year, in his capacity as Foreign Minister.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Ministry of Defence staff are based in India in connection with procurement and disposal programmes. [157747]

**Mr. Hoon:** Service and civilian Ministry of Defence staff based at the British High Commission in New Delhi have a role in promoting UK procurement and disposal programmes as a part of their wider responsibilities.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many visits have been made by Defence Procurement Agency personnel to India in the past two years. [157744]

**Mr. Hoon:** During the period 6 April 1999 to 5 April 2001, no duty visits were made by Defence Procurement Agency personnel to India.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which former Royal Navy warships are in service with the Indian Navy; and what the date was of their commission into the Royal Navy. [157746]

**Mr. Spellar:** There are two former RN ships currently in service with the Indian Navy. They are:

(i) Ex HMS Hermes (renamed INS Viraat), a Hermes Class aircraft carrier.

(ii) Ex HMS Andromeda (renamed INS Krishna), a Leander Class frigate that was converted to a Training Ship for IN operations.

HMS Hermes and HMS Andromeda were originally commissioned into RN service in November 1959 and December 1968 respectively.

### Future Aircraft Carriers

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what implications further delay in the down select for the Joint Strike Fighter would have on *(a)* the timings and *(b)* the cost of the development and construction of the two future aircraft carriers for the Royal Navy; and if he will make a statement. [157735]

**Mr. Hoon:** The procurement strategy for the carriers has been designed to ensure coherency with the future carrier borne aircraft project, and the decision on the selection of a JSF variant. The time and cost implications for the future aircraft carrier programme of a delay in the down select of the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) would depend on the nature and length of any delay, and an assessment of its likely impact on both programmes.

### Eurofighter

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will place the orders for the *(a)* second batch and *(b)* third batch of the Eurofighter within the planned total of 232 aircraft. [157719]

**Mr. Hoon:** We currently plan to place orders for the second and third tranches of Eurofighter aircraft in 2003 and 2007 respectively.

### Link 16

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to install Link 16 in naval and air platforms; and what the projected in-service dates are for each aircraft type and class of vessel. [157727]

**Mr. Spellar:** Link 16 is already in service on the Tornado F3 and Sentry E3D aircraft, and the UK Air Defence Ground Environment. Additionally, on current plans, we will install Link 16 in several in-service naval and air platforms as follows:

| *In-service platform* | *ISD with Link 16* |
|---|---|
| Type 42 destroyer (Batch 2 and 3) | 2004 |
| CVS (Invincible Class) | 2004 |
| Sea King AEW | 2002 |
| Nimrod (R) | 2003 |
| Sea Harrier FA2 | 2004 |

Major new naval and air platforms, such as Eurofighter and the Type 45 destroyer, will be provided with situational awareness through secure tactical data links, in many cases by installing Link 16.

### Nuclear Submarines

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy SSNs are operational; and if he will make a statement. [157736]

**Mr. Spellar:** HMS Triumph is currently operational. HMS Tireless is expected to return to operational status in May and HMS Superb is due to return to operational status in June.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects HMS Tireless to be operational; and if he will make a statement. [157750]

**Mr. Spellar:** HMS Tireless is expected to return to operations in May.

### HMS Valiant

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy personnel are tasked with the maintenance of HMS Valiant. [157739]

**Mr. Spellar:** HMS Valiant has currently 18 staff. Not only do the ship's staff carry out routine maintenance work and safety checks but they are also responsible for the continuous security of the submarine.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future role of HMS Valiant. [157738]

**Mr. Spellar:** HMS Valiant has been decommissioned from the Royal Navy and will be stored afloat at Devonport.

### HMS Norfolk

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which private contractors are involved in the maintenance of the main gun armament of HMS Norfolk; what role Royal Navy personnel will have in the maintenance and repair of the gun system; and if he will make a statement. [157740]

**Mr. Spellar:** BAE Systems are responsible for the majority of support but routine on board maintenance and repair work of the 4.5 inch MK8 Mod 1 gun fitted to HMS Norfolk will be undertaken by suitably trained RN personnel.

### Rosyth

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what Royal Navy maintenance and refit work is under way at Rosyth; and what work is scheduled to be undertaken at Rosyth over the next three years. [157742]

**Mr. Spellar:** HMS Sceptre, HMS Spartan, HMS Ark Royal, HMS Liverpool, HMS Atherstone, HMS Sandown and HMS Inverness are currently undergoing maintenance and refit work at Rosyth Royal Dockyard. We recently announced the intention to contract with the dockyard owners for the refits of five Type 23 Frigates, all of which are planned to start during the next three years. In addition, on current plans for the next three years, work is also scheduled to be undertaken on: HMS Illustrious, HMS Invincible, HMS Ledbury, HMS Brecon, HMS Cottesmore, HMS Dulverton, HMS Inverness, HMS Bridport and HMS Dumbarton Castle.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the implications are for the defence budget of his Department's contribution to meeting the foot and mouth emergency; and if he will make a statement. [157728]

**Mr. Spellar:** There are no significant implications for the defence budget arising from the support the armed forces are giving to MAFF during the current foot and mouth outbreak. It is normal practice when assistance is given to other Government Departments that additional costs will be refunded to the defence budget at the end of the crisis. The Ministry of Defence costs of combating the disease are, however, expected to be minor in comparison with the overall cost of fighting the disease.

### Sonar 2076

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Sonar 2076 will be available for the first of

class of the Astute class submarines from the date of entry into service; and if it will provide the full stipulated military capability. [157730]

**Dr. Moonie:** The prime contractor, BAE Systems, has selected Sonar 2076 for Astute and it will be fitted to the first of class, HMS Astute, for its sea trials in 2004–05. Sonar 2076 is part of an incremental acquisition programme and will provide Astute with the full stipulated military capability.

### Fishery Protection Patrols

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact on the frequency and duration of fishery protection patrols following the replacement of Island class patrol vessels by future offshore patrol vessels. [157741]

**Mr. Spellar:** Subject to the satisfactory outcome of detailed discussions with the preferred bidder, Vosper Thornycroft (UK) Ltd., the Ministry of Defence would expect to be in a position shortly to place a contract for the lease of three future offshore patrol vessels to progressively replace the current Island class vessels from September 2002. Because of their higher availability, the three replacement FOPVs will provide identical fishery protection patrol frequency and duration to that which is currently carried out by the five Island class vessels.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Know How Fund

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which countries have received assistance from the know how fund during the last 12 months. [158735]

**Clare Short:** The know how fund was the name by which the programme in central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union managed jointly by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the former Overseas Development Administration was generally known. Since May 1997 the programme has been managed by the Department for International Development (DFID) in the same way as other DFID programmes.

In the last 12 months those countries that have received DFID assistance are Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Serbia and Montenegro, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Belarus. We have also assisted Kosovo, which is administered by the United Nations.

### Myanmar

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, what assistance she has made for the condition of internally displaced people in Myanmar. [157902]

**Clare Short:** The situation for internally displaced people in Myanmar remains extremely vulnerable. Many of these people have taken refuge in remote, inaccessible and politically sensitive areas, making it difficult to conduct any detailed humanitarian assessment of their situation.

We are currently funding an international non-governmental organisation, Health Unlimited, to meet the emergency needs of displaced people in Kachin State, and we are providing core funding for United Nations humanitarian agencies and the Red Cross movement working inside Myanmar. Those agencies provide us with valuable information on the condition of internally displaced people in the country. In addition, my officials plan to visit the region in the coming months to look at the humanitarian situation in Myanmar and on the Thai/Myanmar border in more detail.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Departmental Policies (High Peak)

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the High Peak constituency of his Department's policies and actions since May 1997. [156779]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** Since May 1997 my Department has introduced and developed a variety of initiatives which will impact on my hon. Friend's constituency which promote our objectives of access, excellence, education, and creativity and employment. We have published strategies to take this forward including Tomorrow's Tourism and A Sporting Future for All, which was recently followed up by The Government's Plan for Sport. We have tackled the issue of social inclusion taking forward the recommendations of Policy Action Team 10 on Arts and Sport and developing social inclusion policies across all our areas which is recognised within the most recent progress report, Building on PAT10.

We have given more support to the cultural and sporting infrastructure. The Spending Review 2000 secured a doubling of the budget for sport and the largest ever increase for the arts: an increase of 80 per cent. from £186 million in 1997–98 to £336 million in 2003–04. In taking forward our aim to develop the educational potential of culture and sport £40 million has been allocated to developing Creative Partnerships; we have established through lottery funding the £30 million National Foundation for Youth Music; and secured an additional £130 million for primary schools sports and arts facilities through the Space for Sport and the Arts programme. With £120 million of central Government and Lottery funding we will be providing a school sports co-ordinator in one in four secondary schools to work with local primary and special schools to improve sporting provision and physical education for children in the most deprived areas. We have delivered free access to national museums for children and the over-60s and additional money will be provided to allow this to be extended to everyone in December 2001. We have commissioned a taskforce which is currently considering the issues facing non-national museums in the regions.

We have made improvements in the way the Lottery is spent to ensure a fairer distribution. The introduction of the New Opportunities Fund for spending on health,

education and the environment has made a real difference to communities everywhere. For instance it has invested £120 million to support the People's Network, which will enable all 4,300 public libraries to offer free public internet access through UK online learning centres; and a further £50 million to stimulate development of content to support the Network.

We have set up a Regional Cultural Consortium in each of the English regions outside London to champion culture and creativity, including heritage, sport and tourism, and to draw up regional cultural strategies identifying regional objectives and priorities.

We have published a Green Paper, "Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years", setting out how individual creative talent can be given the support it needs from childhood to flourish; how artists and cultural institutions can be freed from bureaucratic controls; and how the freedom to explore and enjoy creativity and culture can be made available to all.

Through their commitment to public service broadcasting, the Government have helped to foster an environment in which a creative, commercially successful broadcasting industry provides a wide range of UK-made, high quality, original programmes catering for all viewers and listeners. We have ensured a secure funding base for the BBC and S4C, while giving them the freedom to develop commercial operations which complement and support their public service remit. We have made clear in the Communications White Paper that public service broadcasting will continue to have a key role to play in the digital future. The Government have introduced free television licences for people aged 75 or over from 1 November last year.

In delivering these initiatives we aim to make cultural and sporting activities inclusive ones, boosting participation and improving the quality of life for all.

*High Peak*

According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, there have been 115 national lottery awards to High Peak totalling £9,043,441.

Thirty-nine Millennium Award Winners have been identified from High Peak and between them they have received grants totalling £143,968.

Information from English Heritage (EH):

Church Grants

St. Margaret, Wormhill—£3,948 offered. Fully paid.

St. Michael, Taddington—£15,900 offered. Fully paid.

Others

Derby county council—£10,000 offered towards a feasibility study on Torr Vale Mill. Fully paid.

Conservation Area Partnership Schemes (CAPS)

Buxton CAPS for 1997–98 and 1998–99—£149K p.a.

Heritage Economic Regeneration Schemes (HERS)

Buxton HERS for 1999–2000 and 2000–01—£20K p.a.

Sport England have provided £32,000 for TOPs bags and £5,000 towards a 3-year sports development officer post.

Information on the number of beneficiaries of free television licences by constituency is not available, but estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 6,300 people aged 75 or over living in the High Peak constituency.

The National Foundation for Youth Music has awarded:

High Peak Community Arts £25,565. This is a large scale songwriting and performance project. A team of four music makers will facilitate young people in 10 youth clubs to create music. The music will be recorded on location and produced as a professional CD.

Fosbrooks £12,064. The project will provide new musical direction for young people to work within a structured course designed to enable them to perform traditional music suitable for community events. Activities will cover absolute beginners through to the gifted and very able.

There are of course other initiatives in the wider area which may have an effect on the High Peak constituency. These are:

Under the Space for Sport and Arts scheme, Derbyshire local education authority has been allocated up to £2.2 million towards providing improved facilities for sport and arts in primary schools which can also be used by the wider community.

£20,500,000 for Sheffield—Remaking the Heart of the City Millennium Project.

North West Arts Board received £14,061,000 in 2000–01 from the Arts Council to support arts and cultural activity across its region. In 2001–02 this will increase to £15,491,266 or by 10.17 per cent.

Sport England provide £242,000 for Derbyshire LEA and £25,000 p.a. for Active Sports and £6,500 p.a. for Coaching for Teachers for the County as a whole.

Derbyshire Library Authority, which covers the High Peak constituency, received awards of £90,100, £101,099 and £95,000 from the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund in 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 respectively. The funding was given for public library ICT projects.

## Departmental Policies (Amber Valley)

**Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Amber Valley constituency, the effects on Amber Valley of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157128]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** Since May 1997 my Department has introduced and developed a variety of initiatives which will impact on my hon. Friend's constituency which promote our objectives of access, excellence, education, and creativity and employment. We have published strategies to take this forward including Tomorrow's Tourism and A Sporting Future for All, which was recently followed up by The Government's Plan for Sport. We have tackled the issue of social inclusion taking forward the recommendations of Policy Action Team 10 on Arts and Sport and developing social inclusion policies across all our areas which is recognised within the most recent progress report, Building on PAT10.

We have given more support to the cultural and sporting infrastructure. The Spending Review 2000 secured a doubling of the budget for sport and the largest ever increase for the arts: an increase of 80 per cent. from £186 million in 1997–98 to £336 million in 2003–04. In taking forward our aim to develop the educational potential of culture and sport £40 million has been

allocated to developing Creative Partnerships; we have established through lottery funding the £30 million National Foundation for Youth Music; and secured an additional £130 million for primary schools sports and arts facilities through the Space for Sport and the Arts programme. With £120 million of central Government and Lottery funding we will be providing a school sports co-ordinator in one in four secondary schools to work with local primary and special schools to improve sporting provision and physical education for children in the most deprived areas. We have delivered free access to national museums for children and the over-60s and additional money will be provided to allow this to be extended to everyone in December 2001. We have commissioned a taskforce which is currently considering the issues facing non-national museums in the regions.

We have made improvements in the way the Lottery is spent to ensure a fairer distribution. The introduction of the New Opportunities Fund for spending on health, education and the environment has made a real difference to communities everywhere. For instance it has invested £120 million to support the People's Network, which will enable all 4,300 public libraries to offer free public internet access through UK online learning centres; and a further £50 million to stimulate development of content to support the Network.

We have set up a Regional Cultural Consortium in each of the English regions outside London to champion culture and creativity, including heritage, sport and tourism, and to draw up regional cultural strategies identifying regional objectives and priorities.

We have published a Green Paper "Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years", setting out how individual creative talent can be given the support it needs from childhood to flourish; how artists and cultural institutions can be freed from bureaucratic controls; and how the freedom to explore and enjoy creativity and culture can be made available to all.

Through their commitment to public service broadcasting, the Government have helped to foster an environment in which a creative, commercially successful broadcasting industry provides a wide range of UK-made, high quality, original programmes catering for all viewers and listeners. We have ensured a secure funding base for the BBC and S4C, while giving them the freedom to develop commercial operations which complement and support their public service remit. We have made clear in the Communications White Paper that public service broadcasting will continue to have a key role to play in the digital future. The Government have introduced free television licences for people aged 75 or over from 1 November last year.

In delivering these initiatives we aim to make cultural and sporting activities inclusive ones, boosting participation and improving the quality of life for all.

*Amber Valley*

According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, there have been 136 national lottery awards to Amber Valley, totalling £3,211,436.

Fourteen Millennium Award Winners have been identified from Amber Valley and between them they have received grants totalling £56,461.

Information on the number of beneficiaries of free television licences by constituency is not available, but estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 6,600 people aged 75 or over living in the Amber Valley constituency.

Derbyshire Library Authority, which covers the Amber Valley constituency received awards of £90,100, £101,099 and £95,000 from the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund in 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 respectively. The funding was given for public library ICT projects.

The National Tramway Museum in Crich has been allocated funding from the Designated Challenge Fund as follows:

£35,000 in 1999 towards curatorial support for project development and documentation/digitisation work on illustrations collections;

£105,920 in 2000 towards the continuation of the above, and towards an extension to the existing tramcar restoration workshop; and £202,034 in 2001 mainly towards the building of an extension to the Museum's library and also a continuation of the digitisation programme.

Fleet Arts have been awarded £10,249 by the National Foundation for Youth Music. This is a new departure for the Nail it Down project, extending it from rock and pop to include new technology and samba and the fusion of the two. The two music makers will create opportunities for performance and recording sessions and run workshops which are informal and focused on the individual and encourage the writing of original music and lyrics. English Heritage have offered the following:

St. Matthew, Pentrich—£47,418

Unitarian Chapel, Belper—£18,342

All Saints, Mugginton—£75,476

St. Luke, Heage—£65,014

St. Michael Kirk, Langley—£49,745

North Mill, Belper—£10,077 for feasibility study on major Building at Risk

Heage Windmill—£38,775 for repairs as match funding with Heritage Lottery Fund Conservation Area Partnership scheme in Belper 1997–98—£100,000.

There are of course other initiatives in the wider context of the region which may have an effect on the Amber Valley constituency. These include the receipt by the East Midlands Arts Board of £6,853,000 in 2000–01 from the Arts Council to support arts and cultural activity across its region. In 2001–02 this will increase to £7,771,701 or by 12.4 per cent.

### Departmental Policies (Eccles)

**Mr. Ian Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Eccles constituency, the effects on Eccles of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157284]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** Since May 1997 my Department has introduced and developed a variety of initiatives which will impact on my hon. Friend's constituency which promote our objectives of access, excellence, education, and creativity and employment. We have published strategies to take this forward including Tomorrow's Tourism and A Sporting Future for All, which was recently followed up by The Government's Plan for Sport. We have tackled the issue of social inclusion taking

forward the recommendations of Policy Action Team 10 on Arts and Sport and developing social inclusion policies across all our areas which is recognised within the most recent progress report, Building on PAT10.

We have given more support to the cultural and sporting infrastructure. The Spending Review 2000 secured a doubling of the budget for sport and the largest ever increase for the arts: an increase of 80 per cent. from £186 million in 1997–98 to £336 million in 2003–04. In taking forward our aim to develop the educational potential of culture and sport £40 million has been allocated to developing Creative Partnerships; we have established through lottery funding the £30 million National Foundation for Youth Music; and secured an additional £130 million for primary schools sports and arts facilities through the Space for Sport and the Arts programme. With £120 million of central Government and lottery funding we will be providing a school sports co-ordinator in one in four secondary schools to work with local primary and special schools to improve sporting provision and physical education for children in the most deprived areas. We have delivered free access to national museums for children and the over-60s and additional money will be provided to allow this to be extended to everyone in December 2001. We have commissioned a taskforce which is currently considering the issues facing non-national museums in the regions.

We have made improvements in the way the lottery is spent to ensure a fairer distribution. The introduction of the New Opportunities Fund for spending on health, education and the environment has made a real difference to communities everywhere. For instance it has invested £120 million to support the People's Network, which will enable all 4,300 public libraries to offer free public internet access through UK online learning centres; and a further £50 million to stimulate development of content to support the Network.

We have set up a Regional Cultural Consortium in each of the English regions outside London to champion culture and creativity, including heritage, sport and tourism, and to draw up regional cultural strategies identifying regional objectives and priorities.

We have published a Green Paper "Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years", setting out how individual creative talent can be given the support it needs from childhood to flourish; how artists and cultural institutions can be freed from bureaucratic controls; and how the freedom to explore and enjoy creativity and culture can be made available to all.

Through their commitment to public service broadcasting, the Government have helped to foster an environment in which a creative, commercially successful broadcasting industry provides a wide range of UK-made, high quality, original programmes catering for all viewers and listeners. We have ensured a secure funding base for the BBC and S4C, while giving them the freedom to develop commercial operations which complement and support their public service remit. We have made clear in the Communications White Paper that public service broadcasting will continue to have a key role to play in the digital future. The Government have introduced free television licences for people aged 75 or over from 1 November last year.

In delivering these initiatives we aim to make cultural and sporting activities inclusive ones, boosting participation and improving the quality of life for all.

*Eccles*

According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, there have been 33 national lottery awards to Eccles, totalling £2,022,071. This includes an award from the Millennium Festival of £340,000.

Five Millennium Award Winners have been identified from Eccles and between them they have received grants totalling £16,117.

Information on the number of beneficiaries of free television licences by constituency is not available, but estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 7,000 people aged 75 or over living in the Eccles constituency.

£120 million of central Government and lottery funding is being invested in setting up a network of 1,000 School Sport Co-ordinators. These Co-ordinators will based in families of schools, in areas of greatest need, linked wherever possible through local education authorities to Specialist Sports Colleges. They will provide opportunities for young people to compete regularly for their school and take part in a wide range of sports. By 2004, there will be about 250 families established with 1,000 secondary schools and up to 6,000 primary schools benefiting directly from this programme. Eccles has School Sport Co-ordinators at Ashton-on-Mersey School.

Under the Space for Sport and Arts scheme, Salford local education authority has been allocated up to £2.2 million towards providing improved facilities for sport and arts in primary schools which can also be used by the wider community. Moorfield and St. Peter's CE primary schools in my hon. Friend's constituency have been chosen to develop schemes under the SSA.

On 21 February, Chris Smith announced the 16 areas in which it is hoped Creative Partnership pilots will be developed. Salford is one of these areas. The Arts Council of England, which is delivering the initiative, will be consulting schools and creative organisations in each location over the next few months to establish which bodies and schools will be involved. Details on how schools and cultural organisations can take part in Creative Partnerships will be available from the Arts Council from early May. Funding for the initiative will come on stream in April 2002.

Salford Library Authority, which covers the Eccles constituency, received an award of £55,000 from the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund in 1998–99. The funding was given for a public library ICT project. It is not possible to say what percentage of this funding benefited the Eccles constituency.

English Heritage have awarded St. Mary the Virgin, Eccles, £159,046.

There are of course other initiatives in the wider context of the region which may have an effect on the Eccles constituency. These are:

North West Arts Board received £14,061,000 in 2000–01 from the Arts Council to support arts and cultural activity across its region. In 2001–02 this will increase to £15,491,266 or by 10.17 per cent.

The Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester has benefits for Eccles constituents with the introduction of free access for children and the over 60s.

**Departmental Policies (Ribble Valley)**

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Ribble Valley constituency, the effects on Ribble Valley of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157851]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** Since May 1997 my Department has introduced and developed a variety of initiatives which will impact on the constituency of Ribble Valley which promote our objectives of access, excellence, education, and creativity and employment. We have published strategies to take this forward including Tomorrow's Tourism and A Sporting Future for All, which was recently followed up by The Government's Plan for Sport. We have tackled the issue of social inclusion taking forward the recommendations of Policy Action Team 10 on Arts and Sport and developing social inclusion policies across all our areas which is recognised within the most recent progress report, Building on PAT10.

We have given more support to the cultural and sporting infrastructure. The Spending Review 2000 secured a doubling of the budget for sport and the largest ever increase for the arts: an increase of 80 per cent. from £186 million in 1997–98 to £336 million in 2003–04. In taking forward our aim to develop the educational potential of culture and sport £40 million has been allocated to developing Creative Partnerships; we have established through lottery funding the £30 million National Foundation for Youth Music; and secured an additional £130 million for primary schools sports and arts facilities through the Space for Sport and the Arts programme. With £120 million of central Government and lottery funding we will be providing a school sports co-ordinator in one in four secondary schools to work with local primary and special schools to improve sporting provision and physical education for children in the most deprived areas. We have delivered free access to national museums for children and the over-60s and additional money will be provided to allow this to be extended to everyone in December 2001. We have commissioned a taskforce which is currently considering the issues facing non-national museums in the regions.

We have made improvements in the way the lottery is spent to ensure a fairer distribution. The introduction of the New Opportunities Fund for spending on health, education and the environment has made a real difference to communities everywhere. For instance it has invested £120 million to support the People's Network, which will enable all 4,300 public libraries to offer free public internet access through UK online learning centres; and a further £50 million to stimulate development of content to support the Network.

We have set up a Regional Cultural Consortium in each of the English regions outside London to champion culture and creativity, including heritage, sport and tourism, and to draw up regional cultural strategies identifying regional objectives and priorities.

We have published a Green Paper "Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years", setting out how individual creative talent can be given the support it needs from childhood to flourish; how artists and cultural institutions can be freed from bureaucratic controls; and how the freedom to explore and enjoy creativity and culture can be made available to all.

Through their commitment to public service broadcasting, the Government have helped to foster an environment in which a creative, commercially successful broadcasting industry provides a wide range of UK-made, high quality, original programmes catering for all viewers and listeners. We have ensured a secure funding base for the BBC and S4C, while giving them the freedom to develop commercial operations which complement and support their public service remit. We have made clear in the Communications White Paper that public service broadcasting will continue to have a key role to play in the digital future. The Government have introduced free television licences for people aged 75 or over from 1 November last year.

In delivering these initiatives we aim to make to make cultural and sporting activities inclusive ones, boosting participation and improving the quality of life for all.

*Ribble Valley*

According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, there have been 80 national lottery awards to Ribble Valley, totalling £3,416,734.

Thirteen Millennium Award Winners have been identified from Ribble Valley and between them they have received grants totalling £29,350.

Information on the number of beneficiaries of free television licences by constituency is not available, but estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 6,700 people aged 75 or over living in the Ribble Valley constituency.

Lancashire Library Authority, which covers the Ribble Valley constituency, was a member of a consortium of north-west library authorities which received an award of £215,992 from the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund in 2000–01. The funding was given for a public library reader development project. It is not possible to say what percentage of this funding benefited the Ribble Valley constituency.

English Heritage have awarded Old Lower Hodder Bridge £13,998.

There are of course other initiatives in the wider context of the region which may have an effect on the Ribble Valley constituency. These include the receipt by North West Arts Board of £14,061,000 in 2000–01 from the Arts Council to support arts and cultural activity across its region. In 2001–02 this will increase to £15,491,266 or by 10.17 per cent.

**Departmental Policies (Tiverton and Honiton)**

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Tiverton and Honiton constituency, the effects on Tiverton and Honiton of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157813]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** Since May 1997 my Department has introduced and developed a variety of initiatives which will impact on the constituency of Tiverton and Honiton which promote our objectives of access, excellence, education, and creativity and employment. We have published strategies to take this forward including Tomorrow's Tourism and A Sporting Future for All, which was recently followed up by The Government's Plan for Sport. We have tackled the issue of social inclusion taking forward the recommendations of Policy Action Team 10 on Arts and Sport and developing social inclusion policies across all our areas which is recognised within the most recent progress report, Building on PAT10.

We have given more support to the cultural and sporting infrastructure. The Spending Review 2000 secured a doubling of the budget for sport and the largest ever increase for the arts: an increase of 80 per cent. from £186 million in 1997–98 to £336 million in 2003–04. In taking forward our aim to develop the educational potential of culture and sport £40 million has been allocated to developing Creative Partnerships; we have established through lottery funding the £30 million National Foundation for Youth Music; and secured an additional £130 million for primary schools sports and arts facilities through the Space for Sport and the Arts programme. With £120 million of central Government and lottery funding we will be providing a school sports co-ordinator in one in four secondary schools to work with local primary and special schools to improve sporting provision and physical education for children in the most deprived areas. We have delivered free access to national museums for children and the over-60s and additional money will be provided to allow this to be extended to everyone in December 2001. We have commissioned a taskforce which is currently considering the issues facing non-national museums in the regions.

We have made improvements in the way the lottery is spent to ensure a fairer distribution. The introduction of the New Opportunities Fund for spending on health, education and the environment has made a real difference to communities everywhere. For instance it has invested £120 million to support the People's Network, which will enable all 4,300 public libraries to offer free public internet access through UK on-line learning centres; and a further £50 million to stimulate development of content to support the Network.

We have set up a Regional Cultural Consortium in each of the English regions outside London to champion culture and creativity, including heritage, sport and tourism, and to draw up regional cultural strategies identifying regional objectives and priorities.

We have published a Green Paper "Culture and Creativity: The Next 10 Years", setting out how individual creative talent can be given the support it needs from childhood to flourish; how artists and cultural institutions can be freed from bureaucratic controls; and how the freedom to explore and enjoy creativity and culture can be made available to all.

Through their commitment to public service broadcasting, the Government have helped to foster an environment in which a creative, commercially successful broadcasting industry provides a wide range of UK-made, high quality, original programmes catering for all viewers and listeners. We have ensured a secure funding base for the BBC and S4C, while giving them the freedom to develop commercial operations which complement and support their public service remit. We have made clear in the Communications White Paper that public service broadcasting will continue to have a key role to play in the digital future. The Government have introduced free television licences for people aged 75 or over from 1 November last year.

In delivering these initiatives we aim to make cultural and sporting activities inclusive ones, boosting participation and improving the quality of life for all.

*Tiverton and Honiton*

According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, there have been 231 national lottery awards to Tiverton and Honiton, totalling £6,780,296.

Sixty-Eight Millennium Award Winners have been identified from Tiverton and Honiton and between them they have received grants totalling £198,118.

Information on the number of beneficiaries of free television licences by constituency is not available, but estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately 8,000 people aged 75 or over living in the Tiverton and Honiton constituency.

Devon Library Authority, which covers the Tiverton and Honiton constituency, received an award of £113,647 from the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund in 1997–98. The funding was given for a public library ICT project.

There are of course other initiatives in the wider context of the region which may have an effect on the Tiverton and Honiton constituency. These are:

South West Arts received £6,694,000 in 2000–01 from the Arts Council to support arts and cultural activity across its region. In 2001–02 this will increase to £7,766,575 or by 16 per cent.

The National Foundation for Youth Music has awarded The National Trust—Devon Region £20,500. This project will involve a composer working with three groups of local children at National Trust properties. A body of work will be created by the composer in joint collaboration with the children and will lead towards a final performance.

## Departmental Policies (Plymouth Unitary Authority)

**Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency, *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency and *(c)* South-West Devon constituency, the effects on the Plymouth Unitary Authority area of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158025]

**Mr. Chris Smith** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]*: Since May 1997 my Department has introduced and developed a variety of initiatives which will impact on the Plymouth Unitary Authority area which promote our objectives of access, excellence, education, and creativity and employment. We have published strategies to take this forward including Tomorrow's Tourism and A Sporting Future for All, which was recently followed up by The Government's Plan for Sport. We have tackled the issue of social inclusion taking forward the recommendations of Policy Action Team 10 on Arts and

Sport and developing social inclusion policies across all our areas which is recognised within the most recent progress report, Building on PAT10.

We have given more support to the cultural and sporting infrastructure. The Spending Review 2000 secured a doubling of the budget for sport and the largest ever increase for the arts: an increase of 80 per cent. from £186 million in 1997–98 to £336 million in 2003–04. In taking forward our aim to develop the educational potential of culture and sport £40 million has been allocated to developing Creative Partnerships; we have established through lottery funding the £30 million National Foundation for Youth Music; and secured an additional £130 million for primary schools sports and arts facilities through the Space for Sport and the Arts programme. With £120 million of central Government and lottery funding we will be providing a school sports co-ordinator in one in four secondary schools to work with local primary and special schools to improve sporting provision and physical education for children in the most deprived areas. We have delivered free access to national museums for children and the over-60s and additional money will be provided to allow this to be extended to everyone in December 2001. We have commissioned a taskforce which is currently considering the issues facing non-national museums in the regions.

We have made improvements in the way the lottery is spent to ensure a fairer distribution. The introduction of the New Opportunities Fund for spending on health, education and the environment has made a real difference to communities everywhere. For instance it has invested £120 million to support the People's Network, which will enable all 4,300 public libraries to offer free public internet access through UK online centres; and a further £50 million to stimulate development of content to support the Network.

We have set up a Regional Cultural Consortium in each of the English regions outside London to champion culture and creativity, including heritage, sport and tourism, and to draw up regional cultural strategies identifying regional objectives and priorities.

We have published a Green Paper "Culture and Creativity: The Next Ten Years"; setting out how individual creative talent can be given the support it needs from childhood to flourish; how artists and cultural institutions can be freed from bureaucratic controls; and how the freedom to explore and enjoy creativity and culture can be made available to all.

Through their commitment to public service broadcasting, the Government have helped to foster an environment in which a creative, commercially successful broadcasting industry provides a wide range of UK-made, high quality, original programmes catering for all viewers and listeners. We have ensured a secure funding base for the BBC and S4C, while giving them the freedom to develop commercial operations which complement and support their public service remit. We have made clear in the Communications White Paper that public service broadcasting will continue to have a key role to play in the digital future. The Government have introduced free television licences for people aged 75 or over from 1 November last year.

In delivering these initiatives we aim to make cultural and sporting activities inclusive ones, boosting participation and improving the quality of life for all.

*Plymouth Unitary Authority area*

According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, there have been:

116 national lottery awards to Plymouth, Sutton, totalling £13,749,090

91 national lottery awards to Plymouth, Devonport, totalling £2,237,942

106 national lottery awards to South-West Devon, totalling £4,766,036.

*Millennium Award Winners:*

Fifty-six have been identified from Plymouth, Sutton and between them they have received grants totalling £180,782

Fifty-one have been identified from Plymouth, Devonport and between them they have received grants totalling £151,641

Twenty-nine have been identified from South-West Devon and between them they have received grants totalling £70,659.

In addition, there were two larger travelling festival events which covered all three constituencies with total grant of £150,000; plus a grant of £75,000 for Plymouth new years eve celebrations 2000—A Festival of Light.

Information on the number of beneficiaries of free television licences by constituency is not available, but estimates based on the 1991 Census indicate that there were approximately:

8,100 people aged 75 or over living in the Plymouth, Sutton constituency

5,400 people aged 75 or over living in the Plymouth, Devonport constituency

5,800 people aged 75 or over living in the South-West Devon constituency.

The National Foundation For Youth Music have awarded Estover Percussion Project £58,500. This project will be run through a structure of taster, extended and advanced workshops in the skills of Djing, scratching and sampling using the latest developments in computer generated technology. The Consortium is made up of E-A-Z, Music Zone, Plymouth Youth Service and the Racial Equality Service and Estover Percussion Project.

English Heritage have made the following awards:

Smeaton's Tower, The Hoe, Plymouth (Plymouth City Museums and Art Gallery), £5,000 for feasibility study and £60,000 for works

1 The Esplanade, The Hoe, Plymouth (Devon Historic Buildings Trust) £70,000

Mutley Baptist Church, Mutley Plain, Plymouth £60,936

Saltram House (National Trust) £20,570 (Electrical Installation), £27,016 (Lead Statuary)

St. Aubyn's Church, Devonport, Plymouth £177,069

Conservation Area Partnership Scheme—Plymouth offered £100,000 in 1997–98.

There are of course other initiatives in the wider context of the region which may have an effect on the Plymouth Unitary Authority area. These are:

South West Arts received £6,694,000 in 2000–01 from the Arts Council to support arts and cultural activity across its region. In 2001–02 this will increase to £7,766,575 or by 16 per cent.

Plymouth Library Authority, which includes the Plymouth, Sutton/Plymouth, Devonport constituency, received an award of £31,282 from the DCMS/Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge

Fund in 2000–01. The award was from the Fund's Wolfson British History Programme which is wholly sponsored by The Wolfson Foundation and was to enhance the history collections of public libraries. It is not possible to say what percentage of this funding benefited the Plymouth, Sutton/Plymouth, Devonport constituency.

Under the Space for Sport and Arts scheme, local education authorities in the south-west region including Cornwall, Bristol, north Somerset and Plymouth were allocated £9.1 million towards providing improved facilities for sport and arts in primary schools which can also be used by the wider community. Plymouth City Council is currently developing detailed applications for facilities at four primary schools, Barne Barton, St. George's, Plym View and Whiteleigh Community Primary which will actually be used by over 20 primary schools in the area.

### National Lottery (Test Purchasing)

**Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what his Department's policy is on the use of children of compulsory school age in undertaking test purchasing of National Lottery tickets during school hours; and if he will make a statement. [158490]

**Kate Hoey:** It is an offence to sell a National Lottery ticket to a child under 16 years of age and my Department, and the National Lottery regulator, the National Lottery Commission, are concerned to prevent such sales. The National Lottery operator, Camelot Group plc, makes test purchases using 16-year-olds who appear younger, but cannot make test sales using children under 16. Trading standards officers are able to make test purchases using children under 16. Advice to them on the use of children to make test purchases was included in Home Office Circular 17/1992. A copy of this Circular is in the Libraries of the House.

### After-school Learning and Child Care

**Mr. Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what is the amount of money allocated in Wandsworth from the New Opportunities Fund for out-of-school hours learning and child care; and if he will list the schemes available for pupils in Battersea from these allocations. [158555]

**Kate Hoey:** I understand the New Opportunities Fund has written directly to my hon. Friend with the information he requires. I am arranging for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

### Libraries

**Mr. Woodward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the quality of annual library plans which have been submitted to his Department. [158231]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** Overall, the quality of annual library plans has much improved since they were introduced in 1998. I see this as a very positive development, indicative of the increased importance that library authorities are attaching to their duties. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that for the first time more authorities have been assessed as providing 'good' plans than submitting 'satisfactory' plans. In 2000, 73 library authorities were rated as 'good', 71 plans were 'satisfactory', and only five were rated as 'poor'; we found none to be unacceptable. I am taking steps to help the five authorities rated as 'poor' improve their position.

My right hon. Friend published a report on last year's annual library plans in January, and copies of the report, "Appraisal of Annual Library Plans 2000, Report on Outcomes and Issues", have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Copies of the report can also be obtained freely from my Department (write to Andy Birleson, Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 2–4 Cockspur street, London SW1Y 5DH; or telephone on 0207 211 6128; or email to andrew.birleson@culture.gsi.gov.uk.) In addition, the report can be accessed via the Department's website www.culture.gov.uk.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Magistrates Courts (London)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many disabled people serve as justices of the peace in courts covering the Greater London area; and if she will make a statement. [158516]

**Jane Kennedy:** No figures are currently available on the number of people with a disability who serve as justices of the peace. However, following an equality audit of the procedures and practices surrounding the appointment of lay magistrates last year, my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor plans to conduct a survey of existing magistrates later this year to find out how many classify themselves as having a disability.

## CABINET OFFICE

### Civil Servants (Waivers)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of senior grade civil servants in each Department have signed waivers for *(a)* working time rights and *(b)* other social chapter rights; and if she will make a statement. [158328]

**Marjorie Mowlam:** Information on the proportion of senior civil servants who have, under the working time regulations, entered into voluntary agreements to work more than 48 hours a week is not held centrally. It could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Social chapter rights do not give rise to waivers in other circumstances.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Advertising (Outside Agencies)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those occasions since 1 May 1997 on which his Department has used outside agencies for *(a)* rebranding and *(b)* advertising purposes; what the costs were; and if he will make a statement. [156272]

**Mr. Wilson** *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* British Trade International, which reports jointly to FCO and DTI Ministers, has employed outside agencies for branding and advertising purposes. Its two operating units are Trade Partners UK and Invest UK (formerly the Invest in Britain Bureau).

*(a)* Trade Partners UK: established in May 2000, it has used outside agencies for (i) branding on one occasion, and (ii) advertising on two occasions. The costs were:

£

| | *Branding* | *Advertising* |
|---|---|---|
| 1999–2000 | 250,000 | 350,000 |
| 2000–01 | 0 | 1,400,000 |

*(b)* Invest UK: it has used outside agencies for (i) rebranding on one occasion, the work being spread over three years, and (ii) advertising on numerous occasions, largely overseas, to market the United Kingdom as an inward investment location. The costs were:

£

| | *Branding* | *Advertising* |
|---|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 0 | 1,225,000 |
| 1998–99 | 145,000 | 1,187,000 |
| 1999–2000 | 95,000 | 1,344,000 |
| 2000–01 | 140,000 | 1,536,000 |

In 1998, the FCO employed outside agencies as part of a £1 million publicity campaign to reduce the number of ticketless fans travelling to France for the World Cup finals and to explain what consular services were available.

Later this year, we will be launching a public awareness campaign to encourage British travellers to be better prepared when travelling overseas. We have appointed an outside agency to undertake this work. The cost of public relations activity, which is to include press and radio advertising, will be £255,000.

The FCO has also used outside agencies to assist with routine advertising in the domestic press for recruitment purposes. There have been between 200 and 250 recruitment campaigns. It would involve disproportionate costs to establish a breakdown of expenditure.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Animal Vaccination

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if it is his Department's policy that animals must be slaughtered following all forms of vaccination in order to regain disease-free status for the United Kingdom. [158382]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The recent European Commission decision (2001/257/EC) authorises the vaccination without slaughter of cattle in specific areas in the UK. A copy of the decision has been placed on the MAFF website http://www.maff.gov.uk/.

The Government are considering using vaccination as part of the strategy for controlling foot and mouth disease (FMD). Scientific and veterinary advice is that a limited programme of vaccinating cattle in north Cumbria, and possibly north Devon, is justified as a means of protecting animals. These animals would not be compulsorily slaughtered and could work out their normal economic lives.

Chapter 2.1.1 of the OIE International Animal Health Code contains guidelines on the steps to be taken to regain FMD-free status in various circumstances.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will hold a briefing for hon. Members representing areas affected by the foot and mouth outbreak on the contingency plans by his Department to combat, control and exterminate the disease; [154923]

(2) how many meetings *(a)* he and his predecessor, *(b)* the Minister of State in this House, *(c)* the Minister of State in the House of Lords, *(d)* officials in his Department and *(e)* the Parliamentary Secretary have attended for contingency planning in relation to an outbreak of foot and mouth in the UK since 1 May 1997; [156420]

(3) if a contingency planning committee in relation to an outbreak of foot and mouth in the UK has been *(a)* established and *(b)* maintained since 1 May 1997; [156422]

(4) if he will list those who attended contingency planning meetings in relation to an outbreak of foot and mouth in the United Kingdom attended by *(a)* his Department's officials and *(b)* himself; [156419]

(5) if he will list those who attended contingency planning meetings in relation to an outbreak of foot and mouth attended by *(a)* the Parliamentary Secretary, *(b)* the Minister of State, House of Lords and *(c)* the Minister of State in this House, since 1 May 1997; [156417]

(6) if his Department's regional offices have been involved in contingency planning in the event of a foot and mouth outbreak in the UK since 1 May 1997. [156423]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answers 22 and 30 March 2001]:* Contingency planning for foot and mouth disease is carried out by the state veterinary service and the Ministry's animal health group on an on-going basis. There is no specific planning committee, nor is it possible to list officials who have attended contingency planning meetings. Ministers have not attended any contingency planning meetings between 1 May 1997 and the state of the current outbreak.

The northern region of the state veterinary service has 'lead region' responsibility for the foot and mouth contingency plan. All regional and animal health divisional offices will have been involved in regular exercises to test the contingency plan.

There are no plans to hold a specific briefing on the foot and mouth contingency plans for hon. Members representing areas affected by the current outbreak. However, all hon. Members have received regular situation reports and have been advised where they can obtain further information, for example from the Ministry's website http://www.maff.gov.uk/. A daily update on the disease is placed in the Libraries of the House, and a mechanism has been put in place to ensure hon. Members are informed directly as soon as a case is confirmed in their constituencies.

**Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to what homoeopathic expertise his Department has access on the use of homoeopathic borax in the prevention of foot and mouth disease. [157706]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The Veterinary Products Committee gives advice to Ministers with respect to safety, quality and efficacy in relation to the veterinary use of any substance or article to which provisions of the Medicines Act 1986 may apply. The Advisory Board on the Registration of Homoeopathic Products offers advice to Ministers on the registration of homoeopathic products, whether for the treatment of humans or animals. However, homoeopathic products for the treatment of food-producing species are not covered by the registration scheme and are subject to the requirement to obtain a marketing authorisation.

**Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he has received on the use of homoeopathic borax in the prevention of foot and mouth disease. [157705]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* My officials have been in correspondence with the Dean of the Faculty of Homoeopathy in London on the use of the homoeopathic product borax.

**Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what trials he proposes to establish the effectiveness of the homeopathic remedy borax in the foot and mouth disease outbreak. [155117]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 23 March 2001]:* The onus for providing evidence that supports the need for research into the effectiveness of borax against foot and mouth disease lies with the manufacturer. Products that are presented for the treatment or prevention of disease in animals, or which have that function, must be authorised under the terms of the Marketing Authorisations for Veterinary Medicinal Products Regulations 1994 before they can be legally sold or supplied in the United Kingdom. This ensures that such products are properly assessed and are demonstrated as being safe, of consistent good quality and effective when used in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions. The manufacturer of any such products may apply for such authorisation. No such application has been made for borax.

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will issue guidance on restocking to farmers whose stock have been culled as a result of foot and mouth. [156489]

**Ms Quin:** Guidance on restocking, for farmers whose animals have been slaughtered as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak, is currently being prepared and has been discussed informally with industry organisations.

This guidance currently under discussion would require that no animals susceptible to foot and mouth disease may be brought on to an infected premises until at least 21 days have elapsed since the final cleansing and disinfection procedures have been completed. Animals for restocking can be introduced only from areas not subject to restrictions in relation to foot and mouth.

Animals introduced to the premises will be subject to regular veterinary clinical inspection, with the frequency of inspection depending on the species. Sheep and goats will also be subject to serological testing. Restrictions will be lifted only when it has been shown that none of the animals has developed any clinical signs of foot and mouth.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the manufacturers, stockists and distributors of protective clothing currently *(a)* supplying and *(b)* working (i) for and (ii) on behalf of (A) his Department and (B) agents of Government in relation to the foot and mouth epidemic who were contacted (x) by his Department and (y) on his Department's behalf before 19 February; [156412]

(2) if he will list the manufacturers, stockists and distributors of *(a)* firearms and *(b)* firearms ammunition suitable for animal culling purposes currently (i) supplying and (ii) working (x) for and (y) on behalf of (A) his Department and (B) agents of Government in relation to the foot and mouth epidemic who were contacted (I) by his Department and (II) on his Department's behalf before 19 February; [156414]

(3) if he will list the contractors and suppliers contacted by his Department centrally or regionally in the 36 months before 19 February in relation to a possible outbreak of foot and mouth disease in the UK; [156421]

(4) if he will list the *(a)* vets, *(b)* hauliers, *(c)* renderers, *(d)* valuers and *(e)* slaughtermen, marksmen and contracting firms making available the services thereof currently (i) supplying services and (ii) working (A) for and (B) on behalf of (I) his Department and (II) agents of Government in relation to the foot and mouth epidemic who were contacted (x) by his Department and (y) on his Department's behalf before 19 February; [156413]

(5) if he will list the *(a)* hardcore stockists and merchants, *(b)* timber stockists and merchants, *(c)* coal stockists and merchants, *(d)* diesel fuel stockists and distributors, *(e)* concrete slab stockists and merchants, *(f)* disinfectant stockists and merchants and *(g)* stockists and merchants of disinfectant sprayers currently (i) supplying and (ii) working (x) for and (y) on behalf of (A) his Department and (B) agents of Government in relation to the foot and mouth epidemic who were contacted (I) by his Department and (II) on his Department's behalf before 19 February; [156411]

(6) if he will list the stockists and merchants of straw currently *(a)* supplying and *(b)* working (A) for and (B) on behalf of (i) his Department and (ii) agents of Government in relation to the foot and mouth epidemic who were contacted (y) by his Department and (x) on his Department's behalf before 19 February. [156415]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 50W, in connection with a number of related questions.

The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he expects that sheep belonging to Clive Hawes at Blankney Estates, Blankney, Sleaford, Lincolnshire will be slaughtered; and on what basis the compensation will be paid; [155923]

(2) when he expects that sheep belonging to Clive Hawes at FH Farms, Car Colston, Nottinghamshire, will be slaughtered; and on what basis compensation will be paid; [155926]

(3) when he expects that sheep belonging to Clive Hawes on Waterside Farm, Claydyke Back, Boston, Lincolnshire, will be slaughtered; and on what basis compensation will be paid; [155924]

(4) when he expects that sheep belonging to Clive Hawes at Saracen's Head Farm, Holbeach, Lincolnshire, will be slaughtered, and on what basis compensation will be paid; [155925]

(5) when he expects that sheep belonging to Clive Hawes at Lower Barn Farm Dedham, Mannington, Essex, will be slaughtered; and on what basis compensation will be paid. [155928]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 27 March 2001]:* It is not practicable or appropriate to comment on the position of individual applications under the various schemes in operation to meet the needs of farmers during the foot and mouth outbreak. Every effort is being made to minimise delay in paying farmers in respect of animals slaughtered under foot and mouth measures.

**Mr. Paice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the viability of the foot and mouth virus in vacuum-packed meats. [156661]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* The viability of the foot and mouth disease virus in meat depends on the treatment and preparation of the meat, and on the presence of bones. The drop in pH during rigor mortis generally kills the virus in meat, but viable virus can be found in the bone marrow and lymph glands. Vacuum packing does not affect the viability of the virus.

## Meat Imports

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what inspection is carried out at transit points for personal imports of foreign meat. [152381]

**Ms Quin:** In the course of normal surveillance of individuals entering the UK, Customs officers do become aware of personal imports of foreign meat or meat products from third countries. Where they suspect the import is not permitted, they notify either local authority officials or MAFF officials where appropriate who take the necessary action. In most cases this involves seizing and destroying the product.

## Meat Production Industry

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to review the performance of the meat production industry; and if he will make a statement. [157897]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Once we have succeeded in eradicating foot and mouth disease, we shall be consulting a wide range of interests on how the meat production industry can most effectively be organised to provide consumers with the types and quality of meat products they wish to buy.

## Non-departmental Public Bodies

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the total gross running costs to his Department were of the NDPBs accountable through his Department in the 1996–97 financial year. [157627]

**Ms Quin:** Details of the net cost to MAFF of carrying out its NDPB sponsorship role in the financial year 1996–97 are shown in the 1997 edition of Cabinet Office publication "Public Bodies". Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

## Dawn Cardington Abattoir

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the owners of Dawn Cardington abattoir in Bedfordshire concerning a date for the re-opening of the abattoir. [156800]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 4 April 2001]:* I understand that the owners of Dawn Cardington took a decision to close their abattoir, stating that this was in order to protect their boning and cutting plant on the same site from the risk of infection with foot and mouth disease. The Government have sought to encourage operators in the red meat industry to participate in the market in as normal a manner as possible. Guidance to slaughterhouse owners has been issued by the state veterinary service on the consequences of a confirmed case being detected on their premises. This can be found on the foot and mouth website under moving livestock to slaughter at http://www.maff.gov.uk/.

## Sheep Shipments

**Mr. Paice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when the sheep exported to France by Mr. H. Inizan on 31 January were slaughtered and subsequently tested for foot and mouth antibodies; [156435]

(2) if sheep confirmed as infected with foot and mouth in France spent time *(a)* in the same vehicles or premises as those exported by Mr. H. Inizan on 31 January and subsequently identified as antibody positive and *(b)* in the proximity of Mr. Inizan's sheep. [156434]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answers 30 March 2001]:* We are in touch with the French authorities to establish the circumstances relating to the export of sheep by Mr. H. Inizan.

## Departmental Policies (Amber Valley)

**Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Amber Valley constituency, the effects on Amber Valley of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157133]

**Ms Quin:** MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis.

Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices.

Consumers in Amber Valley will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. This will benefit both consumers and taxpayers in Amber Valley. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside.

One of the most important outcomes of Agenda 2000 was the establishment of the Rural Development Regulation, which is being implemented in England through the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), investing around £1.6 billion in rural areas over seven years. By supporting rural development, including diversification into tourist activities, and by conserving and enhancing the rural environment through support for "public" goods such as biodiversity and landscape appearance, the ERDP offers benefits to all who visit the countryside.

**Departmental Policies (Lincoln)**

**Gillian Merron:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Lincoln constituency, the effects on Lincoln of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [152983]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 20 March 2001]:* MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis.

Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices.

Consumers in Lincoln will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. This will benefit both consumers and taxpayers in Lincoln. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside.

One of the most important outcomes of Agenda 2000 was the establishment of the Rural Development Regulation, which is being implemented in England through the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), investing around £1.6 billion in rural areas over seven years. By supporting rural development, including diversification into tourist activities, and by conserving and enhancing the rural environment through support for "public" goods such as biodiversity and landscape appearance, the ERDP offers benefits to all who visit the countryside.

**Departmental Policies (Gorton)**

**Mr. Kaufman:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the Manchester, Gorton constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 30 November 2000. [154505]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 16 March 2001]:* MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis.

Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices.

Consumers in Manchester, Gorton will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. This will benefit both consumers and taxpayers in Manchester, Gorton. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside. One of the most important outcomes of Agenda 2000 was the establishment of the Rural Development Regulation, which is being implemented in England through the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), investing around £1.6 billion in rural areas over seven years. By supporting rural development, including diversification into tourist activities, and by conserving and enhancing the rural environment through support for "public" goods such as biodiversity and landscape appearance, the ERDP offers benefits to all who visit the countryside.

**Departmental Policies (South Shields)**

**Dr. David Clark:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the South Shields constituency, the effects on South Shields of his Department's polices and actions since 2 May 1997. [153086]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 13 March 2001]:* MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis.

Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices.

Consumers in South Shields will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. This will benefit both consumers and taxpayers in South Shields. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside. One of the most important outcomes of Agenda 2000 was the establishment of the Rural Development Regulation, which is being implemented in England through the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), investing around £1.6 billion in rural areas over seven years. By supporting rural development, including diversification into tourist activities, and by conserving and enhancing the rural environment through support for "public" goods such as biodiversity and landscape appearance, the ERDP offers benefits to all who visit the countryside.

**Departmental Policies (Don Valley)**

**Caroline Flint:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to Don Valley constituency, the effects on Doncaster of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [153524]

**Ms Quin:** MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis.

Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices.

Consumers in Don Valley will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. This will benefit both consumers and taxpayers in Don Valley. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside.

One of the most important outcomes of Agenda 2000 was the establishment of the Rural Development Regulation, which is being implemented in England through the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), investing around £1.6 billion in rural areas over seven years. By supporting rural development, including diversification into tourist activities, and by conserving and enhancing the rural environment through support for "public" goods such as biodiversity and landscape appearance, the ERDP offers benefits to all who visit the countryside.

**Departmental Policies (Jarrow)**

**Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information, relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on Jarrow of his Department's actions since 2 May 1997. [153545]

**Ms Quin:** MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis.

Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices.

Consumers in Jarrow will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. This will benefit both consumers and taxpayers in Jarrow. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside.

One of the most important outcomes of Agenda 2000 was the establishment of the Rural Development Regulation, which is being implemented in England through the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), investing around £1.6 billion in rural areas over seven years. By supporting rural development, including diversification into tourist activities, and by conserving and enhancing the rural environment through support for "public" goods such as biodiversity and landscape appearance, the ERDP offers benefits to all who visit the countryside.

**Departmental Policies (Houghton and Washington, East)**

**Mr. Kemp:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on Houghton and Washington, East of his Department's actions since 2 May 1997. [153028]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 12 March 2001]:* MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis.

Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices.

Consumers in Houghton and Washington, East will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. This will benefit both consumers and taxpayers in Houghton and Washington, East. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside.

One of the most important outcomes of Agenda 2000 was the establishment of the Rural Development Regulation, which is being implemented in England through the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), investing around £1.6 billion in rural areas over seven years. By supporting rural development, including diversification into tourist activities, and by conserving and enhancing the rural environment through support for "public" goods such as biodiversity and landscape appearance, the ERDP offers benefits to all who visit the countryside.

### Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

**Jean Corston:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150555]

**Ms Quin:** MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis.

Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices.

Consumers in Bristol, East will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

The Government are committed to securing a more economically rational CAP. This will benefit both consumers and taxpayers in Bristol, East. We aim to redirect public money from agricultural price support mechanisms to rural development measures of benefit to the wider rural community and visitors to the countryside.

One of the most important outcomes of Agenda 2000 was the establishment of the Rural Development Regulation, which is being implemented in England through the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), investing around £1.6 billion in rural areas over seven years. By supporting rural development, including diversification into tourist activities, and by conserving and enhancing the rural environment through support for "public" goods such as biodiversity and landscape appearance, the ERDP offers benefits to all who visit the countryside.

### Departmental Policies (North-East Derbyshire)

**Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the North-East Derbyshire constituency, the effect on North-East Derbyshire of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150879]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. Information on land use, crop areas, livestock numbers, and labour on holdings in England by parliamentary constituency has been produced from 1 June 1999 Annual Agricultural and Horticultural Census. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Information from the 1 June 2000 census will be available shortly and also placed in the House Library.

As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis. Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices. The value of direct CAP payments to the average farmer is set out in the table.

*Average subsidies received by full-time farm businesses, England 1999–2000*

*£000*

| | *Total direct subsidies* | *Crop subsidies* | *Of which: Livestock subsidies* | *Agri-environment* | *Other*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Cereals | 37.8 | 34.2 | 2.3 | 1.0 | 0.1 |
| General Cropping | 31.8 | 28.8 | 2.4 | 0.6 | 0.0 |
| Horticulture | 0.4 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.2 |
| Pigs and Poultry | 3.6 | 2.2 | 1.4 | 0.1 | 0.0 |
| Dairy | 8.5 | 2.8 | 4.9 | 0.8 | 0.0 |
| LFA Cattle and Sheep | 29.3 | 0.4 | 25.4 | 3.3 | 0.2 |
| Lowland Cattle and Sheep | 14.1 | 1.7 | 10.6 | 1.8 | 0.0 |
| Mixed | 33.8 | 21.4 | 10.7 | 1.7 | 0.0 |
| All Types | 22.5 | 14.8 | 6.4 | 1.2 | 0.1 |

[1] Includes capital grants and any other miscellaneous grants. These reflect a combination of nationally funded and partly match funded schemes.

*Notes:*

HLCA payments to hill farms are included under livestock subsidies

The figures show direct subsidy payments; they do not include allowance for the financial benefit of prices supported above world market levels under the CAP.

*Source:*

Farm Business Survey

In addition to CAP direct payments, farmers in the UK are benefiting from £1.35 billion in short-term financial relief since 2 May 1997.

This includes £785 million in agrimonetary compensation worth some £4,800 per average arable farmer, £3,200 per average dairy farmer, £1,400 per average sheep farmer, and £1,140 and £3,800 per average farmer for agrimonetary compensation related to the Beef Special Premium Scheme and Suckler Cow Premium Scheme respectively.

Since May 1997 the Government have more than doubled expenditure on agri-environment schemes in England. We now have more than twice as much land covered by Countryside Stewardship agreements and we have increased the funding of organic conversion from £571,000 in 1997–98 to £12 million in 2000–01 and £18 million in 2001–02. Full-time hill farmers in England will be in receipt of some £6,360 on average following the introduction of the Hill Farm Allowance Scheme this year. This compares to £4,048 under the Hill Livestock Compensatory Allowance in 1997–98.

Farmers in North-East Derbyshire can benefit from schemes available under the England Rural Development Programme, which is backed by funding of £1.6 billion over the period 2000–06. Three of the schemes within this programme—Rural Enterprise, Processing and Marketing, and Vocational Training—have a budget of around £190 million and are being operated on a regional basis; each region has its own allocation. These allocations are set out in the England Rural Development Programme.

Consumers in North-East Derbyshire will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

### Departmental Policies (Staffordshire, Moorlands)

**Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to Staffordshire, Moorlands constituency, the effects on Staffordshire, Moorlands of his Department's policies and actions *(a)* since 2 May 1997 and *(b)* in the 12 months ending on 1 May 1997. [149195]

**Ms Quin:** MAFF does not hold statistical information on a constituency basis relating to the Department's policies. Information on land use, crop areas, livestock numbers, and labour holdings in England by parliamentary constituency has been produced from 1 June 1999 Annual Agricultural and Horticultural Census. A copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Information from the 1 June 2000 census will be available shortly and also placed in the House Library.

As many of the Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis. Farmers in the UK receive approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. This does not include the significant additional costs to consumers as a result of CAP price supports which keep EU prices above prevailing world prices. The value of direct CAP payments to the average farmer is set out in the table.

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In addition to CAP direct payments, farmers in the UK are benefiting from £1.35 billion in short-term financial relief since 2 May 1997.

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Farmers in Staffordshire, Moorlands can benefit from schemes available under the England Rural Development Programme, which is backed by funding of £1.6 billion over the period 2000–06. Three of the schemes within this programme—Rural Enterprise, Processing and Marketing, and Vocational Training—have a budget of around £190 million and are being operated on a regional basis; each region has its own allocation. These allocations are set out in the England Rural Development Programme.

Consumers in Staffordshire, Moorlands will benefit from the Agenda 2000 reforms of the CAP in the form of reduced food bills, with the average saving for a typical family rising to £65 a year by 2010.

Comparable information for the 12 months preceding 1 May 1997 is not available.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Wednesday 25 April 2001*

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Incapacity Benefit

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the average length of time is that people spend on Incapacity Benefit. [157077]

**Mr. Bayley** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The average duration of Incapacity Benefit for claims which terminated in the period 1 April 1998 to 31 March 1999 is 1,027 days. If people who leave Incapacity Benefit for retirement pension are excluded, the average duration is 500 days.

*Note:*

Figures are taken from a 1 per cent. sample of claimants.

### National Insurance Numbers

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the average time that people who apply for a national insurance number must wait before *(a)* being given an appointment with the Benefits Agency and *(b)* receiving a national insurance number. [158676]

**Mr. Rooker:** The information on the average time that people who apply for a national insurance number (NINO) must wait before being given an appointment with the Benefits Agency is not held.

After a customer is interviewed by the Benefits Agency, the length of time he/she has to wait to receive their NINO depends on whether the application is for benefit or employment purposes.

With the introduction of the enhanced NINO process in April 2001 the Benefits Agency is responsible for notifying the customer of their NINO by letter after all inquiries have been completed.

### Child Benefit (Greenock and Inverclyde)

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Greenock and Inverclyde will benefit from the latest increase in Child Benefit; and if he will make a statement. [158598]

**Angela Eagle:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows:

The latest information shows there are 13,610 children and 7,957 families in the Greenock and Inverclyde parliamentary constituency receiving Child Benefit. Since 1997 the rate of Child Benefit for the first child has increased by 26 per cent. in real terms. The rates from April 2001 are £15.50 for the first child and £10.35 for all other children.

*Notes:*

1. Figures are based on the November 2000 100 per cent. extract of the Child Benefit computer system.

2. Cases are allocated to each parliamentary constituency by matching the postcode against the relevant version of the ONS Postcode Directory. Constituency boundaries are represented as at May 1997.

## DEFENCE

### Army Base Repair Organisation

**Mr. Caplin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Army Base Repair Organisation for the financial year 2001–02. [159241]

**Mr. Spellar:** Key Targets (KT) have been set for the Chief Executive for financial year 2001–02. The targets build on the progress already made by ABRO since it formed in April 1993 and will help it to prepare for trading fund status. They are as follows:

*KT1 Service Delivery—Programme Load*

To complete 95 per cent. of all programmes designated critical within the times agreed with the customer.

*KT2 Service Delivery—Land District Load*

To complete 95 per cent. of Land Command District Load tasks within the priorities agreed with the customer.

*KT3 Efficiency*

To reduce the average cost of a selected range of Programme Load products by 5 per cent., exclusive of spares, over the course of financial year 2001–02 from a 2000–01 baseline.

*KT4 Efficiency*

To reduce the average cost of a selected range of Land Command District Load tasks by 5 per cent., exclusive of spares, over the course of financial year 2001–02 from a 2000–01 baseline.

*KT5 Winning New York*

To produce a robust marketing strategy for the first year of trading (planned to be 2002–03) and to increase the value of third party revenue won in 2001–02 by at least 100 per cent. from a 2000–01 baseline.

### Tornado GR4

**Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on the Tornado GR4 mid life update. [159242]

**Mr. Spellar:** I am pleased to announce that following further development work and extensive trials, the GR4 with improved software achieved a Military Aircraft Release on 10 April. We expect shortly to deploy the GR4 operationally.

### Ro-ro Ferries

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement about the future of the contract to be placed with Harland and Wolff for the construction of two roll-on roll-off ferries to provide strategic sea lift capability for the armed forces; [157725]

(2) if he will make a statement on the progress of the programme to secure guaranteed access to roll-on roll-off ferries to provide strategic sea lift capability for the armed forces. [157726]

**Mr. Hoon** *[holding answer 24 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 9 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 359W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore). The commercial shipbuilding contracts for the two ships to be built by Harland and Wolff have been taken over by the Ministry of Defence. These contracts will be managed on our behalf by AWSR Shipping Ltd.

Negotiations on the Private Finance Initiative contract for the full Strategic Sea-lift service are proceeding and we expect to place a contract shortly. As a result of the adoption of a parallel build programme in two yards, it is planned that the full Strategic Sea-lift capability will be available by 2003, some two years ahead of the planned in-service date. Until then, a provisional service is being managed by MOD, providing an enhanced level of sealift compared to that previously available.

## Fast Jet Pilots

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the maximum output of fast jet pilots is from RAF Valley per year. [157721]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 24 April 2001]:* Over the next four years RAF Valley is tasked to provide places for 102 fast jet pilot students per year to meet the current RAF Valley output target of 80 pilots per year. The output target is determined by the future front-line manning requirements and is reviewed regularly. The RAF Valley output target has recently been increased as the result of such a review.

Capacity is greater than output as not all students achieve the full range of skills necessary to complete fast jet training. Those that do not are usually restreamed into rotary wing or multi-engine roles.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the anticipated shortfalls in *(a)* fast jet pilots and *(b)* single seat fast jet pilots for each of the next five years. [157722]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 24 April 2001]:* The current forecast shortfall of fast jet pilots in the armed forces over the next five years is as follows:

| *Year* | *Fast jet pilots*[1,2] |
|---|---|
| 2001–02 | 125 |
| 2002–03 | 138 |
| 2003–04 | 139 |
| 2004–05 | 138 |
| 2005–06 | 132 |

[1] Figures comprise the forecast shortfall in RN Sea Harrier pilots and RAF junior officer pilots—filling both flying posts (including front line and training squadrons) and ground appointments
[2] RAF Personnel Manning Agency. RAF Manpower planning forecasts do not differentiate between the various types of jet aircraft

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many fast jet pilots in the *(a)* RAF and *(b)* Royal Navy are combat-ready. [157724]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 24 April 2001]:* As at 31 March 2001, there were 230 combat-ready fast jet pilots in the Royal Air Force and 21 in the Royal Navy. A further 94 pilots were at lower states of readiness.

## Pilot Shortages

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the current shortages of trained pilots are for the *(a)* Sea Harrier FA2, *(b)* Harrier GR7, *(c)* Tornado F3, *(d)* Tornado GR1-GR4 and *(e)* Jaguar. [157723]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 24 April 2001]:* The shortfall of trained pilots based on the frontline strength and establishment of specific aircraft types on 1 March is as follows:

| *Aircraft type* | *Pilot shortfall* |
|---|---|
| Sea Harrier FA2 | 5 |
| Harrier GR7 | 9 |
| Tornado F3 | 12 |
| Tornado GR1/GR4 | 18 |
| Jaguar | 3 |

Notwithstanding the shortfalls, all operational commitments are being met.

## A400M

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason he has allowed the final production line for the A400M to be located in Spain. [157720]

**Mr. Hoon** *[holding answer 24 April 2001]:* The location of the final assembly line for the A400M is primarily a matter for Airbus Military Company. The company will be contracted to deliver aircraft on the basis of a "commercial approach" which makes maximum use of existing supply chains and centres of excellence. Just as Airbus UK is the centre of excellence for wing design and will be leading the wing design for the A400M, so European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company of Spain is the centre of excellence for military transport aircraft assembly and this thus influences the choice of Spain to host the final assembly line.

## Holy Loch

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Mr. Swinney) of 29 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 733W, on the cost of the clean-up operation of Holy Loch, what proportion of the cost has been met by the US Defence Department; and if he will make a statement. [158600]

**Dr. Moonie:** The US Defence Department are not contributing to the cost of the clearance nor are they legally obliged to do so.

## Departmental Pay

**Mr. Oaten:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what provision he is making for his Department's staff who wish to continue to be paid on a weekly basis. [158541]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Ministry of Defence's industrial staff will transfer from weekly to monthly pay during April and May this year as part of the process of harmonising their pay and grading arrangements with those of non-industrial staff, who are paid monthly. The change to monthly pay was negotiated with the industrial trade unions and supported by a majority of industrial staff who voted in favour by ballot. As is normal practice, the

change will apply to all industrial staff covered by the negotiations and consequently there is no provision for staff to continue to be paid weekly.

## SOLICITOR-GENERAL

### Lord Birt

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Solicitor-General how many reports Lord Birt has submitted to the Attorney-General in his capacity as an adviser on crime; and if he will make a statement. [158235]

**The Solicitor-General:** The Attorney-General and I received a briefing from Lord Birt setting out his emerging findings, prior to our meeting with him. Aside from that, the work undertaken by Lord Birt was considered alongside that undertaken by the Home Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers and Her Majesty's Treasury in preparing the Government's strategy document "Criminal Justice: the Way Ahead".

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Solicitor-General on how many occasions, and on what dates, *(a)* he and *(b)* the Attorney-General have met Lord Birt in his capacity as an adviser on crime since his appointment; and if he will make a statement about the contribution of Lord Birt to his Department's policies. [158228]

**The Solicitor-General:** The Attorney-General and I have had one substantive meeting with Lord Birt. The work undertaken by Lord Birt was considered alongside that undertaken by the Home Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers and Her Majesty's Treasury in preparing the Government's strategy document "Criminal Justice: the Way Ahead".

## PRIME MINISTER

### East Midlands Airport

Q13. **Mr. David Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister when he next plans to visit East Midlands airport. [157684]

**The Prime Minister:** I have no immediate plans to do so.

### KFOR

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Bush the role of the American element in KFOR in Macedonia and at Camp Bondsteel in Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [157576]

**The Prime Minister:** KFOR's mandate does not include operations in Macedonia. As is the case for other KFOR contributors, including the UK, the US has a logistical unit based in Macedonia in support of their KFOR contingent based at Camp Bondsteel.

The US forces based at Camp Bondsteel are an integral part of KFOR, and make an invaluable contribution to its performance, and its ability to achieve its objectives.

I have no plans at present to discuss the role of the American element in KFOR with President Bush. But I and Ministers in my Government discuss Balkan-related issues with the US on a regular basis. President Bush and I underlined our joint commitment to promote peace and stability in the Balkans on 23 February at Camp David.

## ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

### Newcastle Airport

**Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the safety of passenger aircraft approaching Newcastle Airport, following the AAIB report on an incident involving civilian and military aircraft on 20 March 2000; and if he will make a statement. [158411]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The AAIB report made two recommendations to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), both of which the Authority has partially accepted. In its published response to the recommendations, the CAA said that the Directorate of Airspace Policy had conducted a study of operations by scheduled public transport services in all Class G airspace, including those in the vicinity of Newcastle Airport. The study confirmed that provided a Radar Advisory Service or Radar Information Service is used, safety levels in such airspace meet the internationally agreed standard.

It is clear from this incident, however, that not all traffic is availing itself of such air traffic services. Consequently the CAA is working closely with airspace users and Newcastle Airport, as a matter of urgency, on a wide range of initiatives aimed at preventing such conflicts in the future.

### Motorcycle Excise Duty

**Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect on *(a)* emissions reduction and *(b)* congestion reduction of the decision to raise motorcycle excise duty by £5. [158406]

**Mr. Hill:** Vehicle Excise Duty for motorcycles over 250cc increased by £5 to £65 from 1 March 2001. My Department has not carried out any formal analysis of the effect of this change on levels or patterns of motorcycle use and hence on congestion and levels of emissions. However, we believe that any such effects are likely to be negligible.

### Housing Developments

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many housing developments were approved in London during each of the past three years; and what proportion of the development was for affordable rented housing and for social housing. [158583]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The estimated number of planning applications, for which planning permission was granted, relating to housing developments in London is as follows:

1998—4,000

1999—3,600

2000—4,000.

A full breakdown of information on affordable housing provided as part of individual development schemes is not available. The Department, working with the Greater London Authority, is taking steps to ensure that consistent and accurate data are collected for the provision of affordable housing in London.

### Fare Concessions

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with rail companies on the introduction of further fare concessions for retired people. [158385]

**Mr. Hill:** There have been no discussions. The franchise agreement under which rail services are provided require train operating companies to participate in mandatory railcard schemes, including one for senior citizens, based on the railcards offered by British Rail. Participation in these schemes will be a requirement in any new franchise negotiated under the Strategic Rail Authority's replacement programme. Any further concession would be a matter for the Association of Train Operating Companies to consider.

### Londonwide Cycle Lane Network

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with London local authorities to encourage the development of a Londonwide cycle lane network; and if he will make a statement. [158475]

**Mr. Hill:** None. This is a matter for the Mayor of London, Transport for London and the other local highway authorities in London. The Mayor's draft transport strategy shows that Transport for London is taking a proactive approach to encouraging cycling.

### Noise Pollution

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps have been taken since May 1997 to equip local authorities with greater powers to regulate noise pollution. [158701]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The provisions in the Noise Act 1996 relating to the new night noise offence and associated powers of seizure came into force on 23 July 1997. We have issued a consultation paper, following a review of the Noise Act, setting out further options for local authorities to use in tackling noise nuisance. The closing date for comments was 31 March. I will announce the outcome of the consultation to the House. Copies of the report and consultation paper are available in the House Library.

### Bus Lanes

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action the Government are taking to ensure that only buses travel in the bus lane at peak times; and if he will make a statement. [158404]

**Mr. Hill:** It is for the local highway authority to decide, in the context of its local transport objectives, whether other classes of vehicles, such as cycles and taxis, should be permitted to use bus lanes. The highway authority would normally liaise with the local police on the enforcement of the traffic regulations so that only permitted vehicles use the lanes, but where authorities had taken on the powers now available to them to enforce parking restriction, they would be able to target parking offences in bus lanes more effectively.

Following successful trials in London, enforcement systems using bus-mounted and CCTV cameras are being introduced along bus routes in London. This includes local authorities carrying out enforcement using camera evidence.

My Department will be consulting later this year on regulations to allow local authorities outside London to take up powers in section 144 of the Transport Act 2000 to enforce bus lanes using camera evidence. These new powers would be available to authorities which have parking enforcement powers. We would hope to see a wider use of such approaches leading to better compliance with bus lanes restrictions, keeping them clearer for buses to use.

### School Transport

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the US-style yellow bus as a home-to-school transport service in those counties where it has been piloted; and what implications the scheme has for home-to-school transport throughout the rest of the United Kingdom. [158769]

**Mr. Hill:** The Government are keen to promote bus travel as an alternative to using the private car. We have reached an agreement with First Group plc which enables them to offer suitably modified US-style buses for use in pilot schemes. We shall be evaluating the results of these schemes in due course.

### Sites of Special Scientific Interest

**Mr. Paul Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 4 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 182W, regarding sites of special scientific interest, if he will list the locations of SSSIs in Shrewsbury and Atcham; and if he will make a statement. [158763]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The table shows the name of all 27 sites of special scientific interest (SSSIs) wholly or partly within the Shrewsbury and Atcham area. It also gives the date the site was notified, its area and grid reference.

*SSSIs within Shrewsbury and Atcham borough council area*

| *Site* | *Notification date* | *Area (HA)* | *Grid reference* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Attingham Park | 22 March 2000 | 190.75 | SJ550096 |
| Berrington Pool | 25 January 1984 | 4.8 | SJ524072 |
| Bomere, Shomere and Betton Pools | 26 October 1983 | 59.8 | SJ502080 |
| Buildwas River Section | 5 February 1986 | 1.29 | SJ640045 |
| Buildwas Sand Quarry | 22 December 1992 | 0.14 | SJ644041 |

*SSSIs within Shrewsbury and Atcham borough council area*

| *Site* | *Notification date* | *Area (HA)* | *Grid reference* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bullhill Brook | 21 July 1998 | 0.31 | SJ555015 |
| Chermes Dingle | 17 July 1986 | 5.46 | SJ614064 |
| Comley Quarry | 26 July 1985 | 4.92 | SO484963 |
| Coundmoor Brook | 20 August 1985 | 3.99 | SJ558037 |
| Earl's Hill and Habberley Valley | 26 July 1985 | 62.62 | SJ410048 |
| Granham's Moor Quarry | 28 November 1985 | 2.64 | SJ389036 |
| Hencott Pool | 4 March 1985 | 11.8 | SJ490160 |
| Hope Valley | 30 March 1987 | 4.85 | SJ348013 |
| Hughley Brook | 13 November 1985 | 10.42 | SO585996 |
| Huglith Mine | 15 March 1993 | 4.2 | SJ404016 |
| Lin Can Moss | 16 February 1984 | 1.88 | SJ375210 |
| Long Mynd | 23 March 1990 | 2,719.29 | SO421924 |
| Minsterley Meadows | 28 November 2000 | 8.14 | SJ379048 |
| Old River Bed, Shrewsbury | 18 February 1985 | 14.99 | SJ496147 |
| River Severn at Montford | 14 December 1994 | 27.02 | SJ422144 |
| Sheinton Brook | 5 February 1986 | 2.51 | SJ607037 |
| Shrawardine Pool | 12 July 1983 | 17.89 | SJ398161 |
| The Wrekin and The Ercall | 17 December 1986 | 287.05 | SJ630084 |
| Tick Wood and Benthall Edge | 22 August 1985 | 144.74 | SJ650029 |
| Trewern Brook | 28 November 1985 | 5.1 | SJ305121 |
| Wenlock Edge | 17 December 1986 | 135.24 | SO596986 |
| Whitwell Coppice | 13 November 1985 | 15.35 | SJ619021 |

## Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Anthony D. Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will provide financial assistance to local authorities under the Bellwin scheme in respect of costs incurred following recent outbreaks of foot and mouth disease. [158891]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Councils and other authorities around the country should be commended for the way they have responded to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. While they have a responsibility to budget for the unexpected, the costs that some authorities have incurred because of this outbreak may be exceptional. The Government are keen to ensure that authorities are reimbursed for any extraordinary emergency expenditure so other key services such as education and social services do not suffer.

That is why I am announcing today an extension of the Bellwin scheme to provide emergency financial assistance to local authorities to help them meet some of the costs of responding to outbreaks of foot and mouth disease.

I am satisfied that financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme is justified to help those councils affected by foot and mouth disease. Under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, grant will be paid against valid claims to cover 85 per cent. of the eligible costs above a threshold. These are costs incurred in connection with the taking of immediate action to safeguard life and property or to prevent severe inconvenience following an emergency connected with foot and mouth disease.

My officials are in correspondence with local authorities about the details of the Bellwin scheme. Information will shortly be posted on the Bellwin website which can be found at www.local.detr.gov.uk/finance/bellwin/bell0001.htm.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### EU Youth Orchestra

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on his policy towards funding of the European Union youth orchestra; and how much support was given from public funds in the current financial year. [158755]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** The European Union youth orchestra offers young musicians from across the European Union the opportunity to work together to extend their musical experience, and to perform with leading world conductors and soloists. The specialist training and preparation for concerts provides invaluable training and experience for young musicians and can help in the pursuit of a professional career.

The European Union youth orchestra is primarily supported financially by the European Union. Additional contributions come from the 15 member states of the European Union, of which the UK's contribution was £30,000 from the British Council for the financial year ending 30 September 2000. Funding is also received from corporate and private sponsors.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Cheltenham Gold Cup

**Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to assist businesses and individuals who have been financially disadvantaged by the cancellation of the Cheltenham Gold Cup Festival. [158346]

**Mr. Caborn:** The Government recognise that businesses in areas affected by foot and mouth disease (FMD) are under considerable financial pressure, while

visitor numbers are down and high-profile events such as the Cheltenham Gold Cup are cancelled or postponed.

The Government are constantly monitoring the financial impact of FMD in the country, and have already announced a range of measures to assist businesses through any immediate financial difficulties, including a £120 million extension to the Small Firms Loans Guarantee Scheme (SFLGS).

In addition to these measures, the South-West Regional Development Agency (SW RDA) and Objective 2 partnership have identified over £4 million to assist with the immediate needs of the region and invest-in-recovery programmes to rebuild businesses and communities over the longer term.

### Genetically Modified Fish

**Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the projects funded by his Department and its research councils in the past 10 years on scientific research into genetically modified or transgenic fish in the United Kingdom and abroad, by research project title indicating the purpose of the research, the project timespan, its total cost and recipient research centres including projects recently begun. [157754]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** Project details are listed as follows. All experiments using fish must satisfy the regulations of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Those involving genetic modification are subject to the regulations governing releases to the environment. Marketing of genetically modified fish would also require further approvals, principally as a novel food.

In 1991–92, the then Agriculture and Food Research Council (AFRC) funded three grants to work on transgenic fish. These were on carp, salmon, trout and goldfish (a form of carp). These grants finished in 1995. One was to determine how to undertake transgenesis in fish because techniques for other species did not work well, one was to manipulate the onset of sexual maturity and the third to change the rate of growth of the fish.

In addition, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council and Medical Research Council are supporting a good deal of research using the fish genome as a model. However, this research is aimed at understanding genetic function more generally at a fundamental level, not at improved varieties of fish.

The research councils are also supporting a range of wider research on fish genetics and aquaculture, but I understand this does not involve genetic modification (GM). I would be happy to provide my hon. Friend with the details if he so wishes.

| *Research project title* | *Timespan* | *Cost (£)* | *Institution* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Agriculture and Food Research Council* | | | |
| Efficient production of transgenic fish | 21 October 1991–21 October 1995 | 112,100 | University of Southampton |
| Directing gene expression in transgenic fish | 13 January 1992–13 September 1995 | 99,500 | Universities of Southampton and Edinburgh |
| Grass carp growth hormone gene expression in the early development of goldfish and salmon | 9 November 1992–9 December 1995 | 118,200 | University of Aberdeen |
| *NERC* | | | |
| The genetic impact of escaped farmed Atlantic salmon on local adaptation and fitness of wild populations: performance of second generation hybrid (ie investigating the genetic impact of genetically modified fish on the wild fish) | September 2000–February 2002 | 36,240 | Queen's University Belfast |

### Aquaculture Research

**Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the research projects supported by his Department over the last 10 years into aquaculture research, including the sums spent on each project. [157755]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** I am not aware of any, although the research councils, funded by the Department, may be supporting a number of potentially relevant projects, including contributions to the LINK Aquaculture programme. I would be happy to provide further details.

### Digital TV (Dorset)

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action his Department is taking to enable television viewers in the Verwood area of Dorset to obtain access to the full range of digital terrestrial television. [158472]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting on 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 16–17W.

### Universal Bank

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in discussions on establishing a universal bank at the Post Office; and if he will make a statement. [158770]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** Discussions with the banks are at an advanced stage. I hope that they will be concluded shortly.

### Parental Leave

**Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his plans in respect of parents' rights to take parental leave. [159150]

**Mr. Byers:** The Government are committed to helping parents to achieve a better balance between their home and work lives, in ways which enhance competitiveness for business. That is why we published the Green Paper "Work and Parents: Competitiveness and Choice", and have carried out extensive consultation with employers and their representatives, employees and their representatives, and family groups.

As part of these consultations we have, among other points, received representations on the existing right to parental leave. In the light of these responses I am today announcing three important decisions.

First, we will increase from 13 to 18 weeks the amount of parental leave available to parents of disabled children. An increase on these lines was almost universally positively received by both parents and employers.

Secondly, parental leave will remain unpaid. Parents gave more priority to other options in the Green Paper, and while paid parental leave was supported by some employee representatives and family groups, employers of all sizes maintained a high level of opposition to its introduction on grounds of cost and the impact of absence levels from the workplace. The cost of paying for parental leave would be excessive for both the state and employers.

Thirdly, we will extend entitlement to parental leave to parents of all children who were under five as at 15 December 1999, when the right was first introduced. Experience since then suggests that parental leave has created fewer practical problems for business than may first have been anticipated, and the time is now right to increase the number of parents who are able to exercise the right. Transitional arrangements will apply for parents of children who have since reached, or will soon reach, the age of five, to ensure that they are not disadvantaged.

A note on the regulatory costs of these measures has been put in the Library of the House. We will publish the necessary draft statutory instrument before the summer.

We will announce the further decisions taken as a result of the Green Paper as they are reached.

### Employee Consultation

**Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who is conducting the review of UK law on employee consultation; and when the review will be completed. [158814]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced on 18 January 2001 that he would review UK arrangements affecting collective redundancies, and that the review would consider whether the current laws were working and in particular whether more should be done to promote effective consultation with employees. As part of the review, the Department of Trade and Industry is holding discussions with companies and trades unions and other interested parties with experience in this field. These are continuing. The review will be completed as soon as possible.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Rehabilitation of Offenders Act

**Mr. Burgon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. [159243]

**Mr. Straw:** The Government are already committed to reviewing the rehabilitation periods in the Act, following a recommendation from the better regulation task force in their review of fit person criteria in 1999. The sentencing framework and its application has changed considerably since 1974 and may change further in the light of current reviews. We believe that the time is right for a fundamental review of the Act as a whole, rather than looking at just a part of it. We are working on preparations for such a review, and will give further details in due course.

### Boards of Visitors

**Mr. Pond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the review of the boards of visitors. [159244]

**Mr. Boateng:** I am pleased to announce that the right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) presented his report to me on 30 March and I have arranged for a copy to be placed in the Library. I am very grateful to him for the great care and trouble that he and his working party have given to this review of the boards of visitors and the complex issues that arose from it.

### Schengen Agreement

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Joint Schengen Authority information web page will be fully operational. [158758]

**Mrs. Roche:** I understand that the Joint Supervisory Authority, the independent body which oversees the operation of the Schengen Information System, presently maintains a web page providing information about its activities to members of the public.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on his policy towards retaining Schengen Information System material on domestic files after completion of the spot check; [158756]

(2) what public information campaign he plans to launch about the Schengen Information System. [158754]

**Mrs. Roche:** We have established a programme to take forward the introduction of the Schengen Information System to the United Kingdom. These are both matters I would expect to see the programme address in due course.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on UK participation in Schengen Information System inspections; and what assessment he has made of the report of 9 September 1999. [158759]

**Mrs. Roche:** It is the Department's policy to be fully involved with the Schengen evaluation process, including consideration of any reports that emerge from such evaluations. If the hon. Member will give me further details of the document in question, I will explore the matter further.

### Malcolm Reddican

**Ms Blears:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what inquiries he has made of Greater Manchester police with regard to the disclosure of information relating to the death of Malcolm Reddican. [157963]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The disclosure of information relating to the death of Malcolm Reddican is a matter for the Crown Prosecution Service and Greater Manchester police.

### Crowd Control Technologies

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, on what date he received the Crowd Control Technologies report published by the Scientific and Technological Options Assessment Panel of the European Parliament Directorate General for Research; and what measures he has taken to implement the recommendation that an independent and objective social impact study be *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* published prior to authorisation of purchase orders for new crowd control technology. [158036]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Officials have seen a copy of the report in question, which is not an official report of the European Parliament, and its conclusions have been noted.

The main direction for my Department's future work on baton round systems comes from the Patten Commission report on the future of the police in Northern Ireland. In line with the commission report, full account will be taken of public acceptability and all other relevant issues in our continuing efforts to identify alternatives to the baton round.

### Prison Inspections

**Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the prisons and penal institutions where conditions have been severely criticised by HM Chief Inspector of Prisons *(a)* he and *(b)* other Home Office Ministers, have visited; and if he will ensure that a Minister makes an unannounced visit to every such institution within a year of an adverse report by the Chief Inspector. [158376]

**Mr. Boateng:** Ministers undertake a rolling programme of visits to ensure that the full range of types and categories of prison are visited. Additionally, visits, both announced and unannounced, are arranged in response to issues or concerns raised for various reasons, including adverse comments from Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons.

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers he has to detain all asylum seekers. [158336]

**Mrs. Roche** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The powers to detain individuals are set out in paragraph 16 of schedule 2, and in paragraph 2 of schedule 3 to the Immigration Act 1971. These need to be exercised consistently with article 5 of the European convention on human rights, and with detention policy. There is no blanket power to detain all asylum seekers and the exercise of such a blanket power would almost certainly raise issues under the European convention on human rights.

### Sex Offenders

**Mr. Cotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will add anti-androgen pharmacological treatments to the sex offenders regime. [158522]

**Mr. Boateng:** The Prison Service's principal means of reducing reoffending by sex offenders is the sex offender treatment programme (SOTP), which is based on cognitive-behavioural principles. The service is aware of the value of anti-androgen treatment for some sexual offenders, and will be considering the extent to which it should be used as an adjunct to psychological therapy.

### Immigration Detainees (Battersea)

**Mr. Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration detainees were held in Battersea police stations in the past 12 months; and what was the average length of detention. [158736]

**Mrs. Roche:** The information requested is only held in manual form and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Since 1 April, the immigration service has sought to transfer individuals held by the police solely under Immigration Act 1988 powers to dedicated immigration detention facilities after no more than one night spent in custody at a police station.

### Crime (Lancashire)

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department has assessed the effect the installation of CCTV cameras has had on the reduction of crime in Burnley and Lancashire; and if he will make a statement. [158402]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Police operational experience and various research studies show that closed circuit television (CCTV) has considerable crime reduction and detection potential, particularly when used as part of a wider strategy.

The independent evaluation recently carried out on behalf of Burnley borough council of the "Piloting Neighbourhoods, Burnley" scheme suggests that there has been a reduction in crime of 49 per cent. from the period one year prior to the installation to one year after the installation of CCTV. This residential scheme was funded in 1997 under round 3 of CCTV challenge. The evaluation of Burnley town centre's CCTV scheme, funded in 1996 under round 2 of CCTV challenge, suggested that there had been a reduction in crime of one quarter after the installation of cameras.

We are not aware of any evaluations being carried out into the effect of CCTV in Lancashire as a whole. Schemes funded under round 1 of the CCTV initiative are still being implemented. They will need to have been in place for at least 12 months before their impact can be fully evaluated. Crime and disorder reduction partnerships will also be evaluating schemes locally.

### Lord Birt

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions, and on what dates, *(a)* he and *(b)* other Ministers in his Department have met Lord Birt in his capacity as an adviser on crime; and if he will make a statement about the contribution of Lord Birt to his Department's policies. [158238]

**Mr. Straw:** I met Lord Birt on two occasions on 25 May and again on 15 December 2000. My right hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Ministers of State met Lord Birt on 17 October. These meetings focused on analysing existing data on offenders, offences and victims and crime reduction.

## HEALTH

### Premature Babies

**Mrs. Fitzsimons:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many premature babies were born in the Greater Manchester area in 2000. [157230]

**Mr. Denham:** Information is not available in the form requested for the year 2000. However, in 1997–98, an estimated 2,900 babies were born in National Health Service hospitals in Greater Manchester prematurely (before 37 weeks gestation). This represents about 8 per cent. of total NHS hospital births in Greater Manchester.

*Source:*

Maternity Hospital Episode Statistics

### GP : Patient Ratios

**Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of patients per general practitioner is in *(a)* England, *(b)* the north-west, *(c)* north Cheshire and *(d)* Halton. [157842]

**Mr. Denham:** The average list size of unrestricted principals and equivalents in England, the north-west region, North Cheshire health authority and Runcorn and Widnes primary care groups (PCGs) as at 30 September 2000 is shown on the table.

*Average list size of unrestricted principals and equivalents in England; the north-west region; North Cheshire health authority (HA) and Runcorn and Widnes primary care groups (PCG) as at 30 September 2000*

| | *Average list size* |
|---|---|
| England | 1,853 |
| North-west region | 1,880 |
| North Cheshire HA | 1,918 |
| Runcorn PCG | 1,821 |
| Widnes PCG | 1,972 |

### Medical Negligence

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been paid in compensation by the NHS for medical negligence in each of the last 20 years. [158338]

**Mr. Denham:** Figures on the amounts included in the national audit summarised accounts for clinical negligence payments for the latest available years are as follows:

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 235 |
| 1997–98 | 144 |
| 1998–99 | 221 |
| 1999–2000 | 373 |

*Notes:*

1. Figures prior to 1996–97 are not available because clinical negligence was not separately identified in the accounts prior to that date.
2. The 1999–2000 figure is provisional as it is subject to audit.
3. Changes to accounting policies mean that these amounts are not directly comparable.

*Source:*

National Health Service summarised accounts for health authorities, NHS trusts and NHS Litigation Authority.

### Victoria Climbié

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 687W, on Victoria Climbié *(a)* when he expects to set up the statutory inquiry and *(b)* what the remit of the inquiry will be. [158354]

**Mr. Hutton** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Further announcements about the statutory inquiry into the circumstances leading to and surrounding the death of Victoria Climbié were made on 20 April 2001. The inquiry has been established by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State under powers in section 81 of the Children Act 1989 and section 84 of the National Health Service Act 1977, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department under section 49 of the Police Act 1996. Lord Laming of Tewin has been appointed to conduct the inquiry. The terms of reference have been placed in the Library. The date of the preliminary meeting will be announced shortly.

### Nutriprem 2

**Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) on what date the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances first reviewed Nutriprem 2; what recommendations that Committee made about its suitability for prescription; and if those recommendations have been implemented; [158193]

(2) on what date his Department first received an application from the manufacturers of Nutriprem 2 for the product to be available on prescription; and when he will announce a decision on this matter. [158190]

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which advisory committees of his Department have considered the suitability of Nutriprem 2 for availability on prescription; when that consideration was undertaken; what conclusions were reached; if those conclusions have been implemented; and if he will make a statement; [158319]

(2) if he has received an application from the manufacturers of Nutriprem 2 for their product to be made available on prescription; and if he will make a statement. [158321]

**Ms Stuart** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Pre-term infant formulae were originally considered by the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances (ACBS) in 1992. Their conclusion at that time was that prematurity was not a medical condition and that it would not be appropriate for such formulae to be supplied on national health service prescription. In consequence, pre-term infant formulae have been included in Schedule 10 to the National Health Service (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992, and may not therefore be prescribed on the NHS.

An application for an ACBS recommendation for Nutriprem 2 was made on 8 February 1999 which the Committee considered at its meetings on 29 March and 15 June of that year and on 31 January 2000. At its meeting on 31 January 2000, the Committee decided to reverse its earlier view and agreed to recommend Nutriprem 2 as suitable for prescription by GPs at NHS expense for catch-up growth in pre-term infants (ie less than 35 weeks at birth), and small in size for gestational aged infants, until six months post-natal age. Unfortunately, at that time, the fact that Nutriprem 2 was included in schedule 10 was overlooked. At its meeting on 16 May 2000, the Committee recommended that Nutriprem 2 should be removed from schedule 10.

The Department has been considering whether the reasons which the Committee has given for reversing its earlier decision are sufficiently convincing to justify the additional cost to the NHS of removing this product from schedule 10. We expect to announce our decision in due course.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average period is between a recommendation from the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances that a product is suitable for prescription and a decision to implement that decision; and what the average period of consideration given by his Department is to recommendations from that Committee in respect of Nutriprem 2. [158320]

**Ms Stuart** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* General practitioners may prescribe any product which they consider to be a drug, unless it is included in schedule 10 to the National Health Service (General Medical Services) Regulations, provided they are prepared to justify their decision to the health authority. The Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances provides advice to the National Health Service, the effect of which is that prescriptions issued in accordance with the Committee's advice will not normally be investigated. Generally, therefore, there is no decision for the Department to take when the ACBS has recommended that a product is suitable for prescription. Indeed, I know of no case other than pre-term infant formulae where the ACBS has recommended as suitable for prescription products which cannot be prescribed because they are included in schedule 10. There is thus no average time with which to compare the time taken to consider the ACBS's recommendations on these products.

## Endoscopy Activity

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he decided to reclassify new endoscopic activity as complex out-patient rather than in-patient work; and if he will make a statement; [158267]

(2) what his estimate is of the reduction in in-patient waiting lists consequent upon the reclassification of new endoscopic activity as complex out-patient procedures. [158268]

**Mr. Denham:** We have made no changes to the way endoscopy activity is classified.

## Gastroenterology

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people are on a waiting list for in-patient gastroenterology in England and Wales; [158266]

(2) what proportion of the national waiting list for gastroenterology is made up of patients waiting for endoscopic activity. [158270]

**Mr. Denham:** On 31 December 2000, the latest date for which this information is available, 11,526 people were awaiting admission to hospitals in England for gastroenterology. Information collected centrally does not identify separately those patients awaiting endoscopies. Information for Wales is a matter for the devolved Administration.

## Food Poisoning

**Mr. Dobson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of *(a)* E.coli poisoning and *(b)* salmonella poisoning have been reported in the United Kingdom in each year since 1970; and how many people died in each year. [151645]

**Ms Stuart** *[holding answer 1 March 2001]:* Table 1 sets out the total number of laboratory-confirmed isolations of E.coli 0157 from humans reported to the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) in England and Wales, the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health in Scotland and the PHLS Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, Northern Ireland in each year since 1982. There are no reports prior to 1982.

There is no specific ICD-10 (International Classification of Diseases) code for Verocytotoxin-producing E.coli (VTEC) 0157 and therefore it is not possible to obtain data from the Office for National Statistics or the General Register Offices on deaths attributable to VTEC 0157 infection. Furthermore those who die following infection will usually have symptoms of kidney failure or brain damage and these features are more likely to be recorded on death certificates.

*Table 1: E.coli 0157: Reports of laboratory-confirmed isolations from humans in the UK, 1982–2000*

| Year[1] | Scotland | England and Wales | Northern Ireland | Total UK reports |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1982 | [2]— | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| 1983 | [2]— | 6 | 0 | 6 |
| 1984[3] | 3 | 9 | 0 | 12 |
| 1985 | 3 | 50 | 0 | 53 |
| 1986 | 4 | 76 | 0 | 80 |
| 1987 | 12 | 89 | 0 | 101 |
| 1988 | 39 | 49 | 0 | 88 |
| 1989 | 87 | 119 | 1 | 207 |
| 1990 | 165 | 250 | 1 | 416 |
| 1991 | 202 | 361 | 2 | 565 |
| 1992 | 115 | 470 | 1 | 586 |
| 1993 | 119 | 385 | 2 | 506 |
| 1994 | 242 | 411 | 3 | 656 |

*Table 1: E.coli 0157: Reports of laboratory-confirmed isolations from humans in the UK, 1982–2000*

| Year[1] | Scotland | England and Wales | Northern Ireland | Total UK reports |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1995 | 247 | 792 | 7 | 1,046 |
| 1996 | 506 | 660 | 14 | 1,180 |
| 1997 | 423 | 1,087 | 25 | 1,535 |
| 1998 | 217 | 890 | 24 | 1,131 |
| 1999 | 295 | 1,084 | 51 | 1,430 |
| 2000 | 200 | 897 | 48 | 1,145 |

[1] No data
[2] There were no reports of E.coli 0157 in the UK prior to 1982
[3] There were no laboratory reports of E.coli 0157 to the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health (SCIEH) prior to 1984
[4] Data for 2000 remains provisional
*Sources:*
Scotland data are from the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health (SCIEH) and represents laboratory reports (faecal isolates only) of Escherichia coli 0157 in humans
England and Wales data is from the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) Laboratory of Enteric Pathogens (LEP) and represents verocytotoxin-producing strains of E.coli 0157 isolated from humans
Northern Ireland data are from the PHLS Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, Northern Ireland and represents laboratory reports of E.coli 0157 from humans.

Table 2 sets out the number of laboratory-confirmed reports of Salmonella in humans made to the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) in England and Wales, the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health in Scotland and the PHLS Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre in Northern Ireland in each year since 1970.

*Table 2: Salmonella: Reports of laboratory-confirmed isolations from humans in the UK, 1970–2000*[1]

| Year | Scotland | England and Wales | Northern Ireland | Total UK reports |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1970 | 828 | 6,848 | 55 | 7,731 |
| 1971 | 983 | 6,784 | 36 | 7,803 |
| 1972 | 854 | 4,849 | 36 | 5,739 |
| 1973 | 919 | 6,871 | 29 | 7,819 |
| 1974 | 580 | 5,663 | 44 | 6,287 |
| 1975 | 1,157 | 8,912 | 120 | 10,189 |
| 1976 | 1,550 | 7,831 | 166 | 9,547 |
| 1977 | 889 | 6,505 | 117 | 7,511 |
| 1978 | 1,253 | 9,042 | 35 | 10,330 |
| 1979 | 1,483 | 10,381 | 71 | 11,935 |
| 1980 | 1,577 | 9,508 | 136 | 11,221 |
| 1981 | 2,526 | 10,251 | 131 | 12,908 |
| 1982 | 2,621 | 12,322 | 94 | 15,037 |
| 1983 | 2,288 | 15,155 | 186 | 17,629 |
| 1984 | 2,221 | 14,727 | 157 | 17,105 |
| 1985 | 1,690 | 13,330 | 109 | 15,129 |
| 1986 | 2,015 | 16,976 | 282 | 19,273 |
| 1987 | 2,286 | 20,532 | 480 | 23,298 |
| 1988 | 2,563 | 27,478 | 200 | 30,241 |
| 1989 | 2,557 | 29,998 | 201 | 32,756 |
| 1990 | 2,458 | 30,112 | 259 | 32,829 |
| 1991 | 2,330 | 27,693 | 159 | 30,182 |
| 1992 | 2,992 | 31,355 | 226 | 34,573 |
| 1993 | 2,919 | 30,650 | 180 | 33,749 |
| 1994 | 2,969 | 30,411 | 282 | 33,662 |
| 1995 | 3,107 | 29,314 | 452 | 32,873 |
| 1996 | 3,266 | 28,983 | 413 | 32,662 |
| 1997 | 3,349 | 32,596 | 432 | 36,377 |
| 1998 | 2,109 | 23,728 | 534 | 26,371 |
| 1999 | 1,879 | 17,532 | 688 | 20,099 |
| 2000[2] | 1,723 | 14,845 | 419 | 16,987 |

[1] Faecal and other reports, excluding S.typhi and S.paratyphi
[2] Data for 2000 remains provisional
*Sources:*
Scotland data are laboratory reports to the Scottish Centre for Infection and Environmental Health (SCIEH) of Salmonella in humans in Scotland, 1970–2000
England and Wales data is from the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS). The Salmonella data for 1970 to 1980 differ from 1981 onwards as follows:
1. The pre-1981 data are paper records whereas data for 1981 onwards have been computerised and published on the PHLS website;
2. The pre-1981 data include all human isolates whereas the data from 1981 onwards are for faecal isolates only;
3. The pre-1981 data include more than one report for some patients whereas the data for 1981 onwards have had duplication removed so that there is only one report for each patient.
4. Data for 1981–91 is from Laboratory of Enteric Pathogens (LEP) (formerly DEP). Data for 1992 onwards is from the PHLS Salmonella datasheet.
Northern Ireland data are from the PHLS Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, Northern Ireland

Table 3 sets out the annual corrected notifications of deaths related to Salmonella infections (other than S.typhi and S.paratyphi), reported to the Office for National Statistics in England and Wales and the General Register Offices in Scotland and Northern Ireland in each year from 1970 to 1999.

*Table 3: Salmonella associated deaths in the UK, 1970–99*[1] *(ICD-003)*[2]

| Year | Scotland | England and Wales | Northern Ireland | Total UK reports |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1970 | 3 | 28 | 3 | 34 |
| 1971 | 3 | 34 | 0 | 37 |
| 1972 | 1 | 25 | 0 | 26 |
| 1973 | 3 | 37 | 1 | 41 |
| 1974 | 3 | 29 | 0 | 32 |
| 1975 | 6 | 45 | 2 | 53 |
| 1976 | 7 | 39 | 1 | 47 |
| 1977 | 7 | 34 | 3 | 44 |
| 1978 | 2 | 38 | 0 | 40 |
| 1979 | 6 | 48 | 0 | 54 |
| 1980 | 3 | 37 | 1 | 41 |
| 1981 | 9 | 34 | 0 | 43 |
| 1982 | 8 | 65 | 1 | 74 |
| 1983 | 5 | 49 | 0 | 54 |
| 1984 | 6 | 54 | 2 | 62 |
| 1985 | 4 | 49 | 0 | 53 |
| 1986 | 2 | 40 | 0 | 42 |
| 1987 | 1 | 52 | 2 | 55 |
| 1988 | 3 | 58 | 2 | 63 |
| 1989 | 3 | 61 | 0 | 64 |
| 1990 | 1 | 68 | 1 | 70 |
| 1991 | 4 | 62 | 0 | 66 |
| 1992 | 3 | 59 | 0 | 62 |
| 1993 | 2 | 35 | 0 | 37 |
| 1994 | 1 | 40 | 0 | 41 |
| 1995 | 2 | 36 | 1 | 39 |
| 1996 | 2 | 49 | 0 | 51 |
| 1997 | 1 | 44 | 0 | 45 |
| 1998 | 5 | 21 | 0 | 26 |
| 1999 | 4 | 25 | 0 | 29 |

[1] Data for 1999 are provisional
[2] Annual corrected notifications ICD-003 ('Salmonella Other') Salmonella related deaths excluding Salmonella typhi and Salmonella paratyphi
*Sources:*
England and Wales: Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Scotland: General Register Office Scotland (GROS)
Northern Ireland: General Register Office Northern Ireland (GRONI)
ICD-003: International Classification of Diseases (ICD) category for 'Salmonella Other' these infections exclude Salmonella typhi and Salmonella paratyphi

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to compensate farmers who have cattle approaching the 30 month cut-off and who suffer financially from being unable to transport their cattle to market. [152017]

**Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if compensation will be awarded to farmers who as a consequence of foot and mouth exclusion zones have been unable to move cattle and whose cattle have gone over the 30-month age limit. [155654]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answers 5 and 27 March 2001]:* The Government are continuing to look at ways in which the industry might be helped and recognise the concern of beef producers whose animals are subject to movement restrictions which push them over the 30-month age limit and so leave only the OTMS as an outlet for them. The Government's first priority is the eradication of the disease, but we are keeping the position of the producers affected in these ways under review. In the meantime, cattle of all ages may be entered into the livestock welfare disposal scheme if the circumstances are appropriate.

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if abattoirs will be compensated for the reduction in the value of hides following the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. [153851]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 19 March 2001]:* Compensation is payable for the market value of animals slaughtered to control foot and mouth disease. We have currently no plans to make consequential loss payments of this kind but the situation is being kept under review.

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to vaccinate livestock in Lancashire. [158225]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Although vaccination has not been ruled out in areas other than northern Cumbria and Devon, there are currently no plans to vaccinate livestock in Lancashire. Any such measure would require substantial farmer support.

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has made to protect new areas of low foot and mouth infection from exposure to stock originating from areas with higher levels of infection; and if he will make a statement. [154393]

**Mr. Morley:** The general ban on movement of animals susceptible to foot and mouth disease remains in place. Welfare movements are permitted only under licence from areas of low risk to areas of higher risk. This is based on a careful risk assessment, the principles of which we have set out on the MAFF FMD website http://www.maff.gov.uk/.

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action will be taken to improve biosecurity to prevent the reintroduction of foot and mouth disease after the disease has been controlled. [156011]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* The Ministry is already starting to look at what lessons can be learned from this outbreak to prevent foot and mouth disease recurring. We are currently consulting on a possible ban on swill feeding and on introducing movement restrictions on sheep, goats and cattle to require a 20-day standstill period. We are also reviewing the enforcement of legislation governing imports of animal products, both commercial and personal, and we will consider other issues surrounding the livestock sector, for example the operation of markets.

**Mr. Paice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in what circumstances foot and mouth-free status can be achieved without the slaughter of vaccinated animals. [156650]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* The recent European Commission decision (2001/257/EC) authorises the vaccination without slaughter of cattle in specific areas of the UK. Chapter 2.1.1 of the OIE International Animal Health Code contains guidelines on the steps to be taken to regain foot and mouth disease-free status in various circumstances.

**Sir John Stanley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what warnings were given to *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in his Department of the risk of spreading foot and mouth prior to the present outbreak arising from the use of swill feeding. [156879]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 4 April 2001]:* It has long been recognised that infected meat products might pose a risk if they are not adequately processed in pig swill. The controls in the Animal By-Products Order 1999 are designed to prevent the introduction and spread of diseases such as foot and mouth and classical swine fever by ensuring appropriate treatment of any catering waste which might include meat products.

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what provision he has made for the vaccination of livestock against foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [153023]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 9 March 2001]:* Vaccination has always been an option which we have constantly reviewed in the light of veterinary and epidemiological advice. We have developed contingency plans which would enable us to carry out a limited vaccination programme in certain circumstances. We also need to assess the views of the food and livestock sector.

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what vaccines are available against foot and mouth disease; and what his policy is on their use. [152471]

**Mr. Morley:** The vaccines are:

(i) *Adjuvanted inactivated foot and mouth disease vaccine.* An aqueous based vaccine for the immunisation of domestic ruminants.

(ii) *Aftopur DOE.* An oil based vaccine for the active immunisation of ruminants and pigs.

(iii) *Aftopur AlSap.* An aqueous based vaccine for the active immunisation of ruminants.

Vaccination has always been an option which we have constantly reviewed in the light of veterinary and epidemiological advice. We have developed contingency plans which would enable us to carry out a limited vaccination programme in certain circumstances. We also need to assess the views of the food and livestock sectors.

### Modern Biotechnology Information Transfer Club

**Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the transfer club members for each of the years of his Department's funding, indicating which of the transfer club members also received public funding for biotechnology research during this period, specifying the project details, research partners and funding periods. [157801]

**Ms Quin:** Membership of Campden and Chorleywood Food Research Association (*ca* 1,000 members) automatically conferred membership of the club in its first phase of operation (January 1996 to July 1997). Membership by direct subscription applied in the second phase (October 1997 to March 1999). There were 130 registered members, distributed as follows: retail (7 per cent. manufacturing and wholesale (41 per cent.); agriculture (8 per cent.); biotechnology (15 per cent.); academic and R&D (17 per cent.), Associations and Government (12 per cent.)

There is no direct link between the activities of the club and public funding for research.

**Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the role was of the Modern Biotechnology Information Transfer Club set up by his Department. [157799]

**Ms Quin:** The initiative to set up the Modern Biotechnology Information Transfer Club was taken by Campden and Chorleywood Food Research Association. The objective of the club was to stimulate the information of links between the food industry and the biotechnology sector. The main club activities were to disseminate information via bulletins (10); seminars (six); and visits to research laboratories (seven). MAFF's involvement was to provide partial financial support for the club as a technology awareness raising project, and to monitor the activities to ensure that agreed objectives were met.

**Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what financial and other public resources were put into the transfer club for each year until March 1999. [157800]

**Ms Quin:** Financial resources put into the Modern Biotechnology Information Transfer Club were as follows:

| *Year ending* | £ |
|---|---|
| March 1997 | 15,000 |
| March 1998 | 9,900 |
| March 1999 | 7,500 |
| Total | 32,400 |

Financial resources put in by industry through club membership fees were £57,412, representing 64 per cent. of total costs.

The only other public resources put into the club were for monitoring purposes to ensure that contractors were meeting objectives.

### Cod

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the findings of the scientific investigation into the diet of cod. [157833]

**Mr. Morley:** Copies of final report executive summaries for completed MAFF-funded research projects can be requested by e-mailing fisheries@csg.maff.gsi.gov.uk, specifying which area of research or project information is being requested. The research project investigating the diet of cod will be completed in March 2004.

### Sand Eel Fishery

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the results of the three years research programme into sand eels announced in November 1996. [157831]

**Mr. Morley:** This presumably refers to EU Contract 95/78 dealing with the effects of large-scale industrial fisheries on non-target species. The research partners for this project included the Sea Mammal Research Unit at St. Andrews and the Marine Laboratory at Aberdeen, which will be able to supply the hon. Member with information on this project.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158113]

**Mr. Wilson:** The Government are committed to equality of opportunity and to increasing the diversity of those appointed to public bodies. No age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in this Department.

## TREASURY

### Resource Accounts

**Mr. Sheerman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 300–02W, on what date each of the resource accounts for 1999–2000 were published; what the *(a)* greatest, *(b)* median and *(c)* least number of days that elapsed was between each of the resource accounts being laid upon the table and being made generally available to the public; and if he will make a statement. [158540]

**Mr. Timms:** The dates that Departments' resource accounts were published are shown in the table.

| *Departments* | *Date published* |
|---|---|
| DFEE | 22 March 2001 |
| Teachers Pension Scheme | 22 March 2001 |
| Ofsted | 15 February 2001 |
| NHS Pension Scheme (England and Wales) | — |
| Department of Health | 22 March 2001 |
| Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions | 29 March 2001 |

| Departments | Date published |
|---|---|
| Ofwat | 31 January 2001 |
| ORR | 21 March 2001 |
| Home Office | [1]— |
| Charity Commission | 28 March 2001 |
| Lord Chancellors Department | [1]— |
| Treasury Solicitors | [1]— |
| Crown Prosecution Service | 30 March 2001 |
| Public Records Office | 25 January 2001 |
| Serious Fraud Office | 7 March 2001 |
| Northern Ireland Court Service | 30 March 2001 |
| Armed Forces Pension Scheme—MOD | 13 December 2000 |
| Defence—MOD Consolidated | 1 February 2001 |
| FCO | 30 March 2001 |
| DfID | [1]— |
| DfID—Superannuation Pensions | [1]— |
| DTI—Main | 31 January 2001 |
| ECGD | 20 December 2000 |
| OFGEM | 20 December 2000 |
| OFT | 31 January 2001 |
| Oftel | 31 January 2001 |
| UK Atomic Energy Authority—DTI | 31 January 2001 |
| MAFF | [1]— |
| Forestry Commission | [1]— |
| Forestry Commission Pension Scheme | 22 March 2001 |
| Intervention Board Executive Agency | 9 November 2000 |
| DCMS | 31 January 2001 |
| DSS | 16 February 2001 |
| Scotland Office | [1]— |
| Wales Office | 24 January 2001 |
| Northern Ireland Office | [1]— |
| HM Treasury | [1]— |
| Crown Estate | 19 April 2001 |
| Customs and Excise | 31 January 2001 |
| Department of National Savings | 3 November 2000 |
| GAD | 31 January 2001 |
| Inland Revenue | 24 January 2001 |
| National Investment and Loans Office | 22 November 2000 |
| Office for National Statistics | 2 April 2001 |
| Cabinet Office | [1]— |
| Security and Intelligence Agencies | 12 April 2001 |
| Cabinet Office: Civil Superannuation | 30 March 2001 |
| Central Office for Information | 19 April 2001 |
| Privy Council Office | 9 February 2001 |

[1] Where no date is shown the accounts were not published by 24 April 2001

As at 24 April 2001, the greatest, median and least number of working days between the laying and publication of departmental resource accounts were as follows:

| | Number of days |
|---|---|
| Greatest | 54 |
| Median | 6 |
| Least[1] | −1 |

[1] DETR's non-statutory resource account was published the day before it was presented to Parliament

Fourteen Departments arranged for this statutory resource account to be published on the same day that they were laid by the Treasury, as did one Department for its non-statutory resource account.

This is the first year that Departments have had to organise the printing and subsequent publication of statutory accounts. The National Audit Office undertakes publication of appropriation accounts. The Treasury has informed Departments of the need to publish their resource accounts promptly after laying. Work is in hand to improve Departments' performance in respect of publication of 2000–01 resource accounts.

## Money Laundering

**Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he will take to stop money laundering from the developed world through the City of London. [157659]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The United Kingdom already has comprehensive provisions in place to prevent money laundering, irrespective of where the funds originated. Money laundering is a serious criminal offence in the UK and attracts penalties of up to 14 years imprisonment—among the highest in the world. The UK anti-money laundering regime has been praised by the financial action taskforce as a model for other countries. Nevertheless, the Government are committed to implementing further measures to strengthen the laws against money laundering.

The Proceeds of Crime Bill, published in draft for consultation in March, will create a new criminal assets recovery agency, update the criminal laws on money laundering and permit the restraint of realisable property at the beginning of an investigation, an earlier stage than is possible at present. The Bill will also make it an offence for employees in the regulated sector to fail to disclose a transaction to the authorities when they knew or suspected or had reasonable grounds to suspect that it represented the proceeds of crime.

The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 will give the FSA powers both to issue money laundering rules and to prosecute for breaches of the Money Laundering Regulations 1993.

Furthermore, the UK has taken an active role in updating the EU money laundering directive. The directive will be updated to expand the range of predicate offences giving rise to an obligation to report suspicions and will impose reporting obligations on lawyers and accountants. It will thereby ensure that the minimum standards applicable in other member states are brought close to the tough standards already applied in the UK.

## Life Expectancy

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the estimated average life expectancy of *(a)* men and *(b)* women retiring today; and what the figures were for (i) 1991, (ii) 1981 and (iii) 1971. [158898]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The table gives life expectancy at state retirement age calculated from population estimates and deaths data for the calendar years shown.

*Life expectancy at state retirement age, United Kingdom*

| | Males age 65 | Females age 60 |
|---|---|---|
| 1971 | 12.4 | 20.1 |
| 1981 | 13.0 | 20.8 |
| 1991 | 14.1 | 21.9 |
| 1999 | 15.3 | 22.7 |

*Source:*
Government Actuary's Department

## Minimum Wage (Greenock and Inverclyde)

**Dr. Godman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in Greenock and Inverclyde benefited from the introduction of the national minimum wage; how many are estimated to benefit from the increase to £4.10; and if he will make a statement. [158599]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Dr. Norman Godman, dated 25 April 2001:*

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of people in Greenock and Inverclyde who have benefited from the introduction of the national minimum wage (NMW), and the number who will benefit from the increase to £4.10.

The Office for National Statistics has published estimates of the number of jobs paid at less than NMW rates for 1998, 1999 and 2000. These estimates are based on an improved methodology using data from the New Earnings Survey (NES) and Labour Force Survey (LFS). This methodology provides the best estimates for the number of jobs in the UK paid below low hourly rate thresholds and was developed to overcome the deficiencies inherent in using the NES and LFS separately for measuring low pay.

Estimates for the United Kingdom and Government Office Regions are posted on the National Statistics website at: www.statistics.gov.uk/nsbase/themes/labour_market/nmw_lowpay_tables.asp

Estimates for Parliamentary Constituencies of numbers of jobs paid below NMW rates are not available on the basis of the methodology applied for producing the national and regional level figures.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Trading Opportunities

6. **Mr. Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is taking to improve the trading opportunities of poorer countries. [157648]

**Clare Short:** We are working hard for the launch of a new trade round at the ministerial meeting in November in order to achieve an improvement in the trading opportunities of developing countries.

### Water and Electricity

7. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department offers to ensure public water supply and electricity supply to communities in poorer countries; and if she will make a statement. [157649]

**Mr. Mullin:** We live in a world where over 1 billion people lack access to safe water, 2.4 billion lack adequate sanitation, and a similar number have no electricity in their homes. Water and sanitation are fundamental to health and well-being. Electricity is essential for cooking, lighting and opportunities for small-scale enterprises. Last year my Department provided over £60 million to improve access to water supply and sanitation and £40 million for electricity services.

### Egypt

8. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the budget is for EU and UK development assistance to Egypt for *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002. [157650]

**Mr. Mullin:** Our budget for bilateral assistance to Egypt was £4 million in 2000–01 and is set to remain at this level in 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Assistance by the European Commission to Egypt was approximately £93 million in 1999, of which the UK contribution was £16.5 million, which is the latest year for which figures are available. Budget allocations for 2001 and 2002 have yet to be agreed.

### Russia

9. **Ms Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department is spending on overseas development assistance to Russia. [157651]

**Clare Short:** We spent £26 million on aid to Russia in 2000–01 and expect our programme to continue at this level. We contribute a further £12 million through the EC Tacis programme.

Our new country strategy will focus our work on support for the Government's economic and social reform programme which is crucial for the reduction of poverty in Russia.

### Palestinian Authority

10. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on aid to the Palestinian Authority. [157652]

**Clare Short:** Britain is providing assistance to the Palestinian Authority to help reduce poverty and support democratic and accountable government in the West Bank and Gaza. Palestinians are suffering badly from the effects of the current conflict and the economic sanctions imposed by Israel.

### Peru

11. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's policies on poverty reduction in Peru. [157653]

**Clare Short:** Although a middle-income country, Peru has a serious poverty problem with 41 per cent. of the population classed as poor and 15 per cent. as extremely poor and unable to meet food needs. The Government of President Fujimori grew increasingly corrupt before it collapsed in late 2000 and in the process undermined and reversed the progress on poverty reduction that they had achieved in the mid 1990s.

After the interim Paniagua Government was formed in November 2000, we concluded that our future strategy should remain focused on the problem of inequality in Peru and would be centred on enabling poor people, especially indigenous groups and women, to realise their social and economic rights, play their full role in society and get out of poverty. Once the Peruvian presidential election (now going to a second round in May or June) is decided and a new elected Government take office on 28 July, we will open discussions with them on the future shape of our support for poverty elimination. We will seek to work with the Peruvian Government, civil society and the international community to maximise progress towards meeting the international development targets in Peru.

## HIV/AIDS

12. **Mrs. Fyfe:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on development aid to combat HIV/AIDS in Africa. [157654]

**Clare Short:** HIV/AIDS is the single most important development challenge in Africa. The epidemic is undermining economic growth and fundamentally threatens social and economic development. DFID continues to give greatest priority to prevention, but we also support efforts to combat the personal, social and economic impact of illness and death caused by the disease.

As national strategic plans to tackle the epidemic improve, we have begun to place our support within the framework of those plans. For example, we have recently approved significant HIV/AIDS-related programmes in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe totalling over £60 million, and a £20 million programme is being designed to support Mozambique. A new programme for South Africa is also planned for this year. We have also committed £7.5 million to a regional initiative on HIV/AIDS with the Southern Africa Development Community. Last month, I approved a £25 million programme under the International Partnership Against AIDS in Africa to support the efforts of Ethiopia, Rwanda and Burundi and other countries to curtail the spread and reduce the impact of HIV/AIDS.

14. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the measures her Department is taking to strengthen the international effort to combat AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. [157656]

**Clare Short:** The Chancellor and I announced, as part of the global child poverty initiative, several tax measures and purchase fund options, to help increase access to medicines in developing countries. My Department is in discussion with other countries, international organisations, the private sector and civil society, to explore further options to increase international investment to tackle the diseases of poverty in developing countries, including the establishment of a global purchase fund for commodities for HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and diseases of childhood. In addition, we continue to encourage the EC to rapidly implement its programme of action for tackling the major communicable diseases.

We are also currently supporting a number of innovative public-private partnerships aimed at tackling the diseases of poverty. These include £14 million for the international AIDS vaccine initiative and support for the global alliance for vaccines, the medicines for malaria venture, and LAPDAP to treat drug-resistant malaria. In addition, the UK strongly supports the World Health Organisation-led roll back malaria initiative, which provides the vehicle for concerted action to deliver more widely the benefits of currently available methods of malaria control to the poorest.

Finally, we continue to work with developing countries to strengthen their basic health systems capable of delivering drugs correctly without which poor people will be unable to access the necessary drugs in their communities.

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money her Department has committed in support of sexual reproductive health programmes and action against HIV/AIDS since 1997; and how much it plans to spend in the next financial year. [157655]

**Clare Short:** I will write to my hon. Friend.

## Genetically Modified Fish

15. **Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what risk and impact assessments her Department has commissioned on genetically modified fish programmes. [157657]

**Clare Short:** The recent press reports that have suggested that DFID-sponsored research on genetically modified fish is being carried out in secret were false. Results are published and designed to help developing countries to decide for themselves whether they want to use these technologies.

The one current project is investigating genetic modification techniques to accelerate the growth rate and confer sterility in tilapia, a freshwater fish widely farmed in Africa and Asia. Each stage in the progression of this research depends on evidence of the balance between risk and potential benefits. Two assessments of environmental impact have been undertaken and a third commissioned. Socio-economic studies will help to provide a better understanding of how poor producers and consumers could benefit.

No genetically modified fish have been released from this project. Any controlled field testing will depend on the outcome of current studies. We would only consider a partnership with a developing country where appropriate bio-safety regulations are in place and with the full co-operation of the relevant local authorities.

## Zimbabwe

16. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations she has received regarding assistance for projects in Zimbabwe. [157658]

22. **Mr. Walter:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with other Governments in the industrialised world concerning future aid to Zimbabwe. [157665]

24. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's involvement in aid projects in Zimbabwe. [157667]

**Clare Short:** Since 1997 I have kept our development programme in Zimbabwe under regular review. As part of this process, I have had discussions with and from representations from a variety of interested parties from Zimbabwe, the UK and elsewhere. We remain committed to helping the poorest in Zimbabwe who are suffering the combined effect of economic mismanagement and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. But the situation in Zimbabwe is difficult and we continue to work only where we are confident our support can be effective.

For that reason, I have closed 12 development projects and suspended or substantially modified five others in the last 12 months. Most recently, we wrote to the Zimbabwe Government on 6 April informing them that we were ending our support to the Privatisation Agency of

Zimbabwe and to a Trade Policy Capacity Building Programme. In the continued absence of Government policies likely to reverse current economic decline and reduce poverty, I concluded that those projects were likely to have little beneficial impact for the people of Zimbabwe.

### Kyoto Protocol

17. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to help developing countries contribute to carbon dioxide reduction under the Kyoto protocol. [157660]

**Clare Short:** Over the last three financial years, we have provided around £200 million of development assistance to developing countries for projects and programmes which have contributed to mitigation of, or adaptation to, climate change. The UK has also provided around £215 million since 1992 to the global environment facility (GEF). One of the GEF's four focal areas is climate change, where it has looked in particular at developing renewable energy resources in developing countries.

28. **Mr. Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of the US President's decision not to ratify the Kyoto protocol on sustainable development in developing countries. [157671]

**Clare Short:** Climate change is a global problem which needs a global agreement. The UK believes that the Kyoto protocol provides the only framework for this. Developing countries are the most affected by climate change. We therefore believe that their best interests would be served by continuing to pursue our aim of ratification and entry into force of the Kyoto protocol by 2002, so as to start to deliver emissions reductions by developed countries. We will of course continue to encourage the US to engage in global efforts to tackle climate change and to take domestic action to reduce its emissions.

### Generic Drugs

18. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her policy in respect of the use of World Trade Organisation sponsored and unilateral trade sanctions as a response to developing countries providing generic drugs to treat diseases. [157661]

**Clare Short:** The TRIPS agreement does not apply to generic medicines, which are off-patent. Copies of patented drugs can be legitimately made under the TRIPS agreement through voluntary or, in certain circumstances compulsory licensing. There have been no cases of the WTO dispute settlement panel imposing sanctions on a developing country providing generic drugs.

### Malawi

19. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is providing to the Government of Malawi to support their anti-corruption measures. [157662]

**Clare Short:** We are working with the anti-corruption bureau through the provision of a technical adviser, support to undertake prosecutions, training and equipment. We are also helping to tighten Government-wide financial controls, supporting the Accountant-General in developing an integrated financial management information system, and have recently agreed support for the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament.

### Sierra Leone

20. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is giving to amputee victims of the RUF in Sierra Leone. [157663]

**Clare Short:** We are providing support to various NGOs including World Vision for work with displaced people in Sierra Leone. World Vision is providing support to amputees and others.

### Third-world Debt

21. **Mr. Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on discussions with the US Administration on third-world debt. [157664]

**Clare Short:** I expect to meet members of the new US Administration to discuss debt issues when I am in Washington later this month for the spring meetings of the World Bank and the IMF. My officials maintain regular contact with their US counterparts.

### Maternal Mortality

23. **Jean Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department is taking to help reduce levels of maternal mortality in developing countries. [157666]

**Clare Short:** The International Development goal of a three quarters reduction in maternal mortality by 2015 is a key priority within DFID's health strategy.

Functioning health systems are needed to achieve sustained progress in lowering maternal mortality. We have committed £1 billion since 1997 to help developing countries put in place effective health care systems, vital if maternity services are to be improved. We are also spending around £85 million on bilateral reproductive and sexual health, including projects specifically focusing on maternal health in Malawi, Nepal, Kenya and Ghana.

We are making significant contributions to the maternal health programmes of the European Community, the World Bank and international and national civil society groups, and collaborating with the health and development agencies of the United Nations system, particularly the World Health Organisation, the UN Children's Fund and the UN Population Fund to intensify efforts to make pregnancy safer.

### Firearms

25. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the impact of the availability of small firearms on developing countries. [157668]

**Clare Short:** Our work on analysing conflict-related issues and our experience and that of others in implementing development programmes demonstrates that the availability of arms, especially small arms and light weapons, exacerbates conflict and undermines sustainable development.

### Trade Unions

26. **Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about the role of trade unions in developing countries in promoting social justice. [157669]

**Clare Short:** Trade unions and other civil society organisations have an important role to play in promoting social justice. A strong independent civil society is essential for holding Governments to account and for ensuring that the voice of poor people is heard. Trade unions have traditionally drawn their membership from workers in the formal sector. The challenge for trade unions today is to reach the vast majority of poor people who work outside the formal economy.

### Corruption

27. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the level of corruption in British Government aid programmes. [157670]

**Clare Short:** My Department continuously reviews and assesses mechanisms for the delivery of, and accounting for, UK development funds in order to minimise the risk of corruption.

I am confident that our carefully designed programme management systems, supported by Internal Audit and National Audit Office scrutiny, are sufficiently robust to prevent or detect fraud or corruption.

In developing countries, my officials work closely with Governments, civil society and other development agencies to improve the quality of public sector financial management reform. These measures help to reduce the risks. In addition we may call for special programme management, audit and accounting systems in order to satisfy ourselves that funds are used for the intended purpose.

### Former Yugoslavia

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the value was of her Department's aid to *(a)* Macedonia, *(b)* Kosovo and *(c)* Serbia for the most recent six month period for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [157575]

**Clare Short:** The most recent period for which bilateral aid figures are published is the financial year 1999–2000.

In that year, my Department spent £111 million in emergency assistance for Kosovo refugees in the region including Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, and in Kosovo itself. The UK's share of EU aid to Kosovo and Kosovo refugees in the calendar year 1999 was £56 million.

Our bilateral spending on non-emergency aid to Macedonia in 1999–2000 was £0.84 million. The UK's share of total multilateral aid to Macedonia in the calendar year 1998, the latest for which figures are available, was £4.7 million.

We did not support a bilateral aid programme to Serbia in 1999–2000, in view of the lack of commitment to reform by the then Serbian Government. Our activities in Montenegro were confined to provision of advice to the Privatisation Council.

### Azerbaijan

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what new proposals she has to reduce fatalities in childbirth in Azerbaijan. [157644]

**Clare Short:** Azerbaijan is not a priority for direct assistance, due to poor progress in democratic reform. My Department does, however, provide financial support to international institutions including the WHO and the UNFPA, which operate safe motherhood and reproductive health projects in Azerbaijan.

### Commission on Intellectual Property Rights

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the members of the Commission on Intellectual Property Rights; and if she will make a statement on its objectives. [159344]

**Clare Short:** The commission, which we promised to set up in the international development White Paper published last December, will be headed by John Barton, Professor of Law of Stanford University in the USA. He is an expert on intellectual property law, who has long studied the impact that international and national rules have on developing countries.

The other members of the commission are:

Daniel Alexander, an intellectual property barrister from the UK

Professor Carlos Correa, Professor of Economics at the University of Buenos Aires, Argentina

Dr. R. A. Mashelkar, Director General, Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, New Delhi, India

Dr. Gill Samuels, Senior Director of Science Policy and Scientific Affairs, Europe, Sandwich Laboratories, Pfizer, UK

Dr. Sandy Thomas, Director, Nuffield Council for Bioethics, London, UK.

The terms of the reference of the commission are to consider:

how national IPR regimes should best be designed to benefit developing countries within the context of international agreements, including TRIPS;

how the international framework of rules and agreements might be improved and developed—for instance in the area of traditional knowledge and the relationship between IPR rules and regimes covering access to genetic resources;

the broader policy framework needed to complement intellectual property regimes, including for instance controlling anti-competitive practices through competition policy and law.

I hope that the commission will advance understanding of how IPR regimes could be sensibly implemented in ways that promote sustainable development, and better livelihoods and health for poor people in developing countries.

The commission will hold its first meeting in London on 8–9 May to chart out its objectives and how it will go about its work. The aim is that it will report to me by March next year. The commission will be supported by a secretariat whose members will be drawn from the staff of the Department for International Development and the UK Patent Office.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Thursday 26 April 2001*

## DEFENCE

### Defence Procurement Agency

**Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Procurement Agency for the financial year 2001–02. [159240]

**Mr. Hoon:** Five key targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency for the financial year 2001–02.

The first key targets apply to projects covered by the Major Projects Report which have passed their main gate approval. Key targets 2 and 3 are consistent with targets set in the Department's 1999–2002 Public Service Agreement (PSA), adapted to cover cumulative performance. The fourth key target relates to improvement in DPA customer satisfaction and the fifth to a reduction in the cost of running the agency. Key target 5 exceeds the target featured in the PSA. The key targets are:

Key target 1: Key requirements compliance

Predicted achievement of customers' key requirements for projects[1]: 97 per cent.

Key target 2: Average cumulative In-Service Date slippage

Average cumulative slippage of In-Service Dates[2] at 31 March 2002 not to exceed 11.4 months.

Key target 3: Average cumulative cost growth

Average cumulative cost variation[3] at 31 March 2002 not to exceed 2.5 per cent.

Key target 4: Customer Survey Satisfaction rating

Customer Satisfaction Rating 70 per cent.

Key target 5: Agency Running Costs

While continuing to meet the demands of the procurement programme, reduce the operating costs of the DPA in relation to the 1997–98 costs of the Procurement Executive by 22 per cent.

[1] Key requirements for projects in the MPR have been established that define the essential characteristics of the equipment.

[2] Variation between in service date (ISD) approved at Main Gate (the major investment decision point) and currently predicted ISD.

[3] Variation between cost approved at Main Gate and current estimate.

### Ministry of Defence Police Agency

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the quinquennial review of the Ministry of Defence Police Agency will take place; and what *(a)* the aim of, and *(b)* the arrangements for, the review will be. [159534]

**Dr. Moonie:** The quinquennial review (QQR) of the Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) will begin in April 2001. The review will examine the role, operations and organisation of the MDP with a view to establishing the requirement for its services in the future, and how these can best be delivered.

Work to prepare for the QQR has already begun. This has principally involved canvassing the views of the MDP's customers about its effectiveness, and gathering other information with which to assess the MDP's performance since it became an agency in April 1996. Stage one of the QQR will address three fundamental questions: to what extent is there a continuing requirement for the services currently provided by the MDP; how far could organisations other than the MDP contribute to meeting those future requirements; and, if a continuing requirement for MDP services is confirmed, what organisational configuration should it have. If continued agency status is confirmed, the second stage of the QQR will develop more detailed proposals for continuing improvements in performance and quality of service delivery.

The MDP is by no means the only organisation involved in providing policing and security services to the MOD. The review will therefore examine its interface with other practitioners (including Service police forces) to ensure that the MDP operates in a 'joined up' way with them, focusing in particular on the scope for partnership-working and the spread of best practice. It will also examine the way the relationship between the MDP and other UK police forces is evolving.

I expect to see advice arising from stage one of the review in the summer, and from stage two, if pursued, in the autumn.

The review team will consult widely with all stakeholders, including customer organisations, the MDP management team, Agency staff, the Defence Police Federation, Civil Service trades unions, other police forces, and the relevant policy staffs in MOD, the Home Office, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Treasury and the Cabinet Office. The MOD is also keen to hear the views of other organisations or individuals with an interest. These can be sent to the MDP QQR Team, Room 4113, MOD Main Building, London, SW1A 2HB.

### Tornado GR4

**Mr. Menzies Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when Tornado GR4s will be given Military Aircraft Release; when the first GR4s will be deployed on operations; and if he will make a statement; [157588]

(2) what effect there will be on the United Kingdom's commitments to the Joint Rapid Reaction Force of delay in achieving Military Aircraft Release for the Tornado GR4; and if he will make a statement. [157640]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The Tornado GR4 achieved an initial Military Aircraft Release (MAR) in July last year and has been used extensively in training since. I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the reply which my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright) on 24 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 334W.

In my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on 25 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 270W, I announced that, following further development work and extensive trials, the GR4 with improved software achieved a MAR on 10 April and we

expect the first aircraft to be deployed operationally shortly. In the meantime, there has been no effect on the United Kingdom's ability to meet its commitments to the Joint Rapid Reaction Force which have been maintained by Tornado GR1, Jaguar and Harrier GR7 aircraft.

### Nuclear Weapons

**Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what change there has been in the number of UK nuclear devices since May 1997. [158785]

**Mr. Hoon:** In line with Government intentions set out in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review, the UK now has a stockpile of less than 200 operationally available warheads.

## ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

### Driver Fatigue

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the number of road accidents during each of the last five years in which driver tiredness was *(a)* the cause and *(b)* a contributing factor. [158740]

**Mr. Hill:** Statistics on the main contributory factors in road accidents are not available. Research on behalf of the Department indicates that for car drivers in particular, driver fatigue may have been a principal factor in around 10 per cent. of accidents across the road network in Great Britain.

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of research into tiredness as a cause of road accidents. [158741]

**Mr. Hill:** The Department began its research programme on fatigue in December 1992 and research work continues. Data from the programme have greatly improved our understanding of the effects of fatigue on driving. The results have been developed into recommendations to drivers that have been incorporated into the Highway Code. In addition, the Department launched last August a long-term programme of publicity and advice on measures to counter driver fatigue.

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Tiredness Kills notices; [158405]

(2) how many Tiredness Kills signs there are on UK motorways; and where they are located. [158242]

**Mr. Hill:** I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Ben Chapman, dated 26 April 2001:*

I have been asked by the Transport Minister Keith Hill to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about Tiredness Kills signs. You asked how many of these signs there are on UK motorways; where they are located; and what assessment has been made of their effectiveness.

The Secretary of State's responsibilities and, therefore, the Agency's extend only to England, where these signs—which are usually worked "Tiredness Can Kill, Take a Break"—have been provided on the approaches to the following service areas:

A1(M) Blyth (southbound only)
M1 Leicester Forest East
M1 Toddington
M1 Trowell
M1 Woodall
M1 Wooley Edge
M2 Medway
M4 Leigh Delamere
M4 Reading
M5 Cullompton (southbound only)
M5 Exeter
M5 Frankley
M6 Burton
M6 Hilton Park
M6 Knutsford
M6 Sandbach
M6 Southwaite
M6 Stafford
M6 Tebay
M18 Doncaster North
M23 Pease Pottage
M25 Thurrock (southbound only)
M40 Cherwell Valley
M42 Tamworth
M62 Ferrybridge
M62 Hartshead Moor
M69 Leicester Forest East (northbound only)
M180 Doncaster North (westbound only)

Except where indicated, the practice is to provide one such sign on each carriageway, making a total of around fifty across the network.

We have made no systematic assessment of the effectiveness of the signs, though we do regard them as a useful reminder to motorway users of the dangers of continuing to drive when tired.

### Minimum Fuel Efficiency Standards

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made since May 1997 on introducing minimum fuel efficiency standards for all vehicles. [158660]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The UK played a leading role in the development of the voluntary agreement between the European Commission and European car manufacturers, secured in 1998. This commits manufacturers to improve the sales-weighted average fuel efficiency of new passenger cars by 25 per cent. on 1995 levels by 2008. Similar agreements have been reached between the European Commission and the Japanese and Korean car manufacturers' associations.

### Rail Fares

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take steps to restrict future fare increases by train operating companies. [158419]

**Mr. Hill:** Key fares are already capped at 1 per cent. below the rate of inflation and this will continue for replacement franchises. Train operators are free to price other fares according to market demand and competition from other forms of transport. But we expect train operators to bear in mind the need to increase passenger numbers when considering whether to increase unregulated fares.

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the change in the level of public subsidy on rail fares. [158418]

**Mr. Hill:** No explicit assessment has been made. Subsidy levels were agreed at the time of franchising after a competitive bidding process. Franchising agreements protect key rail fares so that their prices are restricted by a cap that rises by PRI-1 per cent. annually. The key fares include all Saver tickets, or unrestricted standard returns where no Saver exists, and all standard weekly season tickets. Further regulation applies to London commuter fares, linking performance to the permitted increase.

### Transport Plan

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action he is asking the Commission for Integrated Transport to take to implement the findings of the CPRE report 'Running to Stand Still' on the effectiveness of the 10-year plan in reducing congestion. [158409]

**Mr. Hill:** The Commission for Integrated Transport (CfIT) was established to provide independent advice to Government on the implementation of integrated transport policy and to review progress towards meeting the Government's objectives. Although the Government have not specifically asked CfIT to comment on the CPRE report, the commission has been asked to report on progress against the objectives and outcomes of the 10-year plan (including the target to reduce road congestion) and to advise on further policy measures. We are committed to periodic review of the 10-year plan and will pay close attention to CfIT's advice in doing so.

### Housing Developments (London)

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take measures to require at least half of all new housing developments in London to be for affordable rented property. [158981]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The Mayor is expected to publish his initial proposals for the Spatial Development Strategy for London shortly. The Government's planning policy on the provision of affordable housing is set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 and Circular 6–98. The Secretary of State will consider the Mayor's proposals in the light of this and other relevant guidance.

### Pleasure Craft

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries have been caused by people drunk in charge of pleasure craft on British waterways in the last five years. [159010]

**Mr. Hill:** The information requested is not available centrally, although the indications are that few injuries were caused by people drunk in charge of pleasure craft on British waterways. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a small and irresponsible minority of those in charge of such craft pose a risk to safety by choosing to navigate while under the influence of excessive amounts of alcohol.

### London Underground

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* increases in fares and *(b)* increase in passenger ridership on the London Underground are assumed in the financial projections upon which the London Underground PPP is based. [159006]

**Mr. Hill:** The financial projections London Underground and their advisers have carried out for the PPP assume that:

*(a)* London Underground fares will do no more than keep pace with inflation once the PPP is in place.

*(b)* Annual passenger ridership on the London Underground will increase by 20 per cent. over the next 10 years, with the main growth in ridership expected to be off-peak and in the 'shoulders' of the peak. The additional capacity and improved reliability that the PPP will bring should enable this growth in demand to be accommodated safely.

### Air Accidents

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people have died in air accidents on British internal carrier flights in each of the last four months. [158865]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** Two people have died in air accidents on British internal carrier flights in the last four months. Both men were on board the mail flight that crashed into the Firth of Forth on 27 February 2001.

### Railway Accidents

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people died on the railways in each of the last four months. [158866]

**Mr. Hill:** The Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate reports that 104 people have died on the railways in Great Britain in the period 1 December 2000 to 31 March 2001. A breakdown of this data are provided in the table:

| | *2000* | *2001* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *December* | *January* | *February* | *March* | *Total* |
| Passengers | 2 | 0 | 7 | 1 | 10 |
| Railway staff | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Other members of public | 0 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 |
| Trespassers and suicides | 23 | 22 | 20 | 21 | 86 |
| Total | 25 | 24 | 32 | 23 | 104 |

The figures are provisional and may change due to coroners' findings at the subsequent inquests. Included in the February figures are the 10 people that died in the railway accident at Great Heck near Selby.

### BAe 146

**Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what reports he has had on the incident on a British European BAe 146 flight from Paris to Birmingham on 5 November 2000; and if he will make a statement. [159121]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The Air Accidents Investigation Branch (AAIB) is currently still investigating the exact cause of this incident. Research has been commissioned to establish whether, among other possibilities, engine oil fumes leaking into the cabin air released hazardous vapours, which could have contributed to the severity of this incident.

As a precaution, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has issued an Airworthiness Directive that mandates inspections and remedial actions designed to reduce the likelihood of engine oil leaks into the cabin air supply. Instructions to flight crews have also been issued for measures to be taken to mitigate any potential effects should they experience or suspect contamination of the air supply.

Once the AAIB report has been published, the CAA will be able to determine whether further action needs to be taken to minimise the risk of such an incident occurring again.

### Fuels (Environmental Assessment)

**Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the environmental assessments of *(a)* fuels submitted to the Green Fuels Challenge and *(b)* lead replacement petrol. [159247]

**Mr. Hill:** Yes. We are making arrangements to publish the environmental assessments on the DETR website. I have also placed copies of the assessments in the Libraries of the House.

### Regional Planning Guidance (North-east)

**Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish his response to the recommendations of the panel that conducted the public examination of draft Regional Planning Guidance for the north-east; and if he will make a statement. [159666]

**Mr. Raynsford:** My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is today publishing for public consultation proposed changes to the draft Regional Planning Guidance for the north-east (RPG1). They are largely based on the recommendations of the independent panel that held a public examination into the draft RPG1 last summer.

Since then my right hon. Friend has published a number of new Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Notes, which have been taken into account in preparing the proposed changes. Important issues for the region to take forward are also contained in the Urban and Rural White Papers issued last November.

Draft RPG was prepared by the Association of North East Councils (ANEC). Its overall strategy aims to create a more sustainable region and achieve urban and rural renaissance by focusing development in the region's main towns and cities making best use of previously developed land. We support this and, as recommended by the panel, we are proposing changes to ensure that the strategy is more clearly expressed and relates more clearly to the policy chapters. It is important that the implications for development plans and other strategies are clear in order to make a real difference on the ground.

A key issue for the region is to stem population decline by encouraging economic growth and regeneration in a sustainable way. To achieve this we are proposing changes which identify four priorities for regeneration: to accelerate the renaissance of the Tyne, Wear and Tees conurbations; to provide job opportunities and support communities in the former coalfield areas; to adapt and revitalise the region's town and city centres; and secure rural regeneration to combat social exclusion, improve access to jobs and services, and sustain viable communities.

We propose a review of the existing employment land allocated in development plans in the region to ensure that the north-east has a robust portfolio of sites in terms of size, quality and distribution in the most sustainable locations. In this context we would particularly welcome views during the consultation on the proposal to reduce the number of proposed new greenfield strategic employment sites from four to one. We propose to accept the panel's recommendation on this matter against the background of an over-provision of employment land in the region, and concern about the loss of greenfield sites. ANEC is committed to preparing an overall review of RPG1 in 2002–03, which will provide them with the opportunity to establish the need for additional strategic employment sites and set out their broad location or location criteria.

We are proposing a modest reduction in the amount of additional housing in the region, as recommended by the panel. By reducing the need for additional greenfield housing allocations, it will help to concentrate house building more on areas where sites are already available particularly on previously-developed land. The new proposal is to provide 5,000 dwellings per year for the first half of the guidance period (1996–2006) and 6,000 per year for the period 2006–16. The distribution of housing is also proposed to change to reflect the strategy aim to locate the majority of new development in the region's conurbations to avoid unnecessary development in the countryside, and help to create a better balance between where people live and work. 4,000 of the proposed housing provision will be distributed as part of the early review of RPG1 in 2002–03 pending the completion of urban housing capacity studies by the constituent authorities in the region's conurbations.

We also propose to set the region a challenging target of 65 per cent. of this additional housing to be provided on previously developed land and by reusing existing buildings.

It is proposed to significantly revise the transport element of RPG taking on board many of the panel's recommendations. The changes seek to provide a framework for the integration of land use planning and transport and to set the context for the development of the Regional Transport Strategy, which is currently on-going in the region.

There will now be a 12 week consultation period on the proposed changes which will end on Thursday 19 July 2001. Copies of the relevant documents have been placed in the House Library and provided to all of the region's MPs.

## PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

### Parliamentary Broadcasting Ltd.

**Angela Smith:** To ask the President of the Council when she will announce the company appointed by the Parliamentary Broadcasting Unit Ltd. to operate the televising of Parliament following the expiry of the current contract. [159365]

**Mrs. Beckett:** With the agreement of the appropriate Committees of both Houses the PARBUL operating and maintenance contracts for the five years from 1 August 2001 have been awarded to Bowtie Television Ltd.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Consultation

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new proposals he has to improve consultation between employees and employers. [157938]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced to the House on 18 January plans for a review of UK arrangements affecting collective redundancies. The review, which is ongoing, is examining how current provisions have operated in practice and whether more should be done to promote effective consultation with employees.

### Icelandic-water Trawlermen

**Mr. McGrady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when payments will be made under the compensation scheme for former Icelandic-water trawlermen; and if he will make a statement. [158768]

**Mr. Byers:** Over, 1,200 payments have already been made. I expect the bulk of the claims to be dealt with by the end of July.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 22 March to the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and which was passed on to his Department. [158854]

**Mr. Hain:** I have answered the letter today.

## CABINET OFFICE

### Policy Announcements (Regional Impact Assessments)

**Mr. Brake:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list the policy announcements since March 2000 which have been subject in advance to an assessment of their impact on the regions. [158497]

**Ms Beverley Hughes** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Regional Co-ordination Unit (RCU) was established in April 2000 as the centre of operations for the Government Offices for the Regions. A key role of the RCU is to consider proposals for new or extended area based initiatives. Formal arrangements for assessing the impact of such policies on the regions came into force in November 2000. Since then the following initiatives have been subject to the 'double key' assessment involving both the RCU and the Government Offices: Children's Fund, Creative Partnerships, Neighbourhood Management, Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, Playing Fields and Community Green Spaces, Safer Communities Initiative and Sports Action Zones. The RCU has also considered a large number of other initiatives not subject to the full 'double key' procedures.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Benefit Fraud

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's Annual report for 2000 will be published. [157484]

**Mr. Rooker** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI) spending for 1999–2000 and expenditure plans for 2000–01 were included in figures reported in the Department of Social Security's Departmental Report published in April 2000.

The BFI's priority is to deliver reports following inspections of individual local authorities and DSS Agencies. The BFI is nearing completion of its phase 5 programme of inspections. This is a key phase which covers the 30 local authorities with the highest spend on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Once the BFI has published the last of these reports, it will be in a position to provide a comprehensive report on its work to March 2001.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) for what reason the National Benefit Fraud Hotline number was not included in Level 1 of the current Targeting Fraud advertising campaign; how long each level will run for; and if the campaign will continue during a dissolution of Parliament; [157079]

(2) if he will break down the costs of the Targeting Fraud advertising campaign into *(a)* the cost of the pilot campaign, *(b)* the cost of television advertising, *(c)* the cost of radio advertising, *(d)* the cost of newspaper advertising and *(e)* other costs; [157074]

(3) how the Targeting Fraud advertising campaign has been altered to include the findings of the research into the pilot campaign. [157080]

**Mr. Rooker** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The Government are committed to cracking down on benefit fraud. In his report "The Informal Economy", Lord Grabiner recommended testing the use of advertising as a tool for changing public attitudes. The North West Pilot Campaign was developed during 2000 in line with this recommendation.

The overall objectives of the campaign, were to positively reinforce honest behaviour, to create a climate of intolerance to benefit fraud and to undermine the social acceptability of it. It was designed to work on two levels: Level 1, to make 'fiddling' harder to justify by showing that fraud is unfair; and Level 2, to create a climate of unease by using facts to build a fear of detection. Considerable development work was undertaken and the evaluation indicated that the campaign was effective in changing public attitudes towards benefit fraud. In taking the campaign to a national audience as part of a long-term public information programme, only minor refinements were considered necessary.

The national TV advertising did not include the hotline number because it was aimed at a wide audience and was designed to change public attitudes about the social acceptability of fraud (ie a Level 1 objective). Other material did include the hotline number because it was intended to create unease among fraudsters (ie a Level 2 objective).

The first phase of the national information campaign concluded on Saturday 31 March. The campaign will not run in the event of Parliament being dissolved under the normal rules relating to Her Majesty's Government advertising.

So far, the costs of the Targeting Fraud information programme have been £2.2 million for the north-west pilot, including production, media buying, website development and research. The costs for the March phase of the national campaign are £3.2 million for TV advertising, £0.6 million for radio advertising, £0.7 million for press advertising, and £0.2 million for other costs.

### Publicity Campaigns

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what publicity campaigns his Department plans to run in the current financial year. [158713]

**Mr. Rooker:** Plans are in place to continue the anti-fraud campaign, following on from the start of the national activity in March. We also plan to continue the pensions education advertising campaign which began in January.

The Department also has a number of advertorials booked, which will explain the new bereavement benefits available to men.

### Benefit Fraud Investigation Service

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the last Benefit Fraud Investigation Service annual report was published; and when the next one is due to be published. [158690]

**Mr. Rooker:** The Benefit Fraud Investigation Service does not publish a separate annual report. Sections on safeguarding Social Security are included in both the Benefits Agency annual report, due to be published in July 2001, and the Departmental annual report which was published on 30 March 2001.

### Benefits Information Guide

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make copies of the latest edition of the Benefits Information Guide available to hon. Members. [158689]

**Mr. Rooker:** The latest edition of the Benefits Information Guide is available in the Library. The 2001–02 edition will be available shortly.

### Pensions

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners receive *(a)* a partial basis state pension, *(b)* basic state pension increments, *(c)* a basic state pension increase for dependent child, d) a graduated retirement benefit and (e) SERPS. [158675]

**Mr. Rooker:** The information is in the table.

*Retirement pensioners resident in Great Britain and overseas at 30 September 2000*

*Thousand*

| | *All pensioners* |
|---|---|
| In receipt of partial Basic State pension | 2,941.6 |
| In receipt of Basic State pension increments | 1,156.4 |
| In receipt of Basic State pension | — |
| Increase for dependent child(ren) | 18.1 |
| In receipt of Graduated Retirement Benefit | 8,690.3 |
| In receipt of SERPS | 6,389.9 |

*Notes:*
1. Includes all retirement pensioners resident in Great Britain and overseas.
2. Numbers with a partial basic state pension exclude those pensioners who receive 100 per cent. basic State Pension based on their own national insurance record and also those pensioners who receive 60 per cent. (full rate) basic State Pension based on a spouse's national insurance record.
3. Figures are in thousands and rounded to the nearest hundred.

*Source:*
Based on a 5 per cent. sample from the Pension Strategy Computer System at 30 September 2000.

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the way pension funds handle grievances. [159151]

**Mr. Rooker:** Occupational pension schemes are required to have a two-stage internal dispute resolution procedure, which they must make known to members. The second stage written decision by the trustees or managers of the scheme must include statements about the roles of the Office for Pensions Advisory Service (OPAS), to whom they can go for assistance, and the Pensions Ombudsman, to whom they can refer grievance if they remain dissatisfied.

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what plans he has to require pension trusts to give reasons for refusal *(a)* to reward a disability pension and *(b)* of arbitration following such refusal; [159054]

(2) if he will make a statement on pension trusts' refusal to divulge the reason for rejecting ill-health pension applications; [159052]

(3) what plans he has to compel pension trusts to divulge the reason for refusal of ill-health pension applications. [159051]

**Mr. Rooker:** Occupational schemes are not required to pay pension benefits before the normal pension age for the scheme. Some scheme rules do provide for pension benefits to be paid earlier for reasons such as ill-health. This is usually at the discretion of the scheme trustees and there is no legal requirement for them to provide reasons where they reject an ill-health pension application, although many schemes regard it as good administrative practice to do so.

Where an ill-health pension application has been rejected, the member can ask for the matter to be reconsidered under the scheme's internal dispute resolution procedure, and can seek assistance from the Office for Pensions Advisory Service (OPAS). If he remains dissatisfied he can make a complaint to the Pensions Ombudsman.

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to require contributors to occupational pension schemes to have the rights of appeal following an ombudsman's determination. [159049]

**Mr. Rooker:** Determinations by the Pensions Ombudsman can be appealed against to the High Court on a point of law.

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to ensure that members of pension trusts have a right to be consulted before *(a)* trusts are restructured and *(b)* members are transferred to other schemes. [159053]

**Mr. Rooker:** Employers who provide occupational pension schemes do so voluntarily and, ultimately, they decide the nature of the scheme and its benefit structure. Trustees are required to provide extensive information to members about the scheme and their rights to pension benefits.

Generally, members must consent to a transfer of their accrued pension rights to another pension scheme. When employers are taken over, merge, or restructure their pension provision a consequent bulk transfer of members' accrued rights can be made without consent, provided that an actuary certifies that the rights to be acquired in the receiving scheme are broadly no less favourable than the rights to be transferred.

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the rules governing occupational pensions schemes and the way they are vetted to protect contributors. [159050]

**Mr. Rooker:** The framework of legislation governing occupational pension schemes is intended to provide protection for members without imposing undue burdens on employers who provide those schemes. Pension schemes also have their own rules which have to satisfy certain requirements for tax purposes. They may contain discretionary provisions which are exercised by the trustees.

### Departmental Report

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library up-dated versions of tables 1 to 11 at the back of the 2000 Departmental Report (Cm 4614); and if he will reintroduce these tables in future departmental reports. [158693]

**Mr. Rooker:** Following the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting (RAB) there have been a number of changes to the core tables produced in line with Treasury guidance and contained in all departmental reports. The aim of the tables is to provide an analysis of departmental expenditure plans. These are presented in the 2001 Departmental Report (Cm 5115) in resource terms, showing resource consumption and capital investment; Voted and Non-Voted expenditure and the plans agreed in the Spending Review for Departmental Expenditure Limits (DEL) and Annually Managed Expenditure (AME).

The format of the published Core Tables and Main Estimate Tables is intended to anticipate, as far as possible, the format of the Resource Accounts that will be published next year in respect of 2001–02. As in previous years the published departmental report includes key information on local authority expenditure (Table 8), administration costs (Table 9) and staff numbers (Table 10). Departmental Expenditure Limits, in cash terms are set out for the years 1995–96 to 2000–01 in Table 11. Detailed plans are set out in Table 4 and a high level summary provided in Table 1.

We are currently considering what further information might be provided and the most effective way of communicating it. We hope to make an announcement in the near future.

### Automated Credit Transfers

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security to what extent his target of having 85 per cent. of customers having benefits paid into their bank by 2005 is consistent with the Government's plan to complete the transition to ACT by 2005; and if he will make a statement on his plans for those customers who do not receive payment by ACT by 2005. [159166]

**Mr. Rooker:** These two aims are entirely consistent. Payment directly into bank or building society accounts will become the normal method of payment for benefits and pensions starting in 2003 and completing in 2005.

We have always recognised that there will be some people who we will be unable to pay directly through bank or building society accounts, and some payments that cannot be made this way. This is reflected in our Public Service Agreement target of 85 per cent. of our customers having their benefits paid into bank or building society accounts by 2005. For those payments which we cannot make directly into bank or building society accounts, we are considering what alternative simple electronic money transmission system, which could also be accessed at post offices, will be commercially available.

### Sickness Absence

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress he has made on reducing his Department's sickness absence rates; what baseline figure was used to assess his Department's compliance with its PSA target on reducing sickness rates; what the Department's actual figure for 2000 was; and if he will make a statement. [159168]

**Mr. Rooker:** The Department's PSA targets are to achieve a reduction on sickness absence rates of 20 per cent. by the end of 2001 and 30 per cent. by the end of 2003. The targets are measured against the 1998 baseline figure of 12.1 average working days lost per person.

All appropriate recommendations of the Cabinet Office report "Working Well Together" have been introduced and action plans are in place across the Department to improve performance in managing attendance.

Performance for the year 2000 was 12.6 average working days lost. Performance was adversely affected at the start of the year by the influenza outbreak which was higher than normal.

### Public Service Agreement Targets

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what sanction has been applied to his Department in cases where it has failed to meet its public service agreement targets. [159167]

**Mr. Rooker:** The purpose of the Public Service Agreement is not to set sanctions. It is to set high level objectives and challenging targets which can be properly measured and monitored.

The Department's performance against its 1998 Public Service Agreement targets was set out in the Social Security Departmental Report (Cm 5115, March 2001). This shows that the majority of the targets have been met or are on course to be met. Only one target had not been met—that relating to payment for goods and services within 30 days of receipt.

### Pensioners

**Ms Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the administrative cost of allowing pensioners a choice between receiving the Winter Fuel Payment and free television licence or a higher rate of state retirement pension. [159665]

**Mr. Darling:** The estimated costs are in the table.

*£ million*

| *Cost category* | *Year one cost* | *Annual cost thereafter*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| System changes[2] | 6.0 | 0.0 |
| Sending out mail-shot to 10.5 million pensioners[3] | 9.0 | 9.0 |
| Processing the responses to the mail-shot[4] | 89.0 | 89.0 |
| Totals | 104.0 | 98.0 |

[1] The costing assumes that pensioners would be assessed annually.

[2] This cost covers the IT changes to DSS computer systems which would need to be made in order to give pensioners the option of how the payments were made to them. Several different computer systems would need to be partially recoded. The cost here relates mainly to man hours dedicated to recoding. We have assumed that these system changes would be made in such a way as to allow pensioners to subsequently change their payment option without further need for recoding.

[3] This covers the cost of mailing forms to 10.5 million pensioners every year asking them to choose how the payments are made to them.

[4] This covers the costs of processing the responses to the annual mailshot and would be the largest single component of the extra cost. It is estimated that, to the extent that processing 10.5 million payment request options every year was possible at all, it would require the equivalent of an additional 3,000 full-time civil servants.

## HEALTH

### Departmental Costs

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's total gross running costs were for travel, including fares, subsistence, accommodation and other expenses met from public funds but excluding such costs for journeys and stays exclusively within the United Kingdom *(a)* in the three years ending on 30 April 1997 and *(b)* in the 12 months ending 30 April 1997. [157626]

**Ms Stuart:** The Department spent £499,905 in 1995–96 and £540,380 in 1996–97 on overseas travel and subsistence. Prior to this information was not gathered on a similar basis.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total gross running costs were to his Department in the 12 months ending 31 December 1996 of entertaining by Ministers and officials. [157625]

**Ms Stuart:** The Department does not collect the information in the form requested. Expenditure on hospitality for 1996–97 financial year amounted to £105,192.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many visits abroad have been made by officials on departmental business in the *(a)* three years ending 30 April 1997 and *(b)* 12 months ending 30 April 1997. [157624]

**Ms Stuart:** The information requested is not available centrally.

### NHS CT Scanners

**Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS acute trusts which have NHS CT scanners, indicating for each trust the ratio of beds to scanners. [157016]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The following data for numbers of acute hospital beds in trusts come from the National Health Service Executive 1999–2000.

The numbers of CT scanners is derived from a survey carried out in 2000.

The information in the table is correct as of 1 April 2001. Statistical information is updated on a monthly basis and is available at www.canceruk.net.

| Region name | Trust name | Acute beds per CT |
|---|---|---|
| Trent | Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust | 883 |
| West Midlands | Dudley Group of Hospitals NHS Trust | 816 |
| North West | Wirral Hospital NHS Trust | 814 |
| South West | Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust | 748 |
| North West | Aintree Hospitals NHS Trust | 741 |
| London | Havering Hospitals NHS Trust | 732 |
| Eastern | Norfolk and Norwich Health Care NHS Trust | 720 |
| West Midlands | The Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust | 683 |
| South West | Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust | 672 |
| South West | South Devon Healthcare NHS Trust | 663 |
| North West | Blackpool Victoria Hospital NHS Trust | 658 |
| South West | Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Trust | 654 |
| South West | Taunton and Somerset NHS Trust | 650 |
| Trent | Doncaster Royal Infirmary and Montagu Hospital NHS Trust | 643 |
| North West | St. Helens and Knowsley Hospitals NHS Trust | 643 |
| South West | Swindon and Marlborough NHS Trust | 629 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust | 627 |
| North West | Burnley Healthcare NHS Trust | 626 |
| Eastern | Mid Essex Hospitals NHS Trust | 617 |
| North West | North Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust | 617 |
| North West | Wigan and Leigh Health Services NHS Trust | 612 |
| South West | North Bristol NHS Trust | 598 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | North Durham Health Care NHS Trust | 582 |
| North West | Oldham NHS Trust | 582 |
| South East | Brighton Health Care NHS Trust | 578 |
| South East | Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust | 577 |
| South East | Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust | 573 |
| North West | Stockport NHS Trust | 571 |
| Eastern | Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust | 563 |
| West Midlands | North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust | 561 |
| North West | Bury Health Care NHS Trust | 539 |
| South West | Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust | 538 |
| West Midlands | Sandwell Healthcare NHS Trust | 536 |
| Trent | Northern General Hospital NHS Trust | 534 |
| Trent | The Kings Mill Centre for Health Care Services NHS Trust | 533 |
| Trent | Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust | 530 |
| North West | Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust | 529 |
| South West | East Gloucestershire NHS Trust | 529 |
| West Midlands | City Hospital NHS Trust | 528 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Gateshead Health NHS Trust | 527 |
| London | Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust | 519 |
| North West | Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Care NHS Trust | 517 |
| London | Kingston Hospital NHS Trust | 504 |
| Trent | Barnsley District General Hospital NHS Trust | 500 |
| South West | Gloucestershire Royal NHS Trust | 499 |
| London | St. Mary's Hospital NHS Trust | 498 |
| Eastern | Southend Hospital NHS Trust | 495 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | York Health Services NHS Trust | 488 |
| North West | Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust | 486 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust | 477 |
| West Midlands | Birmingham Heartlands and Solihull NHS Trust | 475 |
| South East | Frimley Park Hospital NHS Trust | 475 |
| Eastern | Peterborough Hospitals NHS Trust | 474 |
| South West | Poole Hospitals NHS Trust | 463 |
| Eastern | James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust | 460 |
| Trent | Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital NHS | 459 |
| South East | Heatherwood and Wexham Park Hospitals NHS Trust | 449 |
| Eastern | Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust | 448 |
| North West | The Mid Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust | 447 |
| South West | Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust | 445 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Pinderfields and Pontefract Hospitals NHS Trust | 443 |
| Trent | University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust | 439 |
| South East | Kettering General Hospital NHS Trust | 435 |
| West Midlands | Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust | 432 |
| Trent | Queen's Medical Centre, Nottingham University Hospital NHS Trust | 431 |
| South East | Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust | 429 |
| London | The Lewisham Hospital NHS Trust | 429 |
| South East | Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust | 426 |
| Eastern | Basildon and Thurrock General Hospitals NHS Trust | 425 |
| Eastern | West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust | 423 |
| South East | Medway NHS Trust | 421 |
| Trent | Rotherham General Hospitals NHS Trust | 418 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust | 417 |

| Region name | Trust name | Acute beds per CT |
|---|---|---|
| West Midlands | Mid Staffordshire General Hospitals NHS Trust | 416 |
| North West | Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Trust | 414 |
| London | King's Healthcare NHS Trust | 413 |
| North West | Warrington Hospital NHS Trust | 413 |
| South West | Salisbury Healthcare NHS Trust | 405 |
| South East | South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust | 402 |
| North West | Rochdale Healthcare NHS Trust | 401 |
| South East | Stoke Mandeville Hospital NHS Trust | 401 |
| West Midlands | Good Hope Hospital NHS Trust | 400 |
| West Midlands | South Warwickshire General Hospitals NHS Trust | 398 |
| London | Redbridge Health Care NHS Trust | 395 |
| South East | Worthing and Southlands Hospitals NHS Trust | 388 |
| North West | South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust | 387 |
| London | Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust | 386 |
| South East | Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Trust | 386 |
| Eastern | Addenbrooke's NHS Trust | 381 |
| South East | Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust | 379 |
| West Midlands | University Hospitals of Coventry And Warwickshire NHS Trust | 378 |
| North West | Tameside and Glossop Acute Services NHS Trust | 377 |
| West Midlands | Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust | 374 |
| North West | Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust | 368 |
| Trent | North East Lincolnshire NHS Trust | 367 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Healthcare NHS Trust | 367 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust | 362 |
| London | Greenwich Healthcare NHS Trust | 361 |
| South East | Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust | 358 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Huddersfield Health Care Services NHS Trust | 356 |
| London | Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust | 354 |
| South East | East Kent Hospitals NHS Trust | 352 |
| London | Homerton Hospital NHS Trust | 350 |
| London | Chelsea and Westminster Healthcare NHS Trust | 342 |
| London | Newham Healthcare NHS Trust | 340 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | South Tyneside Healthcare NHS Trust | 336 |
| Eastern | East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust | 335 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Carlisle Hospitals NHS Trust | 333 |
| South East | Milton Keynes General Hospital NHS Trust | 333 |
| West Midlands | University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust | 333 |
| Trent | Scunthorpe and Goole Hospitals NHS Trust | 332 |
| London | North West London Hospitals NHS Trust | 330 |
| South East | Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust | 330 |
| Trent | United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust | 329 |
| London | West Middlesex University NHS Trust | 326 |
| South West | West Dorset General Hospitals NHS Trust | 325 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Calderdale Healthcare NHS Trust | 324 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Airedale NHS Trust | 322 |
| London | Ealing Hospital NHS Trust | 322 |
| Eastern | Luton and Dunstable Hospital NHS Trust | 322 |
| South West | United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust | 321 |
| London | Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust | 316 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Harrogate Health Care NHS Trust | 315 |
| North West | Central Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust | 314 |
| London | Forest Healthcare NHS Trust | 312 |
| Eastern | The Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust | 311 |
| North West | East Cheshire NHS Trust | 310 |
| London | North Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust | 309 |
| South West | East Somerset NHS Trust | 308 |
| South West | Northern Devon Healthcare NHS Trust | 306 |
| North West | Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust | 300 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust | 299 |
| London | Whittington Hospital NHS Trust | 299 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | The Newcastle upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust | 298 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Dewsbury Health Care NHS Trust | 292 |
| London | The Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust | 291 |
| North West | Chorley and South Ribble NHS Trust | 290 |
| London | Queen Mary's Sidcup NHS Trust | 290 |
| Eastern | Kings Lynn and Wisbech Hospitals NHS Trust | 289 |
| Eastern | Bedford Hospitals NHS Trust | 286 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | South Durham Health Care NHS Trust | 285 |
| North West | Salford Royal Hospitals NHS Trust | 283 |
| South East | North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust | 281 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust | 281 |
| South East | Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals NHS Trust | 275 |
| London | Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust | 275 |

| Region name | Trust name | Acute beds per CT |
|---|---|---|
| West Midlands | Burton Hospitals NHS Trust | 274 |
| West Midlands | George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust | 273 |
| South East | Hastings and Rother NHS Trust | 271 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust | 270 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | West Cumbria Healthcare NHS Trust | 270 |
| South East | Surrey and Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust | 269 |
| London | Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust | 265 |
| Eastern | Hinchingbrooke Healthcare NHS Trust | 259 |
| South East | Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS Trust | 247 |
| South West | Weston Area Health NHS Trust | 243 |
| South East | Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust | 241 |
| North West | Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust | 241 |
| West Midlands | The Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust | 239 |
| Trent | Bassetlaw Hospital and Community Health Services NHS Trust | 238 |
| Trent | Central Sheffield University Hospitals NHS Trust | 237 |
| North West | Royal Liverpool Childrens NHS Trust | 236 |
| London | Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust | 235 |
| South East | Mid Sussex NHS Trust | 230 |
| North West | Southport and Ormskirk Hospital NHS Trust | 228 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | Northallerton Health Services NHS Trust | 227 |
| Eastern | West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust | 216 |
| London | The Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust | 213 |
| South East | Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust | 210 |
| London | Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust | 204 |
| London | Barts and The London NHS Trust | 203 |
| London | The Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust | 201 |
| West Midlands | Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust | 194 |
| London | St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust | 192 |
| West Midlands | Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Trust | 188 |
| North West | The Cardiothoracic Centre—Liverpool NHS Trust | 186 |
| London | University College London Hospitals NHS Trust | 185 |
| Eastern | Papworth Hospital NHS Trust | 181 |
| West Midlands | Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic and District Hospital NHS Trust | 172 |
| North West | The Manchester Children's Hospitals NHS Trust | 158 |
| North West | Halton General Hospital NHS Trust | 142 |
| Trent | Sheffield Children's Hospital NHS Trust | 141 |
| North West | Christie Hospital NHS Trust | 139 |
| South East | The Royal West Sussex NHS Trust | 135 |
| West Midlands | Hereford Hospitals NHS Trust | 124 |
| London | The Royal Marsden Hospital NHS Trust | 124 |
| North West | Walton Centre for Neurology and Neurosurgery NHS Trust | 111 |
| North West | Clatterbridge Centre For Oncology NHS Trust | 57 |

**Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what standards are applied to determine the number of NHS CT scanners per head of the population for each NHS region. [157017]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The provision of diagnostic CT scanners is decided locally in the context of regional capital investment plans.

The NHS Cancer Plan announced new investment of £570 million, which will address inequalities in access to services for cancer, including the provision of diagnostic CT scanners.

For funding of CT scanners we have produced a database of the numbers of CT scanners per head of population and have calculated the number of additional machines required in order to bring up the numbers in those regions which currently have a short-fall compared to the mean number of CT scanners per head of population nationally.

This equates to:

seven additional machines for South East region

seven additional machines for Eastern region

five additional machines for South West region

two additional machines for Trent region

one additional machine for West Midlands region

22 additional machines in all.

**Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ratio of population to the number of CT scanners is in each NHS region. [157018]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* Data for population estimates have been obtained from the Office for National Statistics. Data for the numbers of CT scanners have been derived from a survey of trusts carried out in 2000. Data correct as at 1 April 2001. More detailed information is available at www.canceruk.net, where the statistical information is updated on a monthly basis.

| Region | CT scanners per region | Population | Population per CT scanner |
|---|---|---|---|
| London | 58 | 7,285,045 | 125,604 |
| Northern and Yorkshire | 41 | 6,335,729 | 154,530 |
| North West | 44 | 6,595,330 | 149,894 |
| South West | 21 | 4,935,669 | 235,032 |
| West Midlands | 29 | 5,335,597 | 183,986 |
| South East | 40 | 8,698,745 | 217,469 |
| Trent | 26 | 5,147,851 | 197,994 |
| Eastern | 22 | 5,418,898 | 246,313 |

### Meningitis C Injections

**Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases of epilepsy have been recorded between 1 November 1999 and 28 February 2001 related to yellow cards submitted in connection with meningitis C injections; [157552]

(2) what research is being conducted into the incidence of cases of epilepsy which may be related to meningitis C injections. [157549]

**Yvette Cooper:** On 1 November 1999, a national immunisation campaign commenced to vaccinate all children under 18 years with one of the new meningococcal C conjugate vaccines. The campaign finished at the end of January 2001. As of 16 February 2001, 18.5 million doses of meningitis C vaccine had been distributed.

The Medicines Control Agency and the Committee on Safety of Medicine (CSM) has received three Yellow Card reports of suspected epilepsy following vaccination with the meningococcal C conjugate vaccines. A total of 291 reports of suspected seizures have been reported in association with the meningococcal C conjugate vaccines. CSM has concluded that there have been very rare reports of seizures following meningitis C vaccination and individuals have usually rapidly recovered. A significant number of the reported seizures are thought to have been faints.

A report of a particular suspected adverse drug reaction does not necessarily mean that it has been caused by the drug. The Yellow Card data can not be used to calculate the incidence rate of a particular suspected adverse reaction, nor can it be used to measure changes in the rate against time.

The Medical Research Council has research programmes looking into epilepsy and meningitis, but no program that is examining the incidence of epilepsy after meningococcal C conjugate vaccination.

**Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research he is conducting into the incidence of cases of attention deficit and hyperactivity syndrome which may be related to meningitis C injections; [157550]

(2) what change there has been in recorded cases of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder between 1 November 1999 and 28 February 2001; [157554]

(3) how many cases of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder have been recorded between 1 November 1999 and 28 February 2001, which are related to yellow cards submitted in connection with meningitis C injections. [157551]

**Yvette Cooper:** The Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and the Committee on Safety of Medicine (CSM) has received one report through the Yellow Card Scheme of hyperactivity aggravated in a child with a history of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in association with the meningitis C vaccines. There have been no reports of Hyperkinetic Disorder or any other term related to ADHD.

ADHD is being increasingly recognised in the United Kingdom as a significant mental health problem among children and adolescents and to a lesser extent, among adults. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has estimated that approximately 1 per cent. of all school-aged children (about 69,000 six to 16-year-olds in England) met the diagnostic criteria for Hyperkinetic Disorder, the more severe type of ADHD. The prevalence of all types of ADHD is considerably higher, around 5 per cent. of school-aged children (345,000 six to 16-year-olds in England). There are no data on the change in recorded cases of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder between 1 November 1999 and 28 February 2001 as this information is not collected centrally.

No research is currently being conducted into the incidence of cases of attention deficit and hyperactivity syndrome which may be related to meningitis C injections.

### Correspondence

**Mr. McLoughlin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for West Derbyshire *(a)* dated 6 February and 19 March regarding Miss Holland of Doveridge in Derbyshire, *(b)* dated 26 February regarding the treatment and diagnosis of bowel cancer, *(c)* dated 5 February and 7 March regarding the funding of hospices and *(d)* dated 26 February and 20 March regarding synthetic treatment for haemophiliac patients. [158074]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding 23 April 2001]:* A reply to the hon. Member's letter of 26 February regarding the treatment and diagnosis of bowel cancer was sent on 11 April. Replies to the hon. Member's letters of 5 February and 7 March regarding the funding of hospices was sent on 11 April. A reply to the hon. Member's letters of 26 February and 20 March regarding synthetic treatment of haemophiliac patients was sent on 9 April.

Unfortunately, the Department did not receive the original copies of the hon. Member's letters of 6 and 19 February regarding his constituent Miss Holland. Copies have been requested and a reply will be provided as a matter of urgency.

### Test Purchasing

**Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is on the use of children of compulsory school age in undertaking test purchasing on behalf of local trading standards departments during school hours; and if he will make a statement. [158491]

**Mr. Hutton:** Children below the minimum school leaving age who may be asked to assist trading standards officers in the execution of their statutory duties are deemed not to be employed, and child employment legislation does not apply.

### Nicotine Replacement Therapies

**Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money was spent on sustained and co-ordinated health education campaigns aimed at reducing smoking in England in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01; what the figure will be for 2001–02; and if he will reconcile these figures with those in paragraph 6.38 of the 1998 White Paper, "Smoking Kills". [158351]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The information requested is as follows:

| | £ million |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 6.5 |
| 1999–2000 | 15.9 |
| 2000–01 | 13.73 |
| 2001–02 | [1] |

[1] Yet to be finally determined

The 1998 White Paper "Smoking Kills" set out an overall strategy on tobacco control including expenditure of some £50 million on health education and up to £60 million on cessation services.

Since "Smoking Kills" the Government have made first Buproprion (Zyban) and more recently all nicotine replacement therapy products available on National Health Service prescription and appropriate increases have been made in the unified budgets to meet the expected cost of these developments.

The overall sums devoted to tackling tobacco will comfortably exceed the sums committed in "Smoking Kills".

### Viagra

**Mr. Woolas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the list of medical conditions for which Viagra is prescribable on the National Health Service. [158474]

**Ms Stuart:** On 11 December 2000 we commenced an eight-week period of consultation about the operation of the current policy. We are now considering carefully all comments and views received during the consultation period and will make a decision about the operation of the current policy in due course.

### Appointments (Age Limit)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158106]

**Ms Stuart:** We are committed to equality of opportunity and to increasing the diversity of those appointed to public bodies. There are no age limits for public appointments to National Health Service trusts, health authorities, primary care trusts, special health authorities or Department of Health executive and advisory non-departmental public bodies. Currently the youngest board member is aged 26, and the oldest 86.

Appointments to the Mental Health Review Tribunal, the National Health Service Tribunal, the Protection of Children Act Tribunal and the Registered Homes Tribunal are subject normally to a lower age limit of 35 and an upper age limit of 62. The age limits are applied flexibly and are based on advice from the Lord Chancellor. They are made clear in any advertisements for such posts. The lower age limit is intended to give the public the confidence that those appointed have sufficient experience and maturity to fill the different roles involved appropriately.

### Hospices

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made as to the additional costs for hospices arising from extra regulations his Department has introduced for palliative care; [159042]

(2) if he will make a statement on the reluctance of public bodies to fund the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice; [159041]

(3) if he will estimate the savings to health and social services budgets arising from the service provided by the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice; [159043]

(4) what is the level of public funding for the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice as a percentage of its revenue costs; [159040]

(5) what funding is available to hospices from his Department; and what guidelines he has issued concerning the percentage of revenue costs that should be met by local health authorities. [159039]

**Yvette Cooper:** It is for the National Health Service locally to make arrangements for financial support for hospices, given the extent of local diversity both of the services provided and of alternative sources of local support. Accordingly, we have issued no guidance specifying a set percentage of hospice revenue costs that individual health authorities and primary care groups should meet.

We are, however, committed to increased investment in palliative care services overall. The NHS Cancer Plan set out one commitment to increase NHS investment in specialist palliative care by £50 million by 2004, to end inequalities in access to care and enable the NHS to make a realistic contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed levels of service. As a first step, the NHS Plan Implementation Programme for 2001–02 requires all cancer networks, in partnership with voluntary organisations, to develop and begin implementing costed strategic plans for palliative care. This is the context within which the NHS contribution to individual hospices such as the Phyllis Tuckwell Hospice will be considered.

### NHS Appointments

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the occasions on which *(a)* he, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* officials in his Department have met the Commissioner for Public Appointments in the last year to discuss her recommendations for the reform of appointments to NHS trusts, primary care trusts and health authorities. [159011]

**Ms Stuart:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did not meet the Commissioner for Public Appointments in the course of the last year. I met the commissioner on 29 November 2000 specifically to discuss her recommendations on appointments to National Health Service boards. Officials met the commissioner on numerous occasions during the year in the course of which her recommendations were discussed.

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what undertakings he has given to the Commissioner for Public Appointments regarding appointments to NHS trusts, primary care trusts and health authorities. [159015]

**Ms Stuart:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State informed the Commissioner for Public Appointments in July 2000 of his intention to establish an independent appointments commission with responsibility for all non-executive appointments to National Health Service boards. The National Health Service Appointments Commission was established on 1 April 2001 under the chairmanship of Sir William Wells, and will begin to make appointments shortly.

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the occasions in the last year on which hon. Members have made representations on particular appointments to *(a)* NHS trusts, *(b)* primary care trusts and *(c)* health authorities, giving in each case the date the representation was received, the name of the hon. Member and the name of the candidate. [159016]

**Ms Stuart:** Until last year the practice followed by the Government and under the previous Administration was that hon. Members were automatically consulted by the regional chair on all non-executive appointments to National Health Service boards before recommendations were made to Ministers. In response to the recommendations contained in the report of the Commissioner for Public Appointments on appointments to National Health Service boards, the practice of consulting hon. Members was discontinued in September 2001.

## Doctors' Public Statements

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines he has issued to NHS trust chief executives in respect of public statements by doctors working for trusts. [157904]

**Mr. Denham:** On 25 September 1997, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, then Minister of State for Health, wrote to National Health Service trusts and health authorities reinforcing guidance issued in Executive Letter (93)51—"Guidance for staff on relations with the public and the media". In his letter my right hon. Friend said that he wanted to ensure that any member of staff working in the NHS feels able to raise concerns about health care matters in a responsible manner without fear of victimisation.

The Department of Health issued further guidance to all NHS trusts and health authorities on 27 August 1999, following the coming into force of the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. Health Service Circular 1999/198—"The Public Interest Disclosure Act"—states that every NHS trust and health authority should have in place policies and procedures which comply with the provisions of the Act. A copy of HSC 1999–198 is available in the Library.

## Independent Living Fund

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue a definition of reasonable charges in respect of local authorities and home care for persons in receipt of moneys from the Independent Living Fund. [158979]

**Mr. Hutton:** The Department's draft guidance 'Fairer Charges for Home Care and other Non-Residential Social Services', was issued for consultation on 3 January. It includes proposed guidance on assessment of charges for people receiving care jointly agreed by local councils and the independent living funds. Final guidance will be issued in the summer.

My Department is working closely with the Department of Social Security in developing proposals for the future of the independent living funds following the end of the consultation period for the quinquennial review.

## Departmental Policies (Hull, North)

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Hull, North constituency, the effects on Hull, North of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150619]

**Mr. Hutton** *[pursuant to his reply, 6 April 2001, c. 333–34W]:* Detailed information on the impact of Department of Health policies nationally is set out in the Department of Health Annual reports "Department of Health—Government Expenditure Plans 2000–01". A copy of the most recent report is available in the Library and on the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/dhreport.

The impact of policies are not examined by constituency and statistics collected centrally by the Department are not collected on a constituency basis.

My hon. Friend's constituency falls within the geographical area covered by East Riding and Hull health authority and Kingston-upon-Hull social services authority.

Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02 for East Riding and Hull health authority are shown in the table.

*Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02*

| | *Increase* |
|---|---|
| £ million (cash) | 113.3 |
| £ million (real terms) | 72.6 |
| Percentage (cash) | 38.73 |
| Percentage (real terms) | 22.92 |

*Note:*
Increases for 1999–2000 onwards are for unified allocations which cover hospital and community health services, prescribing and discretionary family health services. Those for previous years cover hospital and community health services only.

East Riding and Hull health authority has also received additional funding for certain policies. This includes: £1.06 million for accident and emergency modernisation in 2000–01; £114,000, £225,000, £338,000 and £127,000 for improving cancer services (breast, colorectal, lung and cancer outpatients) in 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000, 2000–01 respectively; £333,000 to reduce waiting lists and times in 2000–01; £5.48 million to expand critical care services in 2000–01; £666,000 to deal with winter pressures in 2000–01 and £1.6 million, £2.06 million in 1997–98 and 1998–99 respectively; £1.08 million for heart disease services in 2000–01; £445,000 invested into dentistry in 2000–01.

In addition, my hon. Friend's constituents will benefit from the new £26 million major hospital development being developed at Hull Royal infirmary and the new £39 million major hospital development being developed at Castle Hill Hospital.

Kingston-upon-Hull local authority's personal social services standard spending assessment for 2001–02 compared with 1996–97 is set out in the table.

| | £ million | Percentage increase | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Real | Cash |
| 1996–97 | 46.297 | — | — |
| 2001–02 | 58.153 | 11.2 | 25.6 |

In addition to the SSAs referred to, Kingston-upon-Hull local authority received additional funding in the form of a number of special and specific grants as set out in the table.

£000

| | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 | 2000–01 | 2001–02 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Special Transitional Grant[1] | 2,333 | — | — | — |
| Partnership grant[2] | — | 1,651 | 1,399 | 1,896 |
| Prevention grant[2] | — | 126 | 189 | |
| Carers grant[3] | — | 127 | 323 | 446 |
| Children's grant[3] | — | 500 | 795 | 1,980 |
| Mental Health Core grant | 329 | 556 | 642 | [4]1,059 |
| Training Support Grant | 304 | 274 | 267 | [4]279 |

[1] The special transitional grant ended in 1998–99
[2] The partnership and prevention grants have been combined in 2001–02 and called the promoting independence grant
[3] The carers' and children's grants were introduced in 1999–2000
[4] Indicative allocation

### North Bristol NHS Trust

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the average hours worked by the NHS nursing staff at North Bristol NHS Trust in each of the last six months; and if he will make a statement on the trust's policy of encouraging nursing staff to work additional shifts. [158945]

**Ms Stuart:** Information on the hours worked by nursing staff is not collected centrally.

The Department has always encouraged all National Health Service trusts to comply fully with the requirements of the Working Time Regulations including ensuring staff conform with the 48-hour weekly limit. However, there is provision in the regulations for staff to voluntarily sign an individual waiver form if they are content to work additional hours. Of course, the trust is still bound by the employer's duty of care to both the health and safety of both the employee and the patient.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Wembley Stadium

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what his Department's role is in the new Wembley project. [157318]

**Kate Hoey** *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* The Wembley project is primarily a matter for the FA and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. Clearly, the Department takes a close interest in the situation regarding the stadium, not least because of the National Lottery element of its funding. The Department is also helping the efforts of the Wembley Task Force to regenerate the area surrounding the stadium.

### Ministerial Visit (Spain)

**Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost was to public funds of the Minister for Sport's recent visit to Spain. [158899]

**Kate Hoey:** £427.

### Prince Michael

**Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what accommodation within the occupied royal palaces is allocated to Prince Michael of Kent and his staff; on what basis the rent is determined; on what basis rent is updated; when he first occupied this accommodation; by how much it has increased to its current level; and what other costs he incurs. [159153]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** Prince Michael of Kent occupies an apartment at Kensington Palace. No staff are provided with residential accommodation. When Prince Michael was granted his licence to occupy the apartment in 1979 it was on a rent-free basis. However, he makes a £3,500 contribution each year towards the cost of maintenance. The contribution is increased in line with inflation. All utility costs are paid by Prince Michael.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Sittings (Costs)

**Mr. Bermingham:** To ask the President of the Council what the cost is for each 15 minute period the House sits after 10 pm. [157751]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** I have been asked to reply. It has been estimated that in a typical full year the cost of the House sitting after 10 pm is some £750,000. The average cost per night is around £10,000.

The main costs associated with late night sittings arise from allowances to staff, overtime for staff of the House and the Metropolitan police, and late night transport.

It would not be meaningful to break these costs down by 15 minute increments after 10 pm.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the President of the Council how many hon. Members have asked Parliamentary Questions requesting statistical information on the effects of Government policy since May 1997 pertaining *(a)* to their own constituency and *(b)* to the constituency of another hon. Member; at what cost in each case; and if she will make a statement. [158329]

**Mrs. Beckett:** The Library of the House has confirmed that it is not possible to extract this information from the POLIS databases but I can say that no such questions have been tabled to me.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Child Slavery

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* cocoa importers and *(b)* UK-based chocolate manufacturers on the working conditions of those who produce the crop in the country of origin. [158966]

**Mr. Wilson:** The UK is firmly committed to eradicating slavery and bonded labour worldwide. I have spoken to the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance. My Department has also been in touch with the Cocoa Association. Both assured us they were addressing the issues of child and slave labour in cocoa production. We are looking at ways we can work together to increase this effort and further meetings will be held in the future.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionary Alliance regarding the issue of slavery in West African cocoa plantations; and if he will make a statement. [158980]

**Mr. Wilson:** The UK is firmly committed to eradicating slavery and bonded labour worldwide. I have spoken to the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance, who assured me they were determined to address the issues of child and slave labour in the production of cocoa. We are looking at ways we can work together to increase this effort and further meetings will be held in the future.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what monitoring of child employment and slavery is undertaken by UK representatives in *(a)* Benin, *(b)* Nigeria, *(c)* Cameroon, *(d)* Senegal, *(e)* the Ivory Coast and *(f)* Ghana; and if he will make a statement on Government policy in this respect. [158967]

**Mr. Battle:** The UK is firmly committed to eradicating slavery and bonded labour worldwide. The UK played a leading role in drafting and securing agreement to the International Labour Convention 182 on the worst forms of Child Labour, which in West Africa has been ratified by Chad, Central African Republic, Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo. The UK closely monitors the human rights situation in the region. We are working with international and non-governmental organisations to address the problem of child slavery, and are looking at what more we can do to increase these efforts.

### Chagos Islands

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have been held with the USA concerning the possible return to Diego Garcia of the former residents and their descendents on the Chagos Islands. [158969]

**Mr. Battle:** The High Court judgment concerning possible resettlement in the British Indian Ocean Territory, though not specifically in Diego Garcia, has naturally been discussed in our regular talks with the American authorities about the use of the Territory for defence purposes.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have been held with the Government of Mauritius concerning the future sovereignty of the Chagos Islands. [158968]

**Mr. Battle:** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made clear both in a letter to the Mauritian Foreign Minister and during a meeting in January this year, that the UK will continue to maintain sovereignty over the Chagos Islands, but that when they are no longer needed for defence purposes, we will be willing to cede them to Mauritius subject to the requirements of international law.

### Libya

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests he has received to undertake a judicial inquiry into the circumstances regarding United Kingdom participation into the bombing of Libya in 1986. [158974]

**Mr. Wilson:** Neither the Foreign Secretary nor I have received a request for a judicial inquiry into this matter.

### China

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the EU's reasons for not co-sponsoring a resolution on China at the 57 UN Commission for Human Rights. [157449]

**Mr. Battle:** EU unity is important to make our policy of critical dialogue with China as effective as possible. We have placed high importance on achieving such unity since the US began sponsoring resolutions on China at the Commission on Human Rights in 1999.

EU Foreign Ministers agreed at the General Affairs Council, on 19 March, not to co-sponsor the US resolution on China at the UN Commission on Human Rights, but to strengthen the EU common position by actively lobbying against the expected Chinese no-action motion, for the first time since 1996.

EU Foreign Ministers agreed to actively continue the policy of critical dialogue on human rights issues with China—an approach they believed would have been affected detrimentally by co-sponsoring the resolution. They made it clear, however, that further continuation of the dialogue would depend on progress being achieved on the ground. EU Foreign Ministers agreed to assess the results of the dialogue on a regular basis.

### Entry Clearance

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 797W, on entry clearance, for what reasons he judged the Minister for Europe the best man for the job; what *(a)* qualifications, *(b)* experience and *(c)* qualities to take into consideration; which other Ministers he considered; and if he will make a statement. [158357]

**Mr. Robin Cook:** I have nothing to add to my previous answer.

## Turkey

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had on human rights in Turkey; and if he will make a statement. [158734]

**Mr. Vaz:** We remain concerned about Turkey's human rights record. I have not had any recent discussions on human rights in Turkey, but we regularly raise concerns about specific human rights cases at senior official level with the Turkish authorities. We continue to closely monitor the human rights situation in Turkey. In addition, the issue forms a regular part of the dialogue between Turkey and the European Union, and will be on the agenda for the meeting between EU and Turkish Political Directors on 26 April.

## Gibraltar

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) of 20 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 112W, on Gibraltar *(a)* what obligations have been accepted by Her Majesty's Government arising out of the Matthews judgment, *(b)* how many electors will be enfranchised as citizens of (i) Gibraltar and (ii) Spain, *(c)* what options for representation he is assessing and *(d)* when the representation of Gibraltar will next be discussed at the General Affairs Council; and if a report from its working group will be published prior to that date. [158578]

**Mr. Vaz:** The Matthews judgment requires the UK to extend the European parliamentary franchise to Gibraltar. The UK unequivocally accepts this obligation. We are considering all possible options for achieving this before the 2004 European Parliament elections.

The precise manner in which Gibraltar will be enfranchised is under consideration. The electorate in Gibraltar is currently estimated at about 18,800. We have made clear that there is no question of Gibraltarians resident in Gibraltar being made to vote in Spain.

The UK has proposed an amendment to the 1976 EC Act on Direct Elections to extend the franchise to Gibraltar. This amendment remains on the agenda of the relevant Council working group. No date has yet been fixed for discussions of this issue at the General Affairs Council. There are no plans to publish a written report from the working group.

## Belarusian Popular Front

**Mr. Trend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government will take in relation to the detention of *(a)* Mr. Vincuk Viachorka, Chairman and *(b)* Mr. Ales Belyatsky, Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front. [158278]

**Mr. Vaz** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* In a démarche delivered to the Belarusian authorities on 11 April, HMG together with EU partners, urged the authorities to review the cases of those imprisoned or fined, including Mr. Viachorka and Mr. Belyatsky, in connection with the 25 March demonstrations in Minsk. HMG will continue to work with EU partners and the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group to encourage an improvement in the human rights situation in Belarus.

**Mr. Trend:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made concerning the abuse of legal process in the trial of *(a)* Mr. Ales Belyatsky, Head of the human rights centre Vyasna and Deputy Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front and *(b)* Mr. Vincuk Viachorka, Chairman of the Belarusian Popular Front. [158279]

**Mr. Vaz** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* An EU démarche was delivered on 11 April to First Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Martynov, raising concerns about the actions of the Belarusian authorities following demonstrations on 25 March, including the imprisonment of Mr. Viachorka and Mr. Belyatsky. The EU also called on the authorities to ensure that freedom of assembly of Belarusian citizens be fully guaranteed.

## UN Human Rights Commission

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list United Kingdom official delegates to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva; and if he will publish the United Kingdom voting record and list those resolutions sponsored by the United Kingdom. [158986]

**Mr. Battle:** The United Kingdom delegation to the UN Commission on Human Rights is headed by Mrs. Audrey Glover CMG. The delegation also includes representatives from the UK missions to the UN in Geneva and New York, as well as from the Human Rights Policy Department and Global Issues Research Group of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The UK contributes actively to initiatives put forward by the EU. At the 57th Session of CHR the EU introduced resolutions on Chechnya, Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Arab Territories, Iran, Iraq, Sudan, Burma, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rights of the Child, and the Death Penalty.

The 57th Session of the CHR will end on 27 April. The final UK voting record will not be available until after this date. As soon as it is available it will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

## Chile

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what records are held by Her Majesty's Embassy of visits to Chile by Dr. Michael Denham, consultant geriatrician, since January 1998; and what facilities were offered to him. [158978]

**Mr. Battle:** There is no record of any visit to Chile by Dr. Michael Denham.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those visitors to Chile who have been visiting *(a)* the Pinochet Foundation and *(b)* General Pinochet who have been offered facilities at Her Majesty's Embassy in Santiago, Chile, since October 1998. [158975]

**Mr. Battle:** The British Embassy has not offered facilities to anyone visiting the Pinochet Foundation or General Pinochet since 1998.

### United States

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the United States Administration and to Congress about the funding of Irish republican terrorist groups. [158775]

**Mr. Battle:** The UK and Irish Governments made a joint representation to the United States Government on 24 November 2000 requesting that the Real IRA be designated under the US Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996. This would make it illegal for anyone to raise funds for RIRA in the United States. The final decision on whether to designate is of course a matter for the US Government.

## TREASURY

### Employment (Termination Payments)

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenue yield of reducing the exemption of the first £30,000 of payments on the termination of employment to *(a)* £15,000, *(b)* £10,000 and *(c)* nil. [158777]

**Dawn Primarolo:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 23 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 570W.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 6 April 2001, to my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer), *Official Report*, column 301W, on foot and mouth, (1) if he will list by valuation office area the number of appeals *(a)* made and *(b)* decided to date; [158677]

(2) if he will instruct the Valuation Office Agency to determine appeals for a temporary reduction in rating assessments on the ground of the impact of foot and mouth within two months of such appeals being made. [158672]

**Dawn Primarolo** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) is continuing to receive appeals on a daily basis. It is not possible to give a final figure.

The VOA will prioritise dealing with these applications. They are consulting, as a matter of urgency, members of the National Ratepayers Valuation Forum and representatives of business and professional bodies, local authorities and valuation tribunals on the approach and timetable for this work.

### Indebted Countries

**Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 413W, on indebted countries, if he will update the figures and list the countries for whom debt has been written off by Britain, together with the amounts written off in each case. [158821]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** As previously outlined, the UK has, and is, writing off debt through multilateral initiatives such as the HIPC initiative, and through additional bilateral initiatives.

Under the HIPC initiative, the UK stands ready to write off all £1.9 billion still owed to the UK by the 41 countries potentially eligible. This is in addition to the £400 million of ECGD debt already written off under previous initiatives, and the £350 million of aid debt already written off for HIPCs. Interim relief is also being given to these countries on around £60 million of debt formerly held by CDC plc.

Since 5 February, no further countries have reached Decision Point or Completion Point, and so the position remains unchanged. The World Bank and IMF produce regular updates of progress of countries towards Decision Point. The latest report, "HIPC Progress Report" (dated April 2001), is available on the World Bank website.

As previously specified, the UK is holding all further payments from HIPC countries in trust, and as such is not benefiting financially from the debts of these countries.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Cotter:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Weston-Super-Mare, dated 6 February, concerning the class 4 national insurance contributions of sub-post masters. [159414]

**Dawn Primarolo:** There is no record of this letter being received. If the hon. Member would like to forward a copy it will be dealt with.

### Children's Tax Credit

**Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Glasgow and *(d)* Glasgow, Pollok, have claimed children's tax credit, indicating the percentage in each case of the numbers estimated as being eligible. [158817]

**Dawn Primarolo:** It is estimated that there are 400,000 families eligible for CTC in Scotland. I regret that the other information that my hon. Friend has asked for is not available.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Criminal Justice Review

**Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his plans are for the Criminal Justice Review. [159667]

**Dr. Reid:** Detailed preparation of the legislation and Implementation Plan for the Criminal Justice Review is well advanced. These documents will be published when the necessary remaining work has been completed.

## SCOTLAND

### Logos and Branding

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how much has been spent by her Department on departmental and agency logos and associated branding since 1 May 1997. [152653]

**Mrs. Liddell:** In the period 1 May 1997–30 June 1999 the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency, an agency of the Scottish Office, spent £57,156 in respect of its agency logo and associated branding. Since 1 July 1999, the Scotland Office has spent £2,988 on departmental branding.

## Promotional Campaigns

**Mr. Lansley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the television, newspaper and radio advertising and other promotional campaigns conducted by *(a)* her Department, *(b)* its agencies and *(c)* its departmental public bodies, in each of the past five years, showing for each the expenditure incurred by her Department; and if she will make a statement. [153411]

**Mrs. Liddell** *[holding answer 12 March 2001]:* Details of advertising and promotional campaigns conducted in the period 1996-June 1999 by the Scottish Office and its agencies are set out in the table. Information on departmental bodies is not held centrally. The Scotland Office conducted a campaign on Electoral Registration in February/March 2001: final cost details are not yet available.

£

| *Campaign* | *TV* | *Press* | *Radio* | *Other promotional* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *1996–97* | | | | |
| Childrens Panels | 38,203 | 24,518 | 50,561 | — |
| Crime Prevention | 1,096 | 166,229 | 131,472 | 176,815 |
| Electoral Registration | 45,473 | 17,795 | — | — |
| Fire Prevention | 281,916 | — | 38,534 | 6,281 |
| Food Safety | 221,755 | 391,811 | 3,296 | 13,072 |
| Historic Scotland | 207,000 | 50,000 | 90,000 | 525,000 |
| Nursery Vouchers | 344,049 | 218,605 | 36,937 | 148,859 |
| Organ Donors | — | 42,256 | — | — |
| Right to Buy | — | 81,428 | 117,481 | 28,736 |
| Road Safety | 222,806 | — | 66,643 | 20,095 |
| Severe Weather | 100,775 | — | — | — |
| *1997–98* | | | | |
| Absent Voters | — | 41,877 | — | — |
| Childrens Panels | 99,148 | 70,189 | — | 5,940 |
| Continence Campaign | — | 2,844 | — | — |
| Crime Prevention | — | — | 37,036 | 15,634 |
| Electoral Registration | — | 31,951 | 37,960 | — |
| Fire Prevention | 196,726 | 60,287 | — | 66,742 |
| Food Safety | — | 21,058 | — | — |
| Historic Scotland | 173,000 | 80,000 | 111,000 | 530,500 |
| Learning Direct | — | — | 35,000 | — |
| NHS Green Paper | — | 76,440 | — | 3,249 |
| Organ Donors | — | 41,274 | — | — |
| Police Recruitment | — | 6,173 | — | — |
| Pre-School Vouchers | 137,470 | 52,904 | 2,668 | 16,559 |
| Referendum | 287,706 | 75,068 | 18,467 | — |
| Road Safety | — | — | 134,892 | 247,675 |
| Severe Weather | 46,036 | — | — | — |
| *1998–99* | | | | |
| Childrens Panels | 71,393 | 31,934 | — | 4,377 |
| Democratising Scotland | — | 123,333 | 94,751 | 30,326 |
| Domestic Violence | 418,403 | 122,973 | 79,764 | 10,105 |
| Electoral Registration | — | 41,008 | — | — |
| Fire Prevention | 164,312 | 44,544 | — | 12,844 |
| Food Safety | — | 21,142 | — | — |
| Fostering | — | 51,419 | 45,936 | — |
| Further Education | — | 29,655 | 39,984 | — |
| Historic Scotland | 257,000 | 50,000 | 120,000 | 678,000 |
| Local Government Commission | — | 68,516 | — | — |
| NHS White Paper | — | 76,734 | — | — |
| Nursing Recruitment | 169,670 | 55,829 | 32,831 | — |
| Pharmacy Point of Dispensing | — | 26,904 | 26,338 | — |
| Police Graduate Recruitment | — | 9,423 | — | — |
| Road Safety | 469,554 | — | — | 158,590 |
| Scottish Parliament | 1,093,679 | 398,419 | 62,606 | 144,240 |
| Teacher Recruitment | — | 4,182 | — | — |
| *1999-June 2000* | | | | |
| Census | — | 8,312 | 1,681 | — |
| Domestic Abuse | 97,257 | — | — | 8,050 |
| European Elections | — | 32,029 | — | — |
| Historic Scotland | 115,000 | — | 56,000 | 106,000 |
| Road Safety | 79,728 | — | — | 397 |
| Scotland's Parliament | 275,451 | 255,766 | — | 11,114 |

## WALES

### Prince's Trust

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the findings of the Prince's Trust report, "Mapping Disadvantage: Young People who need help in England and Wales"; and if he will make a statement. [156352]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** Lead responsibility for promoting the welfare of children in Wales rests with the National Assembly for Wales. The Assembly is committed to improving the health and well-being of children and to protecting them from abuse and neglect. The work of the Prince's Trust, in identifying areas in Wales where young people need the most help provides an additional and valuable source of information to assist the Assembly in its work.

### Sex Education

**Mr. Wigley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with Ministers at the National Assembly for Wales on legislative initiatives designed to ensure a co-ordinated approach to policy in Wales relating to HIV and on the provision of sex education guidance for students. [155967]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** I have regular discussions with Assembly Secretaries about a range of issues affecting Wales.

I understand that Jane Hutt, Assembly Secretary for Health and Social Services has published a sexual health strategy and a communicable disease strategy and that the Assembly's policy on HIV is being kept under review.

The Education Act 1996 requires all maintained secondary schools to make provision for sex education including HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. The National Assembly's guidance in this area is currently being updated.

No new primary legislation requirement has been identified in relation to these matters.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what criteria were used in determining which newspapers were used to publicise Government guidelines on access to the countryside; and if he will assess the benefits of using a wider range of newspapers for future advertising. [157713]

**Ms Beverley Hughes** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* I have been asked to reply, as my Department led in producing initial advertising and publicity aimed at the general public on this issue.

The key requirement in the early stages of this important public awareness campaign was to ensure that the maximum number of potential visitors to the countryside had access to information on the foot and mouth situation as quickly as possible. Our media choices were carefully formulated to make sure that coverage across England and Wales was as thorough and even as possible, using national and regional newspapers and radio, and covering both urban areas of high population and rural areas with concentrations of farming activity.

A media strategy always forms a central part of any communications campaign and the range of media to be used is carefully considered to ensure that maximum impact and awareness of campaign messages is combined with good value for money.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what representations he has received on *(a)* the threat to rare breeds displaying no symptoms of foot and mouth disease from the extension of the cull to a three kilometre radius of an infected area and *(b)* the potential permanent loss of pedigree herds and flocks; and if he will make a statement; [155272]

(2) what representations he has received concerning the vaccination of rare breeds against foot and mouth disease. [157339]

**Mr. Morley:** I have received representations from the Rare Breeds Survival Trust and various individual breed societies and owners. The Ministry published proposals on measures to reduce the risks which make culling of rare breeds of sheep necessary on 19 April. Copies are on the Ministry's website. We have also supported the establishment of the Heritage Gene Bank, to preserve germ plasm from sheep breeds which are particularly threatened by foot and mouth disease.

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the countries from which the UK imports *(a)* livestock and *(b)* meat whose livestock is known to be infected by foot and mouth disease. [154992]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 22 March 2001]:* The UK imports livestock under EU or national rules only from countries or areas officially recognised as being free from foot and mouth disease.

Community legislation recognises that disease is present in some countries, but has been contained in specific regions. The importation of meat is permitted from a limited number of countries where foot and mouth disease is present, but only where the disease is so contained. Imports of fresh meat are permitted only from those regions of the relevant countries that are not considered to pose a risk to human or animal health. Fully matured boneless beef, which does not pose an FMD risk may be imported from other regions subject to veterinary certification. Countries to which these controls currently apply are Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Argentina, Brazil, Columbia and Uruguay.

Community law allows member states to take action to prohibit imports from countries where a particular disease risk has been identified pending the amendment of Community laws to reflect the new disease situation. Because of their FMD situation prohibitions are currently in place on imports of meat of FMD susceptible species from South Africa, Swaziland and Argentina.

All meat imported from third countries is subject to veterinary checks at Border Inspection Posts to ensure that proper import requirements are met.

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will close the road past Wick Farm, Layer-de-la-Haye, near Colchester, to avoid further spread of foot and mouth disease. [153945]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 15 March 2001]:* Veterinary advice is that the road does not need to be closed at this time.

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will grant discretionary powers to highway authorities to close roads past livestock holdings where stock may be at risk of infection by foot and mouth disease and where alternative routes may be available. [153946]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 15 March 2001]:* The Foot and Mouth Disease Order 1983 allows a Ministry or local authority inspector to prohibit the entry of any person onto any land or into any agricultural building that lies within an infected area. This power could be used to close roads. However, veterinary judgment has been that, except in very rare cases, to do so would be disproportionate to the risk involved.

Nonetheless, to ensure that inspectors have sufficient powers to control the current outbreak, additional powers have been inserted in the Foot-and-Mouth Disease Order 1983 by the Foot and Mouth Disease (Amendment) (England) (No 4) Order 2001 which would allow an inspector of the Ministry or a local authority (with prior written authority of the Minister) to close roads within a controlled area. At present, England and Wales and Scotland have been declared controlled areas.

**Mr. Paice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 3 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 126W, on foot and mouth disease, how many sheep were exported in the 118 consignments; and what information he has regarding the other sheep movements in February referred to in the statement by the Prime Minister of 28 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 954, with particular reference to the number of them that were the result of change of ownership other than through official livestock markets or abattoirs. [157511]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given him by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 588W.

45,808 sheep were certified for export in the 118 consignments exported in February this year. Sheep movements are not centrally recorded.

**Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he will provide a substantive reply to the Question tabled for answer on 23 March (Ref: 155117) regarding the effectiveness of homoeopathic borax in the prevention of foot and mouth disease; [157704]

(2) what measures he has taken to assess the effectiveness of homeopathic borax in the prevention of foot and mouth disease, with particular reference to previous outbreaks; and if he will consider its use to prevent the spread of the disease. [157710]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answers 9 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 257W.

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what role the Environment Agency played in contingency planning for the foot and mouth outbreak; and if he will make a statement; [157997]

(2) what guidance he has given the Environment Agency about its role in the contingency planning for a foot and mouth outbreak. [158000]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The Environment Agency has been consulted by MAFF on the environmental impact of methods of dealing with animal disease outbreaks. Prior to the foot and mouth outbreak, the Agency had agreed with MAFF a National Incident Response Plan to ensure that guidance on protection of the natural environment was timely and accurate. The Environment Agency deals with pollution risks to ground and surface waters and has expertise in air pollution modelling, but is not the competent authority in this latter environmental impact.

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the changes in the average income of farmers *(a)* in the current year and *(b)* next year arising from the foot and mouth outbreak. [157009]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* It is premature at this stage to estimate the impact of the foot and mouth outbreak on farm incomes.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the last outbreaks of foot and mouth were in each of the candidate countries for membership of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [155586]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The latest reported dates are as follows:

| *Country* | *Date of last reported FMD outbreak* |
|---|---|
| Bulgaria | 1993 |
| Cyprus | 1964 |
| Czech Republic | 1975 |
| Estonia | 1982 |
| Hungary | 1973 |
| Latvia | 1987 |
| Lithuania | 1987 |
| Malta | 1978 |
| Poland | 1971 |
| Romania | 1973 |
| Slovakia | 1973 |
| Slovenia[1] | 1978 |
| Turkey | 2001 |

[1] Last notified outbreak in that part of the former Yugoslavia

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of using the homeopathic remedy Borax 30 to combat the outbreak of foot and mouth, using information drawn from the experience of the 1967 outbreak. [155932]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 27 March 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) on 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, 257W.

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what *(a)* advice, *(b)* proposals and *(c)* recommendations he has received from the European Commission on measures to contain foot and mouth disease; and what response he has made. [156200]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* The Commission has been very supportive of the measures taken in the UK to control the outbreak. The Commission and members states have discussed the measures taken on a number of occasions and adopted a number of decisions relevant to the United Kingdom's position on the range of relevant issues.

A mission from Food and Veterinary Office of the European Commission visited the UK on 12 to 16 March 2001. We are currently awaiting the official report to the Standing Veterinary Committee.

### Woodland Management

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to review the Forestry Commission's support for the management of existing woodland. [159531]

**Mr. Morley:** Woodland makes an important contribution to the rural economy and is essential to the character of the English countryside. However, many of our woods are under-managed and are not delivering the potential range of benefits to their owners or to society as a whole. The Forestry Commission plays a key role in ensuring the sustainable management of our woodland.

I have therefore asked the Commission to review its support for the sustainable management of existing woodland in accordance with the priorities of the Government's Forestry Strategy for England and in the light of the UK Forestry Standard.

The review will help focus the Commission's work on finding ways to engage woodland owners effectively in implementing the England Forestry Strategy. This will help owners sustain their own plans while supporting the rural economy and improving the environment for the benefit of all. While the review will consider the effectiveness of existing Forestry Commission grant schemes, I am keen to see ideas emerging on the whole range of support measures through partnerships, advice, training and market development.

The review will be managed by a steering group including woodland owners and managers and representatives from appropriate Government Departments and agencies, as well as from Wildlife and Countryside Link. Anthony Bosanquet, president of the CLA and a non-executive Forestry Commissioner, will chair the steering group. There will be widespread public consultation, including a series of regional seminars later this year.

I have asked the Commission to submit its recommendations to me within 12 months.

### Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158129]

**Ms Quin:** This Government are committed to equality of opportunity and to increasing the diversity of those appointed to public bodies. In support of this, the Department has drawn up an action plan for increasing the numbers of public appointees from under-represented groups. The latest plans, together with the Government's overall plan, were published on 24 May 2000 in "Quangos: Opening up Public Appointments 2000–03", copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

No MAFF public appointments falling within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments have age limits applied. The Dairy Produce Quota Tribunal, dormant since 1994, also has no age limits.

In addition, there are seven MAFF Agricultural Land Tribunals, which must abide by the statutory provisions set out in section 73 of the Agriculture Act 1947. The chairmen and deputy chairmen, appointed by the Lord Chancellor, must be barristers or solicitors of at least seven years standing. The statutory age limit is 72 for chairmen. Serving panel members retire at 70, but those appointed after 12 May 2000 must retire at 65. My noble Friend the Lord Chancellor also appoints the Plant Varieties and Seeds Tribunal chairman, who similarly must be a barrister or solicitor of at least seven years standing. The retirement age for the chairman and lay members of this tribunal is 70. The Plant Varieties and Seeds Tribunal has not been convened since 1984. The age limit for these posts is advertised. Appointments are initially for 12 months, with renewal thereafter at the Lord Chancellor's discretion.

### Fisheries Council

**Mr. Hood:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the outcome was of the Fisheries Council held in Brussels on 24 and 25 April; what the Government's voting record was at the Council; and if he will make a statement. [159573]

**Mr. Morley:** I represented the UK at the Fisheries Council on 25 April together with Ms Rhona Brankin, the Deputy Minister for Rural Affairs in the Scottish Executive.

Commissioner Fischler made a first presentation of the Commission's Green Paper on the 2002 Review of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) underlining the need for significant revision of the CFP in particular to achieve a better balance between catching capacity and stock availability. The Council gave a general welcome to the Green Paper, with a number of member states endorsing the Commission's concern to increase stakeholder involvement in fisheries management and to strengthen the regional dimension. There will be a full discussion of the Green Paper at the June Council.

Commissioner Fischler reported on the current state of play on the stock recovery plans for cod and hake. General support for recovery plans for close industry involvement in their development was expressed together

with concerns about individual aspects of the plans. I made clear the need for effective and workable technical conservation measures in the North Sea to take account of the realities of the UK mixed fisheries.

The Council adopted conclusions on the integration of environmental concerns into the CFP, which will contribute to the forthcoming report to the Gothenburg European Council on environmental integration, as required under the Cardiff Process. Commissioner Fischler presented the Commission report on a bio-diversity action plan for fisheries which will now be considered in detail and the Council adopted conclusions on a move towards multi-annual management strategies for setting Total Allowable Catches within a precautionary framework.

We took note of the failure to conclude a further fisheries agreement between the EU and Morocco and of the Commission's intention to bring forward measures for the necessary re-structuring of the Spanish and Portuguese fleets as a result of the lack of fishing opportunities in Moroccan waters. All member states confirmed that they would be ready to ratify the UN Agreement on straddling and migratory stocks by the end of this year. The Council agreed a common position on the criteria that the EU wants to see applied in the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) in the future allocation of catching opportunities. These take account both of the needs of EU fishermen and of developing countries.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Equal Pay

14. **Mr. Fitzpatrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to promote the policy of equal pay for equal work. [157921]

**Ms Jowell:** The pay gap between men and women's full-time hourly earnings has halved since the introduction of the Equal Pay Act. But women still earn only 82p for £1 a man earns. This is because of discrimination and the fact that most women are still concentrated in low paid, important but unskilled jobs.

We are acting on a number of fronts to make equality law work better for women, and to tackle the culture of low expectation, low pay and no pay. Denise Kingsmill is leading the women's employment and pay review. We have appointed fair pay champions from business, public sector and trade unions. We have introduced the Castle Awards for exemplary employers. We are funding the EOC to develop pay reviews.

The Government will set a lead and will be the first to audit equal pay of men and women.

### FE Colleges

15. **Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the contribution of colleges of further education to bridging the skills gap. [157922]

**Mr. Wicks:** Colleges of further education make a very substantial contribution to raising the country's skill levels. FE students achieve some 2.5 million qualifications each year including around a quarter of a million students achieving NVQ level 3 or equivalent. We are also establishing Centres of Vocational Excellence to enable colleges to be more sharply focused on meeting the skills employers need.

### Rural Sixth Forms

16. **Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the implications for small rural school sixth forms of his Department's new funding arrangements. [157923]

**Mr. Wicks:** This Government are committed to school sixth forms and there is nothing in the new arrangements that will undermine that. Every school sixth form, small or large, will be protected by our real terms funding guarantee.

### School Buildings and Repairs

17. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money has been allocated for *(a)* new school building and *(b)* major building repairs and improvement in the north-west since May 1997. [157924]

**Jacqui Smith:** £839.6 million in total has been allocated for investment in school buildings in the north-west in the years since 1997. Of this, £199.5 million has been allocated through the New Deal for Schools programme, which is targeted at major repairs and improvements. Over the next three years we have so far allocated a further £501.3 million in funding for schools in the north-west, as part of the biggest school building and repair programme in over half a century.

### Education Funding (Leicestershire)

18. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received regarding Government funding for education in Leicestershire. [157925]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on Government funding for education in Leicestershire from schools and parents. We are continuing to increase general funding to Leicestershire; in 2001–02 Leicestershire's SSA will increase by £14.7 million and its schools will receive an increase in direct grant of £4.2 million.

### New Deal for Young People

19. **Dan Norris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the progress of the New Deal for Young People. [157926]

**Ms Jowell:** The New Deal is at the centre of this Government's drive to deliver employment opportunities for all. Almost 280,000 young people have found jobs through the New Deal, which has helped virtually to eradicate long-term youth unemployment. The New Deal has also won unprecedented support from employers, almost 85,000 of whom have signed up to the programme. The next phase of the New Deal will build on our success in equipping people with the skills and experience employers need, and intensify the help available to those at greatest disadvantage in the labour market.

### Employment (Over-50s)

20. **Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will focus his employment policy priorities on the over-50s. [157927]

**Ms Hodge:** The Government's recent Green Paper, "Towards Full Employment", sets out our firm commitment to tackle the high levels of inactivity among people over 50, by increasing choice and opportunities for employment.

In under a year, New Deal-50 plus has helped 30,000 people off benefits and back into work. In the coming year our range of New Deals, including New Deal 25-plus and New Deal for Disabled Peopie, will help some 50,000 over 50s into employment.

### Sure Start

21. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of the Sure Start programme; and if he will make a statement. [157928]

**Yvette Cooper:** I have been asked to reply. Although initial feedback is very positive, the Sure Start programme is still very new and it is too early to make a thorough assessment of its impact. A major evaluation of Sure Start began in January 2001. It will examine the impact of Sure Start on children, families and communities, both in the short, medium and long term by tracking a sample of 8,000 children and their families over time.

27. **Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of Sure Start on rural deprivation. [157935]

**Yvette Cooper:** I have been asked to reply. Over time the national evaluation of Sure Start, which commenced at the beginning of 2001, will consider the impact of rural Sure Start programmes on child poverty and deprivation in these areas. Working with the Countryside Agency, Sure Start is developing ten rural pilot programmes, including one in Staffordshire, Moorlands, so that we may learn what works best for disadvantaged children in rural areas.

### School Admissions

22. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in how many local education authorities in England there is an integrated system for dealing with applications for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools. [157929]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** My Department does not collect this information. The statutory Code of Practice on School Admissions recommends as good practice that admission authorities should operate co-ordinated admission arrangements. The code also encourages the setting-up of admission forums, which now operate in most areas, and which play a key role in bringing together various admission authorities to seek solutions to common problems and to improve the level of co-ordination in local admission arrangements.

### Education SSA

23. **Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the education standard spending assessment for *(a)* secondary and *(b)* primary school pupils. [157930]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** Between 1997–98 and 2001–02 funding for primary schools has increased by £640 per pupil in real terms, and for secondary schools by £550. The ratio of secondary to primary funding per pupil has narrowed from 1.3 to 1 in 1997–98 to 1.2 to 1 in 2001–02.

Since 1997, funding overall has increased by £540 per pupil in real terms. Under the last Government, it fell by £80 in real terms between 1994–95 and 1997–98.

### School Catchment Areas

24. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to change the system for the determination of school catchment areas; and if he will make a statement. [157932]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** Admission authorities, normally the local education authority for community and controlled schools, and the governing body for aided or foundation schools, are responsible for setting the admission arrangements for their schools, including determining and reviewing the boundaries for any school catchment areas. There is no requirement for admission authorities to use catchment areas as an admission criterion, although many choose to do so.

### Teacher Recruitment and Retention

25. **Mr. Efford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent steps he has taken to improve teacher recruitment and retention. [157933]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** Our recruitment and retention measures have already ensured that there are more teachers than for a decade and the number of trainee teachers has risen for the first time in eight years.

The teachers' pay arrangements for 2001–02, and the £200 million teacher recruitment package announced by my right hon. Friend on 12 March will help build on this success. We are introducing a welcome back bonus for people returning to teaching; a teacher retention and recruitment fund to support schools in areas where there are difficulties; extension of £4,000 golden hellos for newly-qualified teachers of shortage subjects to English; funding for 570 more places in a full year on the graduate teacher programme; and 500 more places on refresher courses for those returning to teaching, which include training grants of up to £150 a week and help towards child care costs. My right hon. Friend has also published a Green Paper, "Schools: building on success", containing proposals that will further help recruit and retain teachers, including paying off, over time, the student loans of new teachers who commit themselves to a career in the maintained sector.

**Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many teaching vacancies in *(a)* schools and *(b)* colleges in England and Wales were filled during the financial year 1999–2000. [155624]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 27 March 2001]:* The number of teachers recruited to a full-time post (new entrants and teachers moving to jobs from other schools/colleges) in England in financial years 1997–1998 and 1998–1999 (the latest year for which data are available), were as follows:

| | *1997–98* | *1998–99*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| Maintained schools sector | 52,100 (14.4%) | 50,200 (14.0%) |
| FE colleges | 3,700 (7.5%) | 4,100 (9.1%) |

[1] Provisional

The figures in brackets are recruits as a percentage of the total number of teachers in post at the beginning of the financial year.

There was a fall in the number of teachers leaving the maintained school sector in England, 27,570 (6.6 per cent.) in 1998–99 compared with 34,250 (8.2 per cent.) in 1997–98, following the 1997 reform of the Teachers Pension Scheme.

The full-time equivalent (FTE) number of regular teachers (excluding short-term supply) in the maintained schools sector in England at January 2001 was 410,280, an increase of 12,600 since January 1998:

| *January* | *FTE*[1] |
|---|---|
| 1998 | 397,700 |
| 1999 | 401,200 |
| 2000 | 404,600 |
| 2001 | 410,280 |

[1] Rounded

There was a growth of 2,300 in the number of people recruited to train as teachers between 1999–2000 and 2000–01, the first such increase since 1992–93.

From April 2001 new graduate recruits can expect to earn £17,000 a year (up 6 per cent. from the previous year) and starting salaries in Inner London will rise to £20,000 (up 9 per cent. from the previous year).

Teacher information for Wales is the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

### Women's Employment and Pay Review

26. **Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the remit is of the Women's Employment and Pay Review. [157934]

**Ms Jowell:** The Women's Employment and Pay Review, led by Denise Kingsmill, Deputy Chair of the Competition Commission, will examine ways to increase diversity and flexibility of the labour market, for example through high value part-time and flexible working arrangements such as job shares, term-time contracts and contracts for 'job-pools'. It will look to produce a strategy for the promotion and implementation of voluntary pay reviews by all employers to ensure pay equality within their organisations. The review will advocate the benefits to business of voluntary pay audits and will work in collaboration with the EOC and employer and trade union representatives to help build support for a voluntary approach. It will identify further areas where understanding and awareness of existing equality law can be increased among employers and female employees. The review will draw on experiences of good practice both in the UK and internationally. Ministers across Government will be available to assist the review, but the work will be autonomous.

We aim for the review to be completed by the end of October. The final report will include non-legislative and cost-effective proposals to improve women's employment prospects and participation in the labour market, taking account of the Government's Work-Life Balance Campaign. Denise Kingsmill will present her report to the conference on Women's Employment, Pay and Prospects in December.

### In-service Training Days

28. **Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the future of Baker days. [157936]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** We are committed to raising standards of education and supporting teachers to do this by providing the training and development they need. Teachers are currently entitled to five in-service training days, under the terms and conditions of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document. In-service training days are an important tool for headteachers to help their staff keep their skills and knowledge up to date, and they are an integral part of our future CPD strategy.

### Employment Service

29. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what guidance he gives to the Employment Service on helping job seekers to find part-time work. [157937]

**Ms Jowell:** Through our range of New Deal programmes which are operated through the Employment Service we are providing tailored help to meet the variety of needs of those without work. The personal adviser approach is at the heart of all these programmes providing support to some of the most vulnerable people in the labour market.

For some this will mean full-time work but for others, perhaps those with other responsibilities such as bringing up children, part-time work will be the better option. The advisers can offer advice and assistance, including help with calculating in-work benefits, child care arrangements and appropriate training to help them into work. And, from the end of this month, lone parents who take up part-time work of less than 16 hours will be able to get help with child care costs for their first year in work.

### Call Centres (Training)

30. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on training provision to provide skills for people planning to work in call centres. [157939]

**Mr. Wicks:** We are working with the Call Centre Association (CCA) and the Communication Workers Union to raise standards and increase training opportunities in the sector. We are also working closely with the CCA to identify current and future skill needs. Training provision for call centre staff, and for people planning to work in call centres, was part of the wider consultation into National Training Organisation arrangements for the

telecommunications sector. The consultation ended on 30 March 2001 and we will make an announcement shortly.

### Jobseeker's Allowance

31. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what policies are in place to ensure that young unemployed couples without children are actively seeking work while claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. [157940]

**Ms Jowell:** On 19 March this year, we introduced joint claims for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). Both members of young unemployed couples without children have to be available for work and to seek work actively, and each has to agree a Jobseeker's Agreement detailing what steps they will take in looking for work. Each member of the couple is required to attend the Jobcentre every fortnight to discuss their job search. Full payment of JSA is conditional on both carrying out their full responsibilities. Both will be helped by advisers to secure work and will be referred to programmes and New Deal assistance as appropriate.

### Ufi

32. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the development of Ufi. [157941]

**Mr. Wills:** Excellent progress is being made. Using the brand-name learndirect, Ufi Ltd. moved from its developmental phase to the national roll-out of its services and systems in October of last year.

There are now over 900 learndirect centres operating nationally in a wide range of settings in both urban and rural communities. learndirect currently offers in excess of 430 course titles of which over 70 per cent. are on-line. The courses cover Ufi Ltd.'s initial priority areas including basic skills, information technology at all levels and business and management skills for small and medium-sized enterprises.

The network of learning centres is underpinned by the learndirect National Information and Advice Service, comprising the learndirect telephone helpline (0800 100 900) and the learndirect website (www.learndirect.co.uk). Over 2.6 million callers to the helpline and over 1.7 million searchers of the website, have received advice and information on a whole range of over half a million learning opportunities.

### Training Facilities (Sheffield)

33. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on his plans for new training facilities in Sheffield. [157942]

**Mr. Wicks:** This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the council's chief executive, to write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library. However, Sheffield College will be in discussions with the LSC about the development of the new programme of Centres of Vocational Excellence, and new Technology Institutes. There has also been, as part of Excellence in Cities, the development of new City Learning Centres in the city.

### Lecturers' Pay

34. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the pay of further education and sixth form college lecturers. [157943]

**Mr. Wicks:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 28 March 2001, *Official Report*, columnS 689–90W.

### University Funding

35. **Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations he has had from vice-chancellors and principals on core levels of funding for universities. [157944]

**Mr. Wicks:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State receives representations about higher education funding from time to time from vice-chancellors and principals. Most recently, he has received a copy of the report of the Universities UK Funding Options Review Group "New Directions for Higher Education Funding".

The Government are increasing publicly planned funding to universities and higher education colleges in England by £1.7 billion over the six years to 2003–04: funding per full-time student will thereby increase in real terms in 2001–02 for the first time in over a decade.

### Chief Inspector of Schools

36. **Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools' latest annual report. [157945]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** Mike Tomlinson's annual report for 1999–2000 shows that the quality of teaching has improved and the attainments of pupils at all levels have risen. We welcome the evidence of rising standards and congratulate teachers, pupils and schools on what they have achieved. Our policies are designed to build on the firm foundations which are now in place and to secure continuous improvement in teaching and learning in all types of school.

### Further Education (Standards)

37. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on his plans to raise standards in further education. [157946]

**Mr. Wicks:** Standards in further education are already high. The most recent annual report summarising inspections showed that over 90 per cent. of teaching in further education was judged satisfactory.

However, more needs to be done to bring standards in all colleges up to the level of the best. That is why the Government have put in place the Learning and Skills Council with a remit to secure better quantity and quality, introduced new inspection arrangements, and will increase the standards fund. These will all contribute to raising standards in further education.

### Individual Learning Accounts

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the number of people who have, to date, taken up ILA's, indicating the criteria used to determine suitability to open an ILA; and what the average amount invested for each individual is. [158846]

**Mr. Wicks:** Latest figures are that over 950,000 people have opened Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) in the UK. This figure will be updated shortly and I will write to the hon. Member with a revised figure when this is available. In England the main criterion for holding an ILA is that the individual is aged 19 or over. The figures available for ILAs in England show that each learning opportunity undertaken by account holders costs an average of £355. £178 of this is supported by funds available through the ILA initiative while the balance of £177 is shared between the individual and other sources of funding such as employers and trade unions.

### Student Transport

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what powers he has to overrule the policy of *(a)* a local authority and *(b)* a passenger transport executive relating to subsidy of public transport for students at independent schools of music on the basis of local education authority contribution to fees. [158953]

**Jacqui Smith:** A local education authority must by law provide free school transport for a day pupil attending an independent school if it is the nearest suitable school to the pupil's home, and that home is beyond the statutory walking distance. Local education authorities have discretion to provide free or subsidised school transport for pupils who do not satisfy those criteria; but they are under no obligation to do so. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no powers to intervene in a local education authority's discretionary policy in such cases, except where he is satisfied that the authority is acting unreasonably in the exercise of statutory powers or duties. He has no relevant powers in relation to passenger transport executives. For pupils aided under my Department's Music and Ballet Scheme at four independent specialist music schools in England, means-tested help is available through that scheme towards transport costs.

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many school children received free school transport in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1997, *(d)* 1998, *(e)* 1999 and *(f)* 2000; and at what cost. [158771]

**Jacqui Smith:** My Department does not collect from local education authorities a breakdown of numbers, or costs, relating specifically to children who receive free transport for the individual years requested. We estimate that approximately 800,000 pupils in England receive free transport to school every year. Total local education authority expenditure in England on home to school transport, including discretionary free and subsidised fares, in the relevant financial years was as follows.

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1994–95 | 319 |
| 1995–96 | 345 |
| 1996–97 | 382 |
| 1997–98 | 418 |
| 1998–99 | 444 |
| 1999–2000[1] | 485 |

[1] Provisional

### Learning and Skills Council

**Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the objectives he has set for the Learning and Skills Council. [157931]

**Mr. Wicks:** The Learning and Skills Council was launched on 28 March and is now operational. It is the most significant and far-reaching reform ever enacted to post-16 learning. The council has a huge agenda, and its priorities include encouraging more young people to stay in learning; increasing demand for learning among adults; and improving the skills of the work force. We also expect the council to drive up standards in teaching and training, and build equality of opportunity into everything it does.

### School Improvement Awards

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list those schools in East Surrey which were wrongly informed that they had won improvement awards; and if he will make a statement. [158378]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the letter issued on 30 March.

### Oxbridge Admissions

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish the information collected by *(a)* Oxford and *(b)* Cambridge universities in each of the last five years in respect of admissions, disaggregated by college. [157901]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 24 April 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given on 3 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 123–24W.

### Fresh Start

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools have been given a Fresh Start since 1997; and how many pupils obtained five GCSEs at grades A* to C for each of the schools for each year since 1997. [158847]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** The Government are committed to preventing schools from failing, and turning round those that do as quickly as possible. There are 353 schools on special measures, compared with 515 in 1998. Over 700 failing schools have been successfully turned round since 1997. The average turn-round time is currently 18 months, compared with 25 months in 1997. Over 100 schools in special measures have closed, and the pupils educated elsewhere.

Where it proves impossible to turn a school round in a reasonable time, closure should be the preferred option. In exceptional circumstances, where closure is not

feasible, the local education authority may consider a Fresh Start, closing the existing school and opening a new school on the same site. This is a difficult course, and should be reserved for the hardest cases. 25 schools have been "Fresh Started", of which 15 are secondary and 10 primary. All were causing concern, and the majority had been in special measures for over two years.

Of the 15 secondary Fresh Start schools, four opened in September 2000 and have therefore not yet published GCSE results. Results for the other 11 schools are shown in the table. Two of these schools—Telegraph Hill School in Lewisham and Firfield Community School in Newcastle—are due to close in July 2001 and July 2002 respectively.

*GCSE/GNVQ Performance data for Fresh Start schools*[1]

*Percentage*

| | *School name* | *Date of Fresh Start* | *Percentage of pupils achieving 5 GCSE/GNVQ A*-C in: 1997* | *1998* | *1999*[2] | *2000*[2] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| New | Firfield Community School | 1 September 1998 | — | — | 9 | 4 |
| Formerly | Blakelaw School | | 9 | 7 | — | — |
| New | Fir Vale School | 1 September 1998 | — | — | 11 | 17 |
| Formerly | Earl Marshal School | | 11 | 10 | — | — |
| New | East Brighton College of Media Arts | 1 September 1999 | — | — | — | 13 |
| Formerly | The Marina High School | | 13 | 13 | 19 | — |
| New | Islington Arts and Media | 1 September 1999 | — | — | — | 5 |
| Formerly | George Orwell School | | 13 | 10 | 18 | — |
| New | Kingswood High School | 1 September 1999 | — | — | — | 3 |
| formerly | Perronet Thompson School | | 5 | 6 | 8 | — |
| New | Telegraph Hill | 1 September 1999 | — | — | — | 3 |
| Formerly | Hatcham Wood School | | 7 | 14 | 8 | — |
| New | Bishopsford Community School | 1 September 1999 | — | — | — | 12 |
| Formerly | Watermeads High School | | 22 | 18 | 13 | — |
| New | River Leen School | 1 September 1999 | — | — | — | 7 |
| Formerly | Alderman Derbyshire School | | 7 | 5 | 11 | — |
| New | The King's CE School | 1 September 1998 | — | — | 36 | 34 |
| Formerly | Regis County School | | 25 | 29 | — | — |
| New | New College | 1 September 1999 | — | — | — | 11 |
| Formerly | New Parks Community College | | 16 | 14 | 13 | — |
| | Mary Linwood School | | 14 | 6 | 7 | — |
| | Wycliffe Community College | | 11 | 2 | 14 | — |
| | John Ellis Community College | | 17 | 19 | 12 | — |
| | Alderman Newton's School | | 21 | 21 | 31 | — |
| | Mundella Community College | | 23 | 26 | 23 | — |
| New | Park View Academy | 1 September 1999 | — | — | — | 12 |
| Formerly | The Langham School | | 7 | 13 | 13 | — |
| New | Kings High School | 1 September 2000 | — | — | — | — |
| Formerly | Kingsleigh Secondary School | | 9 | 17 | 17 | 10 |
| New | Parkwood High School | 1 September 2000 | — | — | — | — |
| Formerly | The Herries School | | 11 | 13 | 4 | 14 |
| New | Kings College | 1 September 2000 | — | — | — | — |
| Formerly | Kings Manor School | | 18 | 20 | 13 | 10 |
| New | Corby Community College | 1 September 2000 | — | — | — | — |
| Formerly | Queen Elizabeth School | | 19 | 19 | 16 | 8 |
| | Beanfield Community College | | 9 | 21 | 15 | 8 |

[1] Data for Fresh Start Schools; data for predecessor establishments shown below each Fresh Start school.
[2] Performance Data for 1999 adjusted for exclusions; 2000 data adjusted for exclusions and refugees.
*Source:*
Performance tables.

## Departmental Report

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will give a breakdown of the component sums under the heading, 'Developing in everyone a commitment to lifelong learning so as to enhance their lives, improve their employability in a changing labour market and create the skills that our economy and employers need', referred to in the accounts on page 146 of his Department's report 2001–02 to 2003–04 (Cm 5102). [159005]

**Mr. Wills:** A breakdown of the amounts under each of the headings on page 146 is given in Note 9 to the Main Estimate on page 160 of the Departmental Report (Cm 5102).

### Pupil Exclusions

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the average amount of hours of education that a permanently excluded child receives, by local education authority. [158845]

**Jacqui Smith:** In July 1999 we placed a responsibility on local education authorities to phase in full-time education for all permanently excluded pupils by September 2002, compared to the two to three hours all too typically offered in the past. Data from the 2000 Schools Census indicated that around a third of PRUs were providing full-time education and two thirds were offering 13 or more hours of education each week. All LEAs must offer full-time provision to all excluded pupils from September 2002. Since 1997 there has been an expansion of PRU provision with over 1,000 additional pupil places and nearly 600 more teaching and support staff.

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many schools have received a financial penalty for not meeting their exclusion reduction targets; and what the fine imposed in each instance was. [158843]

**Jacqui Smith:** We have not set school level exclusion targets and schools are not fined for excluding pupils.

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many off-site pupil referral units have closed in each year since 1997. [158853]

**Jacqui Smith:** Schools Form 7 Census figures show the number of pupil referral units (PRUs) in each year since 1997 as:

| | *Number of PRUs* | *Number of pupils*[1] |
|---|---|---|
| 1997 | 309 | 11,933 |
| 1998 | 309 | 11,906 |
| 1999 | 298 | 12,465 |
| 2000 | 295 | 13,065 |
| 2001 | [2]308 | [3]— |

[1] Including dually registered pupils
[2] Provisional
[3] Not yet available

A number of PRUs have amalgamated to rationalise and improve the quality of provision following Ofsted concerns about standards in PRUs in 1995. Ofsted now reports that pupils in most PRUs are making satisfactory or better progress and teaching in 90 per cent. of units is at least satisfactory. Almost all PRUs now improve pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning.

A net total of 13 new PRUs have opened in the last year. Since 1997 the number of pupil places at PRUs has risen by over 1,000 and the number of teaching and support staff is up by nearly 600. The pupil:teacher ratio is 4.3 the same as in 1997. Local authorities were planning to spend 13 per cent. more on PRU provision in 2000–01 compared to the previous year. This reflects the tenfold increase in funding to tackle poor behaviour in schools and provide education outside school for those who are excluded, up from £17 million in 1996–97 to £174 million this year.

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the criteria used to determine whether a decision by a headmaster to exclude a pupil should be overridden. [158852]

**Jacqui Smith:** Permanent exclusions must be reviewed by the governing body of a school through its discipline committee. Where a parent or pupil appeals against permanent exclusion, an independent appeal panel will consider the case.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's guidance to appeal panels is that they should decide whether the pupil did what they are accused of doing, and if so whether, considering all relevant factors, permanent exclusion is a reasonable response to that conduct. He has advised that reinstatement would not normally be appropriate where the circumstances involve:

serious actual or threatened violence against another pupil or a member of staff; or

sexual abuse; or

presenting a significant risk to the health and safety of other pupils by selling illegal drugs; or

persistent and malicious disruptive behaviour—including open defiance or refusal to conform with agreed school policies on for example, discipline or dress code.

### General Teaching Council

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the salary or expenses to be paid to GTC members including details of the sums paid. [158994]

**Jacqui Smith:** Two of the 64 General Teaching Council for England (GTC) members receive fees in respect of their duties as Chair and Vice-Chair. All Council members are entitled to receive expenses for travel, subsistence and dependent relative carer costs incurred as a result of their attendance for approved duties. The members' support scheme is in line with standard provisions payable to the Department's staff. I have asked the Chief Executive of the GTC to write to the hon. Lady with details of payments made since the GTC was established on 1 September 2000 and to provide a copy of the members support scheme. A copy of her response will be placed in the Library.

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the arrangements which have been put in place to cover the absence of those teachers who are members of the GTC and who have taken time-off in order to fulfil their GTC commitments; and if he will indicate how the costs of such arrangements is met. [158996]

**Jacqui Smith:** The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) pays a standard rate to schools to facilitate the release of teachers for GTC work. The payment is made to allow schools to purchase supply cover for a teacher's absence on GTC business. The costs are met from the GTC's budget.

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many meetings the GTC has held. [158995]

**Jacqui Smith:** The General Teaching Council for England (GTC) has held four full council meetings since 1 September 2000. I have asked the chief executive of the GTC to write to the hon. Member with details of the number of committee meetings it has held. A copy of her reply will be placed in the Library.

## GCSEs

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out the percentage of pupils who gained a GCSE grade A* to C in *(a)* physics, *(b)* chemistry, *(c)* biology and *(d)* ICT in each year since 1997. [158850]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** The number of pupils aged 15 attempting the GCSE subjects and percentages gaining grades A* to C are as follows:

*Number attempting*

*Thousand*

| | *Physics* | *Chemistry* | *Biology* | *ICT* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 34.5 | 35.2 | 36.6 | 62.7 |
| 1997–98 | 36.2 | 36.5 | 37.9 | 68.4 |
| 1998–99 | 37.2 | 37.6 | 38.8 | 76.3 |
| 1999–2000 | 37.5 | 37.7 | 39.4 | 85.9 |

*Percentage gaining A* to C*

| | *Physics* | *Chemistry* | *Biology* | *ICT* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 89 | 89 | 88 | 55 |
| 1997–98 | 89 | 90 | 88 | 57 |
| 1998–99 | 89 | 90 | 89 | 55 |
| 1999–2000 | 90 | 90 | 89 | 56 |

## Employment Green Paper

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the cost of producing the Green paper 'Towards Full Employment in a Modern Society'; and how many copies have been produced. [159002]

**Ms Jowell:** The total cost of producing this Green Paper was £72,278 for 11,200 copies.

## Medical Students

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students have *(a)* applied and *(b)* been recruited to each medical school in (i) England and Wales and (ii) Scotland in the last five years, broken down by (1) gender, (2) ethnicity and (3) social class. [158439]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The available data from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) are shown in the table. UCAS do not release data for individual institutions at subject level. Information on the numbers of undergraduate entrants to medical schools by socio-economic group has been published at institution level for the last two years in the circular "Performance indicators in higher education in the UK (00/40 and 99/66)"[1], copies of which are available from the Library.

[1] Produced by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)

*Home domiciled applicants to full-time courses and sandwich courses in medicine institutions in the United Kingdom: year of entry 1996–2000*

| | *Year of entry* | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *1996* | *1997* | *1998* | *1999* | *2000* |
| Total applicants | 12,025 | 12,076 | 11,807 | 10,972 | 10,226 |
| of which: | | | | | |
| *Gender* | | | | | |
| Male | 5,950 | 5,795 | 5,637 | 5,035 | 4,455 |
| Female | 6,075 | 6,281 | 6,170 | 5,937 | 5,771 |
| *Ethnic background* | | | | | |
| White | 5,879 | 5,969 | 5,894 | 5,405 | 5,198 |
| Black Caribbean | 46 | 43 | 45 | 34 | 38 |
| Black African | 268 | 241 | 249 | 250 | 230 |
| Black Other | 30 | 50 | 58 | 42 | 26 |
| Indian | 1,086 | 1,092 | 1,064 | 978 | 926 |
| Pakistani | 649 | 570 | 572 | 488 | 452 |
| Bangladeshi | 181 | 159 | 162 | 147 | 119 |
| Chinese | 195 | 189 | 158 | 165 | 174 |
| Other Asian | 513 | 457 | 435 | 445 | 402 |
| Other | 317 | 285 | 279 | 290 | 278 |
| Not known | 2,861 | 3,021 | 2,891 | 2,728 | 2,383 |
| *Social class* | | | | | |
| Professional | 4,279 | 4,084 | 3,542 | 3,126 | 2,970 |
| Intermediate | 4,537 | 4,370 | 3,771 | 3,284 | 3,035 |
| Skilled Manual | 938 | 882 | 796 | 724 | 695 |
| Skilled non-Manual | 982 | 920 | 817 | 793 | 704 |
| Partly Skilled | 524 | 527 | 460 | 399 | 351 |
| Unskilled | 105 | 107 | 84 | 71 | 77 |
| Not known | 660 | 1,186 | 2,337 | 2,575 | 2,394 |

## Cockburn High School, Leeds

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much *(a)* revenue and *(b)* capital funding Cockburn High School, Leeds, has received since May 1997. [158339]

**Jacqui Smith:** The information requested (which has been provided by the local education authority) is as follows:

*Revenue Funding*

£

| *Financial year* | *Budget share* | *Standards Fund (devolved)* | *School Standards Grant* | *Other recurrent funding* | *Total funding* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 1,599,790 | 14,279 | n/a | 3,900 | 1,617,969 |
| 1998–99 | 1,670,530 | 63,876 | n/a | 16,803 | 1,751,209 |
| 1999–2000 | 2,485,490 | 203,666 | n/a | 18,228 | 2,707,384 |
| 2000–01 | 3,075,610 | 352,830 | 40,000 | 42,670 | 3,511,110 |
| 2001–02[2] | 2,937,380 | 418,680 | 70,000 | 0 | 3,426,060 |

[1] The Standards Fund figures include National Grid for Learning grants but exclude New Deal for Schools Devolved Formula capital, Seed Challenge capital and school security grant.

[2] The 2001–02 figures are provisional (except in the case of School Standards Grant).

*Capital Funding*

The amounts shown in the table represent Standards Fund resources devolved to the school. There were no comparable allocations to the school prior to 2000–2001, other than £18,700 of devolved capital allocated by the LEA to the school in 1997–98.

£

| *Financial year* | *Devolved formula* | *Security Grant* | *Seed Challenge* | *Total funding* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2000–01 | 36,130 | 2,780 | 20,000 | 58,910 |
| 2001–02 | 31,940 | 0 | 0 | 31,940 |

In addition to the amounts shown, investment by the LEA in the school's buildings was £1.2 million and £1 million in 1999–2000 and 2000–01 respectively.

### EU Schools Programme

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list those schools in the Lancashire Carrefour which participated in the European Union, Action Aimed at Young People, programme, identified in the Communities' publication, 'At the Very Heart of Europe'; if he will place in the Library a copy of the *(a)* polling questions and *(b)* Commission response; what part was played by his Department in the survey; and if he will make a statement. [156977]

**Mr. Wicks:** The Carrefour network provides information about the European Union to rural communities. In 1994 six Carrefours from five countries of the European Union, including the north-west England Carrefour, bid for and were successful in securing funding for a small project under the Youth Information Action Programme to research the provision of European Information in rural schools.

The six Carrefours reported to the European Commission on the project in April 1997. As the project was commissioned and funded directly by the Commission, this Department had no involvement in the project and therefore does not have access to: information on the schools that participated; the polling questions; nor the project report. The Commission document "At the Very Heart of Europe" which reports on the work of the Rural Information and Promotion Carrefours and which refers to the project described above, is available from the European Commission.

### Departmental Policies (Plymouth Unitary Authority)

**Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to *(a)* Plymouth, Sutton constituency, *(b)* Plymouth, Devonport constituency and *(c)* South-West Devon constituency, the effects on (i) Plymouth travel to work area and (ii) Plymouth Unitary Authority area of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158029]

**Mr. Wills** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the Plymouth, Sutton constituency, Plymouth, Devonport constituency, South-West Devon constituency and Plymouth and Devon LEA have been placed in the Library.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Criminal Justice

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what was the average time taken from charge to the start of trials and what was the average number of hearings in an indictable-only case in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* the first quarter of 2001. [158927]

**Jane Kennedy:** Information is not available in the exact form requested and is instead provided for defendants in indictable and triable either way cases that were committed for trial at the Crown court.

In 2000 the average time taken from charge or laying of information to committal for trial was 87 days for defendants in magistrates' courts. The average time taken from committal for trial to first main hearing in the Crown court was 100 days in 2000. There were on average three adjournments per defendant per case in the magistrates' courts. There is no information held centrally on the number of adjournments in the Crown court.

These figures provide only a broad indication of the total time taken from charge or laying of information to first main hearing for defendants who are tried in the Crown court, as the data from magistrates' courts and the Crown court will not relate to exactly the same defendants.

Data for the first quarter of 2001 are not yet available.

### Asylum Appeals

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she expects her Department to achieve its PSA target of reducing asylum appeal decision times to four months or less. [159033]

**Jane Kennedy:** The Lord Chancellor's Department does not have a PSA to reduce asylum appeals, but does have an asylum Service Delivery Agreement which makes up part of a wider PSA. The relevant target, which refers to the year 2002–03, is for 65 per cent. of all cases to be cleared through both tiers of the Immigration Appellate Authorities within four months.

To acknowledge the importance of this target, and the significant progress already made, the Court Service has agreed a key performance indicator, in the same terms, for the 2001–02 year. Therefore we expect that level of performance over the year to be achieved by 31 March 2002. Accordingly, we expect the SDA target to be achieved by 31 March 2003.

### Defendants' Rights

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what objectives he *(a)* has set and *(b)* plans to set to meet his Department's PSA target to respect the rights of defendants and to treat them fairly. [159028]

**Mr. Lock:** The objective is to achieve the targets set out in the PSA by 31 March 2002. Targets set on 31 March 2001 are:

To ensure that by 31 March 2002, 90 per cent. of people in police stations requesting the service of duty solicitor receive the service within 45 minutes; and

That 98 per cent. of prisons have, in accordance with Prison Service standard audit requirements, sufficient staff to ensure that all prisoners receive information about public funding on reception and know who can assist them with applications for public funding.

The Group will continue to add other measures to the basket and to develop meaningful targets.

### Lord Birt

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many reports Lord Birt has submitted to the Lord Chancellor in his capacity as an adviser on crime; and if she will make a statement; [158237]

(2) on how many occasions, and on what dates, *(a)* the Lord Chancellor and *(b)* other Ministers in her Department have met Lord Birt in his capacity as an adviser on crime; and if she will make a statement about the contribution of Lord Birt to her Department's polices. [158239]

**Jane Kennedy:** I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given her by the Prime Minister on 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 211W.

### Trials (Premature Abandonment)

**Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement about the powers available to the courts to reclaim legal costs from publications which cause the premature abandonment of a trial. [158939]

**Mr. Lock:** I shall reply to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Asylum Seekers

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken is for asylum cases, from the initial lodging of an appeal with the Immigration Appellate Authority to the authority's final decision; and if he will make a statement. [157174]

**Mrs. Roche** *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* For the 12 months ending 31 March 2001, data from the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) indicate that the average time taken from receipt of an asylum appeal in the IAA, to the appeal being decided through both tiers of the authority, was approximately 21 weeks.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many failed asylum seekers were removed in 2000–01. [159152]

**Mrs. Roche:** Provisional data indicate that the total for the number of failed asylum seekers removed in the financial year 2000–01 is 8,925, rounded to the nearest five.

### Immigration

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reach a decision on the application from Mrs. Lori Graham Strother Dixon of the Leeds, Central constituency for leave to extend her stay in the UK and permit her to take employment as a teacher. [158943]

**Mrs. Roche:** An application for leave to remain was received on 8 March but was returned to Mrs. Dixon as not all the necessary information and documents had been enclosed with the application. There is no trace, as yet, of the application having been returned to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate.

**Sir John Stanley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many clandestine entrants into the United Kingdom were detected each month since 30 September 1999. [159122]

**Mrs. Roche:** Between 30 September 1999 and 31 March 2001 a total of 56,749 clandestines were detected. The table details these by month and category, i.e. On Entry or In Country:

| | *Clandestines detected:* | |
|---|---|---|
| *Date* | *On entry* | *In country* |
| September 1999 | 382 | 2,152 |
| October 1999 | 215 | 2,236 |
| November 1999 | 180 | 1,848 |
| December 1999 | 57 | 1,886 |
| January 2000 | 210 | 2,084 |
| February 2000 | 144 | 2,226 |
| March 2000 | 195 | 2,328 |
| April 2000 | 169 | 1,545 |
| May 2000 | 204 | 1,583 |
| June 2000 | 185 | 2,410 |
| July 2000 | 86 | 2,567 |
| August 2000 | 105 | 2,874 |
| September 2000 | 88 | 4,154 |
| October 2000 | 194 | 3,974 |
| November 2000 | 99 | 4,692 |
| December 2000 | 56 | 3,943 |
| January 2001 | 82 | 5,203 |
| February 2001 | 98 | 4,135 |
| March 2001 | 78 | 4,346 |

It should be noted that while on-entry detections relate directly to the month in which they appear, in-country detections could relate to an individual who entered the United Kingdom sometime before detection.

### Departmental Policies (Nottingham, North)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the Nottingham, North constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158855]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home

Office Annual Report 2000–2001, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. 'Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000' and 'Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000' can be found in the Library.

The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by basic command unit and crime and disorder partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested, although set out are examples relating to the Nottingham, North constituency or the immediate locality:

*Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI)*

Under round 1 of the RBI, Nottingham police, in partnership with Nottingham city council, were awarded £277,000 for a project in Top Valley and Bestwood Park. The main interventions include: repeat victims and vulnerable residents to receive burglar alarms; production of crime prevention leaflets; use of covert tracking devices and portable tracking unit; shared pathways and alleyways to be gated and increased lighting in the rear of houses and flats.

Under round 2 of the initiative, Nottinghamshire police, in partnership with Community Safety and Youth Justice Partnership, were awarded over £2 million for the whole of Nottingham. The main intervention proposed is a strategic bid that aims to tackle burglary across the whole area. It focuses on 10 communities with sets of police beats that have similar characteristics and applies to them the Deep model (diversion, education, enforcement and prevention).

*Targeted Policing Initiative*

Nottinghamshire police was awarded almost £1.2 million for a force wide project focusing on alcohol-related violence. The project strategy would be based on the SPEEDE response to tackling alcohol related violence. SPEEDE means support, prevention, education, enforcement, diversion and evaluation. £90,000 has also been awarded for a distraction burglary initiative covering eight Midlands police forces and their local authorities to develop, co-ordinate and manage a strategic plan to tackle burglary.

*Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)*

Nottingham city council was awarded approximately £227,000 under round 1 of the CCTV initiative for a scheme covering the residential areas of the Bulwell Hall Estate.

*Youth Offending*

Nottingham Youth Offending Team (YOT) covers the area of north Nottingham. The Youth Justice Board (YJB) is currently funding a Bail Support Scheme and two Intervention Schemes in Nottingham. Nottingham City Remand Strategy aims to provide full and comprehensive pre-court assessments and support services for 10 to 17-year-olds. It also aims to provide an effective remand management strategy which meets the needs of young people and their families while ensuring the protection of the public. The YJB have awarded a grant of approximately £572,000 towards this project.

Nottingham Community Justice Project is targeted at young people aged 10 to 17-years-old, initially focusing on the pre-court interventions, namely reprimands and final warning stages, then developing to involve pre-crime, at risk and post-court interventions. This project complements the work of Nottinghamshire police, who currently uses restorative conferencing at the final warning stage in some parts of the county. This scheme has been awarded a YJB grant of approximately £170,000. The YJB is contributing approximately £72,000 towards a project entitled INTERVENE. This is a scheme that works with Afro-Caribbean young people, both at risk or serving any youth offending order. It offers mentoring by Afro-Caribbean mentors, including peer mentors. In addition to one to one support, it also offers group monitoring and cultural and personal development workshops with links to local industry.

Nottingham YOT was awarded a YJB grant of £145,000 in 1999–2000, of which £85,000 was for information technology, £10,000 for parenting, £30,000 for throughcare and £20,000 for minor equipment.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Nottingham, North to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 crime and disorder reduction partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 49,690 by the end of February 2001; and

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

**Departmental Policies**
**(Dulwich and West Norwood)**

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the Dulwich and West Norwood constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158860]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 2000–01, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. "Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000" and "Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000" can be found in the Library.

The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by basic command unit and crime and disorder partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are examples relating to the Dulwich and West Norwood constituency or the immediate locality:

*Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI)*

Under round 1 of the RBI, £65,000 was awarded to the West Camberwell area to fund a lock-fitting service to target-harden burglary victims and vulnerable properties and the establishment of a detached youth project. The funding is also being used to improve quality of service to victims. £65,000 was also awarded to a project in Parkside Plus to correct physical vulnerability of vulnerable estates in the target area and develop new ways of working with offenders.

Under round 2 of the initiative, the Metropolitan police in partnership with the London borough of Southwark were awarded £27,000 for a project covering Herne Hill and Croxted Road to tackle situational vulnerability and unmarked property.

*Targeted Policing Initiative*

The Metropolitan police, in partnership with the London boroughs of Islington, Camden and Southwark, have been awarded £570,000 for a project targeting autocrime through Operation Arrow, which is aimed at 'hotspots' in the three boroughs. The Metropolitan police have been awarded £688,000 for a project in Southwark to tackle hate crime. Methods used will include the creation of self-help groups defined by cultural, ethnic or lifestyle profile and supported by a dedicated co-ordinator.

*Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)*

The Crystal Palace Partnership was awarded approximately £1.4 million for a scheme covering the London boroughs of Bromley, Croydon and Lambeth. The scheme will allow for 34 new cameras, designed to help reduce incidents of street crime, commercial robbery, violent offences, drugs offences, criminal damage and vehicle crime.

*Youth Offending*

Dulwich and West Norwood is served by Lambeth Youth Offending Team (YOT), Southwark YOT and Croydon YOT. All three YOTs have several intervention schemes and bail supervision schemes operating. These schemes receive funding towards these projects from the Youth Justice Board (YJB). The YOTs are multi-agency teams consisting of staff from: Social Services; Police; Probation; Department for Health and Department for Education and Employment as well as youth justice workers. The YOTs work in partnerships with other organisations to tackle problems of substance abuse, persistent offending, social exclusion and truancy and other problems that may cause young people to offend. Croydon YOT is currently running two intervention schemes in conjunction with the Prince's Trust. These projects aim to focus on mentoring and education and team-building, values and attitudes.

Other projects being run include: Croydon '55' Drug Project, to provide specialist resources to young people whose offending is drug related; Croydon Community Partnership with and for Young People, the key objective of which is the diversion of young people from criminal activities by using a programme of social education; Restorative Justice Conferencing Project, the YOT works with Southwark Mediation Centre to provide direct and indirect victim-offender mediation and family group conferencing services; Positive Parenting and Behavioural Change Programme, this includes the assessment of cognitive abilities, direct work from the psychologist or Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN). There are bail support schemes being run which aim to provide support and supervision to young people on remand to avoid them having to be removed from home because of their offending and to reduce offending while on bail and reduce delays caused by non-appearance in court.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Dulwich and West Norwood to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 crime and disorder reduction partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 49,690 by the end of February 2001; and

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

**Departmental Policies (Bristol, South)**

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the Bristol, South constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158856]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 2000–01, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. "Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000" and "Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000" can be found in the Library. The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by basic command unit and crime and disorder partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are examples relating to the Bristol, South constituency or the immediate locality:

*Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI)*

Under round 2 of the RBI, Avon and Somerset Constabulary in partnership with Bristol city council have been awarded £152,000 and £89,000 for projects in Knowle and Knowle West and Hartcliffe respectively. The main interventions proposed are target hardening; fencing of rear gardens and intervention work.

Under round 3 of the initiative, Avon and Somerset Constabulary in partnership with all local authorities in the force area have been awarded approximately £650,000 for a project to test new forensic techniques.

*Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)*

Bristol city council has one bid for CCTV funding entitled "Safer Symes CCTV scheme" to a potential capital of £237,000 shortlisted for further consideration under round 2 of the CCTV initiative.

*Youth Offending*

The Bristol Youth Offending Team (YOT) during 2000–01 has worked with 2,200 young offenders and supervised 330 young people on community-based orders. The YOT has prepared more than 450 court reports and its appropriate adult volunteers have attended 350 interviews with young people at police stations. The YOT has established offender-victim mediation services and is providing intervention programmes to confront young offenders with the views of their victims. The YOT is also working to deliver the Government's pledge to halve the average time taken from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders, from 142 to 71 days. The most recent figure for Bristol is 89 days.

The Youth Justice Board (YJB) is currently providing funding for one bail support and five intervention schemes through its development fund. The Prince's Trust operates an education project, FIVE, that is based in five cities in England and Wales working with young offenders and those at risk of offending, aged 14–17, through the provision of two Prince's Trust programmes. This has been awarded a YJB grant of £340,000. Fairbridge West run an education, training and employment project, Constructive Alternatives Through Life Skills for Life that works with persistent young offenders and those on final warning in trying to build personal, social and independence skills. This is receiving YJB funding of approximately £64,000. £128,000 is provided towards a project run by Include. This is an education, training and employment project called Post 16 Bridge Course, that works with 16 and 17-year-old persistent offenders who have poor educational achievements and limited employment prospects. Bristol YOT runs a parenting scheme, Bristol Parenting Support Project, that supports parents of young people who are offending so that they may help their child reduce offending. This project receives £60,000 of YJB funding. A grant of £82,000 has been awarded to the Children's Society for a prevention programme it operates called Right Track, which provides support for black children and young people aged 10–17 who are involved in the criminal justice system.

The Bristol Remand and Intensive Support Project is being implemented by Bristol YOT and NACRO (National Association for Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders). £370,000 has been awarded to the project whose main objective is to reduce the incidence of custodial remands for 10 to 17-year-olds.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Bristol, South to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 49,690 by the end of February 2001; and

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

## Departmental Policies (Southwark, North and Bermondsey)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the Southwark, North and Bermondsey constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158861]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 2000–01, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. "Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000" and "Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000" can be found in the Library.

The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by basic command unit and crime and disorder partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are examples relating to the Southwark and Bermondsey, North constituency or the immediate locality:

*Targeted Policing Initiative*

Under round 1 of the Targeted Policing Initiative the Metropolitan police in partnership with the London boroughs of Islington, Camden and Southwark were awarded £597,000 for a scheme covering these boroughs targeting auto crime through Operation Arrow, which is aimed at "hotspots" in the three boroughs.

Under round 2 of the initiative the Metropolitan police were awarded £688,000 for a project covering Southwark to tackle hate crime. Methods used will include the creation of local self-help groups defined by cultural, ethnic or lifestyle profile and supported by a dedicated co-ordinator. The use of the rapid hate crime intervention officer, who would have access to a range of evidence collection methods, will be available.

*Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)*

London borough of Southwark was awarded approximately £850,000 for two schemes submitted under round 1 of the CCTV initiative. Housing CCTV Control Centre and Mobile CCTV Scheme was awarded £750,000 to provide a new control centre with the capacity to manage 500 cameras. In addition, 50 new mobile cameras

will be situated in crime "hotspots" across the borough. The scheme aims significantly to reduce overall crime, drug-related crime and burglary.

The Car Park Vehicle Crime Prevention Scheme was awarded £100,000 for a 26 camera system, covering six car parks across the borough. The scheme aims to reduce all vehicle crime in the target area by 80 per cent. over three years.

*Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI)*

The Metropolitan police in conjunction with the London borough of Southwark were awarded £65,000 under round 1 of the RBI, for a scheme in the West Camberwell area. Interventions include: establishment of a lock-fitting service to target burglary victims and vulnerable properties and establishment of a detached youth project. The quality of service to victims has been improved and a problem solving approach to burglary and improvements in relevant monitoring and communication systems is being developed. £65,000 was awarded to a scheme in the Parkside Plus area correcting physical vulnerability of vulnerable estates in the target area. It is also helping to develop new ways of working with offenders in the area.

Under round 2 of the RBI, approximately £30,000 was awarded for a scheme in the Herne Hill and Croxted Road, West Dulwich areas. This project aimed to tackle situational vulnerability and unmarked property by using electronic alarms and property marking as well as increasing neighbourhood watch activity. £153,000 was awarded for a scheme in the North Southwark Corridor. The scheme aims to improve property marking and to work with offenders and work towards community building.

*Youth Offending*

North Southwark and Bermondsey is covered by Southwark Youth Offending Team (YOT). The Youth Justice Board (YJB) is contributing funding for five intervention schemes and one bail supervision scheme. Approximately £170,000 is being used to fund a Restorative Justice Conferencing Project. Southwark Mediation Centre works with the YOT to provide direct and indirect victim-offender mediation and family group conferencing services. Family Group Conferencing is offered to young people remanded into local authority accommodation, young people subject to throughcare and young people made the subject of Action Plan Orders.

A Positive Parenting and Behavioural Change Programme includes the assessment of cognitive abilities. The YOT caseworkers provide consultation and life supervision via social skills training, anger management and cognitive behavioural interventions. The YJB are contributing £119,000 to this project. The YJB are also providing approximately £117,000 to an Appropriate Alternatives through Skills for Life (Cognitive Behaviour) programme. This project aims to provide integrated effective supervisory and mentoring support for 80 offenders.

Approximately £69,000 is being provided to fund a Development Officer scheme. The Development Officer facilitates cross-borough communication and ensures congruence in development of services. A Parent Support Group has been established with a YJB contribution of approximately £43,000. This project offers support and information to parents and carers of young people who are behaving in an anti-social or criminal manner. The YOT has supervised 26 Parenting Orders since April 2000 and has received positive feedback from parents attending these groups either voluntarily or as a condition of an order. The YJB are also providing approximately £104,000 to a bail support scheme, being run in partnership with NACRO. This has reduced the rate of re-offending while on bail, while also reducing the numbers of young people remanded into local authority accommodation, or custody.

A functional team within the YOT is dedicated to providing preventative and early intervention services. A multi-agency Risk Management Panel has been established, designed to manage the risks presented to the public by a small number of prolific offenders, through an intelligence led approach. This activity will be supported by the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Project to be launched in July 2001. The YOT has provided and/or co-ordinated a number of crime reduction initiatives including innovative work in schools, alongside police officers, in support of Operation Arrow; the Youth Inclusion Programme in the Elephant and Castle area and Midnight Basketball in partnership with the Youth Service and the National Playing Fields Association. The YOT provides groupwork programmes in schools for disaffected pupils at risk of exclusion and co-ordinates monthly truancy patrols, which have dealt successfully with over 200 truants in the past year.

Easter and Summer Splash Schemes have been run in the following estates: Aylesbury Estate, Rockingham; Astley Cooper estates; Heygate Estate and Peckham. These schemes were set up across England and Wales to address offending by young people (especially 13 to 17-year-olds). The five areas traditionally associated with youth crime—burglary, motor crime, criminal damage, street robbery and juvenile nuisance all showed significant reductions compared with the corresponding period in the previous year. The combined drop for these crimes was 14 per cent.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Southwark, North and Bermondsey to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 49,690 by the end of February 2001; and

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

**Departmental Policies (Sandwell)**

**Mr. Bailey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Borough, the effects of his Department's policies and actions on the Metropolitan borough of Sandwell since 2 May 1997. [158330]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and

communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 2000–01, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. "Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000" and "Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000" can be found in the Library. The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by basic command unit and crime and disorder partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested, although set out are examples relating to the Metropolitan borough of Sandwell or the immediate locality:

*Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI)*

Under Round 1 of the RBI, Metropolitan police in partnership with Sandwell Metropolitan borough council have been awarded £60,000 and £58,000 for projects in the Yew Tree and Smethwick areas of Sandwell respectively. The Yew Tree project aims to follow resource intensive police 'Crackdowns' with a structured multi-agency approach to target hardening and crime reduction methods ('Consolidation'). Crime prevention information packs will be given to every house on the target estate, together with Smartwater property coding for identified vulnerable premises. Persistent offenders will be evicted by the local authority from the estate and promotion of neighbourhood watch schemes will be encouraged and diversionary work with young people on the estate will be carried out. The Smethwick estate will undertake a crime reduction awareness programme encouraging households to receive property marking and a home security survey. An assessment of estate design and management will be carried out, leading to initiatives to design out crime and targeted police patrol strategy, concentrating on the most prolific offenders supported by strict pre-sentence bail enforcement. The probation service will work with ex-offenders to manufacture ornamental security grilles that can be used for target hardening as part of the community service order programme.

Under round 3 of the RBI, Sandwell Metropolitan borough council was awarded approximately £371,000 in partnership with West Midland police and Sandwell local education authority for a project in North Sandwell. The proposed interventions include a programme for educating residents about preventing and tackling crime, a dedicated enforcement team to tackle the most prolific offenders, target hardening, neighbourhood wardens and designing out crime. West Midlands police in partnership with Sandwell Metropolitan borough council, Education and Life Long Learning and Sandwell Youth Offending Team have been awarded £120,000 to tackle prolific young offenders through an approach successfully used by the Brandon Centre in Camden, London.

*Targeted Policing Initiative*

West Midlands police in partnership with Leicester University have received £98,000 for six Neighbourhood Watch schemes across the West Midlands. This is a project based on "community safety through communication". Six new Neighbourhood Watch schemes will be set up and provided with radio equipment for communicating among themselves and alerting the police. The University will then study the findings and issue a manual of best practice in how to use such radio links.

*Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)*

The safer Sandwell Partnership, with West Midlands police, were awarded approximately £745,000 for four schemes under round two of the CCTV initiative. These schemes are in the following areas: Darley House Enhancement; Charlemont Farm Estate; St. Giles' and Moorland Court and Friar Park Estate.

*Youth Offending*

Sandwell Youth Offending Team (YOT) covers the area of Sandwell in the West Midlands. The YOT works in partnership with a local Nacro (National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders) project in the delivery of some of the Final Warning programmes. Crime Concern is running the Youth Inclusion Programme for the Greets Green neighbourhood in Sandwell. Community service is provided by the Probation Service. All service users are assessed using the Youth Justice Board (YJB) Asset assessment tool. In addition if there are concerns regarding a young person's mental health of substance use further specialist assessments are undertaken by the YOT community psychiatric nurse (CPN) or drug worker. The YOT is a multi-agency team consisting of members from: Social Service; Probation; Police; Education officers; Bail Support workers; Youth Justice workers; drug worker and a CPN.

The YOT provides the following services: appropriate adults, bail support, court reports, programmes in support of final warnings, delivery of reparation orders, action plan orders, supervision orders, community rehabilitation orders, community punishment and rehabilitation orders and young offender through care. In support of final warnings the team have used offending behaviour group work in partnership with Nacro and are also using the "Prison No Way" and "Impact Roadshow" packages. Funding has been obtained to run a particular cognitive behavioural programme (the Brandon Centre Programme) for persistent young burglars. This programme has been rigorously evaluated and shown to reduce recidivism in the target group. The YJB are providing funding for one bail support scheme and two intervention schemes. The bail supervision and support scheme has been awarded a grant of approximately £74,000 over three years making a total project investment of £376,000. This project aims to ensure that young offenders will be assessed for and, if suitable, offered bail support as well as ensuring that those remanded to local authority care are appropriately placed and supported. It is attempting to reduce the number of young people in local authority and custodial remand placements by 50 per cent. and 30 per cent. respectively.

Re-Solve implements a prevention scheme, Sandwell-Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Initiative, which contributes to the reduction in offending behaviour by supporting local strategies aimed at addressing volatile substance abuse in Sandwell. The YJB are contributing approximately £10,500 towards this project. £256,000 is provided towards a joint local authority/WISH project. The WISH project focuses on children and young people who act in a sexually inappropriate way towards other people.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Metropolitan borough of Sandwell to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 49,690 by the end of February 2001; and

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

### Augusto Pinochet

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what criteria Dr. Michael Denham was selected to assess the capacity of Augusto Pinochet to stand trial; which other consultants were considered; and what objections were made to his appointment. [158976]

**Mr. Straw:** Dr. Denham was selected because he was a consultant physician in geriatric medicine, a medical specialism which was an essential component of the medical team for the purpose for which it was appointed, and because it was established that he was of outstanding national and international reputation in that specialism and had no inappropriate personal interest in the case. No objections were made to his appointment.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the records of medical examinations carried out on Augusto Pinochet prepared for his Department have been made available to *(a)* military and *(b)* legal authorities in Chile. [158977]

**Mr. Straw:** None of the records concerned were made available directly by me or on my behalf to the authorities in Chile, nor did we receive any request to that effect.

Senator Pinochet was medically examined on 5 January 2000 for the purposes of the extradition proceedings then under way. The report was made available to Senator Pinochet and, later, to each of the four states—Spain, France, Belgium and Switzerland—that requested his extradition. Its contents subsequently received wide circulation in the world media. At the conclusion of the case I placed a copy of the report in the Library.

### Holloway Prison

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the staffing level is of *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses and *(c)* support staff in the medical facility at HMP Holloway; and what the equivalent figures were for each of the last five years. [158982]

**Mr. Boateng:** As of 24 April 2001, there were *(a)* three doctors, *(b)* 43 nurses and *(c)* 26 support staff employed in Holloway's health care centre. On the same date last year, the equivalent figures were *(a)* four doctors, *(b)* 50 nurses and *(c)* 41 support staff.

Information for previous years is not available. While there are staffing difficulties at Holloway, due to a number of factors, it should be noted that in November last year, the detoxification and post-detoxification treatment facilities were removed from the health care centre to separate units, reducing the number of health care centre beds from 92 to 27.

### Drug Misuse

**Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 23 April 2001, how he proposes to measure his performance against the first and fourth of his targets in his Tackling Drugs strategy; what figures he is currently using for the numbers of young people using illegal drugs and the amount of drugs available on the streets; and how he has arrived at these estimates. [158935]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The target covers young people aged under 25 years, and is based on measuring the proportion of people who report use of Class A drugs (heroin, crack cocaine, powder cocaine, ecstasy, magic mushrooms, methadone and LSD). This is measured principally by the British Crime Survey (BCS) which is a nationally representative victimisation survey of households in England and Wales. The survey is administered annually (from 2000) using computer-assisted interviewing to a random sample of households, with a sample of 40,000 (from 2001 onwards), aged 16 and upwards.

The results from the 1998 BCS form the baseline. The proportion of 16 to 24-year-olds reporting use of Class A drugs in the last year was 8.3 per cent. and in the last month was 3.4 per cent. The report on the drugs component of the 1998 BCS published in 1999 as Home Office Research Study 197, and is available in the Library.

The baseline information from the BCS will also be supplemented by other available research, including the results of a school-based survey.

The baseline in terms of drug availability will be based on a range of current and planned research (including intelligence estimates). The 1999–2000 baseline that determines the availability of drugs in the United Kingdom will be measured in a forthcoming Home Office research study. This study will estimate the size and extent of the United Kingdom drugs market for selected drugs including heroin, crack and cocaine. The Home Office will publish the findings of this research in the summer of 2001.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of his Department's Drug Prevention Advisory Service Business Plan. [159023]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Drugs Prevention Advisory Service Business Plan is currently being prepared for publication and should be available by 2 May. We will arrange for copies to be placed in the Library.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug treatment and testing orders have been *(a)* made, *(b)* breached and *(c)* revoked by the courts since the national roll-out of the order in October 2000. [158946]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The available information is shown in the table:

*Drug treatment and testing orders*
*England and Wales*

| | *1 October 2000–31 March 2001*[1] |
|---|---|
| *Number of orders* | |
| Made | 1,250 |
| Breached | —[2] |
| Revoked by courts | 100 |

[1] Estimated from those returns received from the 42 areas
[2] Not available at present

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offenders were dealt with for supply offences in respect of Class A drugs for the calendar years *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 2000 and for the financial years (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98, (iii) 1998–99, (iv) 1999–2000 and (v) 2000–01. [159024]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Not all the information requested is available. The table gives the number of persons dealt with during the calendar years 1996 through 1999 for supply offences involving Class A drugs. Data for 2000 are not yet available. Information broken down by financial year can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

*Persons dealt with for supply offences involving Class A drugs, United Kingdom, 1996–99*

| *Year* | *Police (Great Britain)* | *Customs (United Kingdom)* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1996 | 5,332 | 425 | 5,757 |
| 1997 | 6,813 | 510 | 7,323 |
| 1998 | 7,866 | 236 | 8,102 |
| 1999 | 9,133 | 384 | 9,517 |

*Notes:*
1. Police data not available by drug type for Northern Ireland, 1996–99. 'Dealt with' means found guilty, cautioned, given a fiscal fine (Scotland only), or dealt with by compounding (Customs).
2. 'Supply' offences have been taken to mean: unlawful production, possession with intent to supply unlawfully, unlawful supply, and unlawful import/export.
*Source:*
Drugs and Alcohol Research Unit, Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the results of his Department's research into the results of the new England and Wales Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring Initiative. [159022]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The first annual report of the new England and Wales Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring programme (NEW-ADAM) will be published in the summer of 2001. The results of previous NEW-ADAM studies are in the Library (Home Office Research Studies 183 and 205; published in 1998 and 2000).

## Crime Statistics

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for *(a)* each police force area and *(b)* each basic command unit area, the number of recorded vehicle crimes in (i) the financial year 1998–99, (ii) the financial year 1999–2000 and (iii) the first nine months of the financial year 2000–01; what is the difference between the number of recorded vehicle crimes in 1999–2000 and in 1998–99; and what is the percentage change in the number of recorded vehicle crimes in 1999–2000 compared with 1998–99. [159047]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** For the purpose of this question, 'vehicle crime' is taken to mean theft of and from vehicles. The number of vehicle crimes in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 by police force area is given in the table, with the change and percentage change between the two years. The numbers of thefts of and from vehicles in basic command unit areas have been collected for the period from 1 April 1999. Details of these offences in 1999–2000 by basic command unit area are included in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 12–00, 'Recorded Crime Statistics: England and Wales, April 1999 to March 2000', which is available in the Library.

Details of the number of vehicle crimes for the first nine months of 2000–01 in police force areas are not yet available. The number of vehicle crimes by police force area in the year ending September 2000 is given in the table. Details of the number of thefts of and from vehicles in basic command units for the first nine months of 2000–01 are not available centrally. Figures for thefts of and from vehicles for basic command units for the year ended September 2000 are included in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 1–01, 'Recorded Crime: England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000', which is available in the Library.

*Notifiable offences recorded by the police by police force*
*Vehicle crime (thefts of and from vehicles)*

| *Police force* | *Offences year ending March 1999* | *Offences year ending March 2000* | *Change* | *Percentage change* | *Offences year ending September 2000* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Avon and Somerset | 37,823 | 34,411 | −3,412 | −9 | 32,669 |
| Bedfordshire | 12,752 | 14,442 | 1,690 | 13 | 13,897 |
| Cambridgeshire | 13,233 | 12,443 | −790 | −6 | 11,819 |
| Cheshire | 12,447 | 12,176 | −271 | −2 | 12,443 |
| Cleveland | 14,301 | 13,030 | −1,271 | −9 | 13,410 |
| Cumbria | 6,477 | 5,414 | −1,063 | −16 | 4,747 |
| Derbyshire | 20,273 | 18,121 | −2,152 | −11 | 16,119 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 22,270 | 21,438 | −832 | −4 | 21,207 |
| Dorset | 12,298 | 11,427 | −871 | −7 | 10,851 |
| Durham | 10,056 | 9,126 | −930 | −9 | 8,689 |
| Essex | 22,278 | 20,429 | −1,849 | −8 | 19,718 |
| Gloucestershire | 11,196 | 10,244 | −952 | −9 | 9,056 |
| Greater Manchester | 87,181 | 87,932 | 751 | 1 | 85,306 |
| Hampshire | 24,425 | 23,363 | −1,062 | −4 | 23,046 |
| Hertfordshire | 13,320 | 12,578 | −742 | −6 | 13,456 |

*Notifiable offences recorded by the police by police force*
*Vehicle crime (thefts of and from vehicles)*

| *Police force* | *Offences year ending March 1999* | *Offences year ending March 2000* | *Change* | *Percentage change* | *Offences year ending September 2000* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Humberside | 25,404 | 21,880 | −3,524 | −14 | 20,479 |
| Kent | 29,294 | 22,465 | −6,829 | −23 | 23,043 |
| Lancashire | 23,478 | 20,812 | −2,666 | −11 | 19,541 |
| Leicestershire | 20,540 | 18,940 | −1,600 | −8 | 17,217 |
| Lincolnshire | 6,944 | 6,871 | −73 | −1 | 6,749 |
| London, City of | 502 | 611 | 109 | 22 | 639 |
| Merseyside | 30,337 | 33,735 | 3,398 | 11 | 32,801 |
| Metropolitan police | 163,020 | 174,997 | 11,977 | 7 | 171,789 |
| Norfolk | 10,834 | 10,428 | −406 | −4 | 10,099 |
| Northamptonshire | 14,065 | 12,255 | −1,810 | −13 | 11,685 |
| Northumbria | 29,416 | 26,199 | −3,217 | −11 | 24,427 |
| North Yorkshire | 9,641 | 8,596 | −1,045 | −11 | 8,180 |
| Nottinghamshire | 26,957 | 24,716 | −2,241 | −8 | 24,485 |
| South Yorkshire | 33,304 | 29,523 | −3,781 | −11 | 26,728 |
| Staffordshire | 19,464 | 17,601 | −1,863 | −10 | 16,638 |
| Suffolk | 6,446 | 6,501 | 55 | 1 | 6,192 |
| Surrey | 7,107 | 7,455 | 348 | 5 | 8,634 |
| Sussex | 25,334 | 25,140 | −194 | −1 | 24,074 |
| Thames Valley | 49,047 | 50,464 | 1,417 | 3 | 46,287 |
| Warwickshire | 8,961 | 8,621 | −340 | −4 | 7,516 |
| West Mercia | 16,174 | 15,743 | −431 | −3 | 14,527 |
| West Midlands | 74,142 | 77,031 | 2,889 | 4 | 72,136 |
| West Yorkshire | 64,071 | 58,298 | −5,773 | −9 | 59,449 |
| Wiltshire | 6,759 | 6,598 | −161 | −2 | 5,620 |
| Dyfed-Powys | 2,480 | 2,203 | −277 | −11 | 2,113 |
| Gwent | 9,746 | 9,107 | −639 | −7 | 8,157 |
| North Wales | 7,254 | 7,501 | 247 | 3 | 7,000 |
| South Wales | 36,681 | 33,053 | −3,628 | −10 | 27,687 |
| England and Wales | 1,077,732 | 1,043,918 | −33,814 | −3 | 1,000,325 |

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for *(a)* each police force area and *(b)* each basic command unit area the number of recorded domestic burglaries in (1) the financial years 1998–99, (2) the financial year 1999–2000 and (3) the first nine months of the financial year 2000–01; what is the difference between the number of recorded domestic burglaries in 1999–2000 and in 1998–99; and what is the percentage change in the number of recorded domestic burglaries in 1999–2000 compared with 1998–99. [159045]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The number of burglaries in a dwelling in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 by police force area is given in the table, with the change and percentage change between the two years. The number of burglaries in a dwelling in basic command unit areas has been collected for the period from 1 April 1999. Details of these offences in 1999–2000 by basic command unit area are included in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 12/00, "Recorded Crime Statistics: England and Wales, April 1999 to March 2000", which is available in the Library.

Details of the number of burglaries in a dwelling for the first nine months of 2000–01 in police force areas are not yet available, and are not available centrally for basic command units. Figures for the year ended September 2000 are included in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 1/01, "Recorded Crime: England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000", which is available in the Library.

*Notifiable offences recorded by the police by police force—*
*Burglary in dwelling*

| *Police force* | *Offences Year ending March 1999* | *Year ending March 2000* | *Change* | *Percentage change* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Avon and Somerset | 14,584 | 13,121 | −1,463 | −10 |
| Bedfordshire | 3,302 | 3,709 | 407 | 12 |
| Cambridgeshire | 5,628 | 5,259 | −369 | −7 |
| Cheshire | 5,925 | 5,379 | −546 | −9 |
| Cleveland | 8,875 | 7,717 | −1,158 | −13 |
| Cumbria | 2,298 | 2,222 | −76 | −3 |
| Derbyshire | 6,603 | 6,427 | −176 | −3 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 7,435 | 7,416 | −19 | 0 |
| Dorset | 3,828 | 3,524 | −304 | −8 |
| Durham | 4,597 | 4,044 | −553 | −12 |
| Essex | 6,331 | 5,868 | −463 | −7 |
| Gloucestershire | 4,866 | 4,160 | −706 | −15 |
| Greater Manchester | 45,739 | 40,953 | −4,786 | −10 |
| Hampshire | 7,892 | 7,372 | −520 | −7 |
| Hertfordshire | 3,589 | 3,501 | −88 | −2 |
| Humberside | 13,496 | 13,040 | −456 | −3 |
| Kent | 10,179 | 8,177 | −2,002 | −20 |
| Lancashire | 12,189 | 10,561 | −1,628 | −13 |
| Leicestershire | 8,937 | 7,803 | −1,134 | −13 |
| Lincolnshire | 4,455 | 4,626 | 171 | 4 |
| London, City of | 39 | 27 | −12 | −31 |
| Merseyside | 14,177 | 13,606 | −571 | −4 |
| Metropolitan police | 75,797 | 79,504 | 3,707 | 5 |
| Norfolk | 3,711 | 3,956 | 245 | 7 |
| Northamptonshire | 5,110 | 4,907 | −203 | −4 |
| Northumbria | 15,334 | 12,539 | −2,795 | −18 |
| North Yorkshire | 4,822 | 4,343 | −479 | −10 |
| Nottinghamshire | 13,697 | 12,612 | −1,085 | −8 |
| South Yorkshire | 18,405 | 16,169 | −2,236 | −12 |
| Staffordshire | 9,974 | 9,073 | −901 | −9 |
| Suffolk | 2,464 | 2,332 | −132 | −5 |
| Surrey | 3,100 | 2,903 | −197 | −6 |
| Sussex | 11,026 | 9,596 | −1,430 | −13 |
| Thames Valley | 14,434 | 15,498 | 1,064 | 7 |
| Warwickshire | 2,887 | 3,189 | 302 | 10 |

*Notifiable offences recorded by the police by police force—Burglary in dwelling*

| Police force | Offences Year ending March 1999 | Offences Year ending March 2000 | Change | Percentage change |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| West Mercia | 5,867 | 5,667 | −200 | −3 |
| West Midlands | 37,323 | 35,583 | −1,740 | −5 |
| West Yorkshire | 35,952 | 29,623 | −6,329 | −18 |
| Wiltshire | 2,447 | 2,149 | −298 | −12 |
| Dyfed-Powys | 973 | 696 | −277 | −28 |
| Gwent | 3,377 | 3,148 | −229 | −7 |
| North Wales | 2,449 | 2,219 | −230 | −9 |
| South Wales | 9,239 | 8,383 | −856 | −9 |
| England and Wales | 473,352 | 442,601 | −30,751 | −7 |

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish the recorded crime statistics for the 12 months ending 31 March. [159012]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The recorded crime bulletin for the year ending March 2001 is due to be published in the week beginning 16 July 2001.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the police force areas and basic command units that make up the principal cities which are the subject of his Department's target for reducing recorded robbery. [159013]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** We have set the following five forces a target of a 14 per cent. reduction of robbery by March 2005: Greater Manchester police, Merseyside police, Metropolitan police, West Midlands police and West Yorkshire police.

The basic command units which make up these police force areas are:

*Greater Manchester Police*

Bolton, Bury, North Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, South Manchester, Stockport, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan.

*Merseyside Police*

Central Wirral, City and Kirkdale, Knowsley, North Sefton, North Wirral, South Liverpool, South Sefton, St Helens, Walton and Croxteth, Wavertree and Riverside and West Derby and Tuebrook.

*Metropolitan Police*

Barking and Dagenham, Barnet, Bexley, Brent, Bromley, Camden, City of Westminster, Croydon, Ealing, Enfield, Greenwich, Hackney, Hammersmith and Fulham, Haringey, Harrow, Havering, Heathrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, Kingston-upon-Thames, Lambeth, Lewisham, Merton, Newham, Redbridge, Richmond-upon-Thames, Southwark, Sutton, Tower Hamlets, Waltham Forest and Wandsworth.

*West Midlands Police*

D1—Erdington/Aston/Nechells/Saltley/Ward End, D2—Sutton Coldfield/Castle Vale /Kingstanding, D3—Stechford/Shard End/ Bordesley Green/Bromford/Sheldon, E1—Bournville/Bartley Green/Longbridge/Selly Oak/Frankley/Northfield, E2—Kings Heath/Billesley/Kings Norton, E3—Acocks Green/Sparkhill/ Sparkbrook/Edgbaston /Balsall Heath/Selly Park/Moseley, F1—Birmingham City Centre/Digbeth, F2—Soho/ Winson Green/ Harbourne/Ladywood/Quinton, F3—Soho/Handsworth/Sandwell/ Perry Barr/Aston (part), G1—Wolverhampton Town Centre/ Wolverhampton West/ Whitmoreanes/Tettenhall/Penn, G2—Wednesfield/Bilston, H1—Walsall North and South/Walsall Town Centre/Aldridge, H2—Willenhall/Bloxwich/Brownhills/ Darlaston, J1—Brierley Hill/Dudley/Sedgeley/Gornal, J2—Halesowen/Stourbridge/ Lye/Cradley/Kingswinford, K1—West Bromwich/Wednesbury/Tipton/Great Barr, K2—Smethwick/ Oldbury/Old Hill/Langley/Warley, L1—Solihull/Chelmsley Wood/Shirley, M1—Coundon/Hillsfields/Tile Hill/Coventry City Centre, M2—Fletchamstead /Stivichall/Willenham—Coventry/ Stoke and M3—Radford/Foleshill/Bell Green/ Wyken.

*West Yorkshire Police*

Bradford Central, Calder Valley, Chapeltown, Dewsbury, Eccleshill, Halifax, Holbeck, Huddersfield, Keighley, Killingbeck, Millgarth, Odsal, Pontefract, Pudsey, Toller Lane, Wakefield and Weetwood.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list *(a)* for each police force area and *(b)* each basic command unit area the number of recorded robberies in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) the first nine months of the financial year 2000–01; what is the difference between the number of recorded robberies in the first nine months of 2000–01 compared with the first nine months of 1999–2000; and what is the percentage difference between the number of recorded robberies in the first nine months of 2000–01 compared with the first nine months of 1999–2000. [159044]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The number of robberies in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 by police force area are given in the table.

The number of robberies in basic command unit areas has been collected for the period from 1 April 1999. Details of the number of robberies in 1999–2000 by basic command unit areas are included in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 12–00, 'Recorded Crime Statistics: England and Wales, April 1999 to March 2000', which is available in the Library.

Details of the number of robberies for the first nine months of 2000–01 in police force areas are not yet available, and are not available centrally for basic command units. Figures for the year ended September 2000 are included in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 1–01, 'Recorded Crime: England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000', which is available in the Library.

*Notifiable offences recorded by the police by police force—Robbery*

| Police force | Offences year ending March 1999 | Offences year ending March 2000 | Change | Percentage change |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Avon and Somerset | 1,831 | 2,381 | 550 | 30 |
| Bedfordshire | 530 | 615 | 85 | 16 |
| Cambridgeshire | 437 | 548 | 111 | 25 |
| Cheshire | 397 | 466 | 69 | 17 |
| Cleveland | 908 | 839 | −69 | −8 |
| Cumbria | 119 | 90 | −29 | −24 |
| Derbyshire | 504 | 584 | 80 | 16 |
| Devon and Cornwall | 462 | 487 | 25 | 5 |
| Dorset | 205 | 241 | 36 | 18 |
| Durham | 172 | 236 | 64 | 37 |
| Essex | 523 | 626 | 103 | 20 |
| Gloucestershire | 273 | 291 | 18 | 7 |
| Greater Manchester | 7,632 | 8,634 | 1,002 | 13 |
| Hampshire | 588 | 732 | 144 | 24 |
| Hertfordshire | 250 | 420 | 170 | 68 |
| Humberside | 839 | 950 | 111 | 13 |
| Kent | 712 | 827 | 115 | 16 |
| Lancashire | 982 | 1,058 | 76 | 8 |
| Leicestershire | 967 | 1,023 | 56 | 6 |
| Lincolnshire | 149 | 178 | 29 | 19 |
| London, City of | 29 | 49 | 20 | 69 |
| Merseyside | 2,484 | 2,663 | 179 | 7 |
| Metropolitan Police | 26,330 | 36,317 | 9,987 | 38 |
| Norfolk | 220 | 297 | 77 | 35 |
| Northamptonshire | 443 | 481 | 38 | 9 |
| Northumbria | 1,347 | 1,389 | 42 | 3 |
| North Yorkshire | 170 | 212 | 42 | 25 |
| Nottinghamshire | 1,312 | 1,768 | 456 | 35 |

*Notifiable offences recorded by the police by police force—Robbery*

| Police force | Offences year ending March 1999 | Offences year ending March 2000 | Change | Percentage change |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| South Yorkshire | 979 | 1,122 | 143 | 15 |
| Staffordshire | 509 | 697 | 188 | 37 |
| Suffolk | 140 | 223 | 83 | 59 |
| Surrey | 171 | 224 | 53 | 31 |
| Sussex | 939 | 1,020 | 81 | 9 |
| Thames Valley | 1,327 | 1,659 | 332 | 25 |
| Warwickshire | 170 | 224 | 54 | 32 |
| West Mercia | 351 | 359 | 8 | 2 |
| West Midlands | 7,315 | 10,092 | 2,777 | 38 |
| West Yorkshire | 3,072 | 3,088 | 16 | 1 |
| Wiltshire | 195 | 258 | 63 | 32 |
| Dyfed-Powys | 42 | 28 | −14 | −33 |
| Gwent | 173 | 216 | 43 | 25 |
| North Wales | 127 | 146 | 19 | 15 |
| South Wales | 511 | 519 | 8 | 2 |
| England and Wales | 66,836 | 84,277 | 17,441 | 26 |

## Sentence Reports

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the ratio of specific sentence reports to the total of pre-sentence reports plus specific sentence reports in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2000–2001. [158929]

**Mr. Boateng:** Specific sentence reports became used nationally only at the end of 1999. Figures are available only for the first three quarters of 2000. The proportion of pre-sentence reports that were specific sentence reports was:

1st Quarter—5 per cent.

2nd Quarter—7 per cent.

3rd Quarter—8 per cent.

The figures are estimates as the definitions varied slightly in different probation areas.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of pre-sentence reports were delivered within 15 days during the year 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [158930]

**Mr. Boateng:** Information collected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation indicates that in the first six months of 2000–01, 71 per cent. of pre-sentence reports were prepared within 15 days. This figure is provisional as not all data are yet available. Information is not yet available for the second six months.

## Crime Reduction Directors

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Crime Reduction Directors in England and Wales, indicating their relevant *(a)* experience and *(b)* qualifications. [159036]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The details requested are given in the table.

*Crime Reduction Directors*

| Name | Experience and qualifications |
|---|---|
| David A'Herne—Wales | Served with the South Wales police for 31 years<br>Masters degree in criminology specialised in community policing<br>Member of the British Society of Criminology |
| Margaret Geary—West Midlands | Professional probation officer and social worker<br>Experience with Warwickshire social services and West Midlands probation service<br>Formerly Home Office Government Office co-ordinator for West Midlands |
| Greg Dyche—Yorkshire and the Humber | Civil servant with experience across a number of Government Departments<br>Six years in Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber<br>Law graduate |
| Henry Tam—East of England | Former Assistant Chief Executive of St. Edmundsbury Borough Council in Bury St. Edmunds, Suffolk<br>Doctorate in Moral and Criminal Responsibility<br>Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Marketing |
| Alan Brown—North East | Former Deputy Chief Constable Northumbria police with 33 years service in total<br>Awarded Queen's Police Medal in 1996<br>Member of the Institute of Personnel Development |
| Stephen Brookes—East Midlands | 24 years experience as a service Police Officer with Hampshire, Avon and Somerset and Leicestershire police<br>Led Her majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary thematic inspection 'Calling Time on Crime' |
| David Smith—North West | 35 years in the Police Service, including nine years as Assistant Chief Constable in both Northumbria and Lancashire police<br>First class honours degree in Social Studies |
| Paul Rowlandson—South West | 34 years service with Merseyside police, including three years as a staff officer with Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary |
| Hugh Marriage—South East | Member of Home Office staff for over 35 years<br>Previously head of the Criminal Policy Strategy Unit |
| Ellie Roy—London | 21 years with the probation service including four as Chief Probation Officer in Northamptonshire |

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total cost to public funds of the Crime Reduction Directors in England and Wales, their offices and support staff. [159037]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The 10 Crime Reduction Directors took up post between June and October last year. The total cost of the directors, their support staff and associated running costs was £2,043,000 in 2000–01. Crime reduction support staff were employed prior to the appointment of the directors, principally to manage the crime reduction programme funding, and their total cost in 1999–2000 was £529,000.

### Football-related Offences

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many football-related offences had been committed by the end of March; and what his Department's baseline figure was. [159035]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The data are not available in the form requested. But as of 20 April 2001, there have been 3,026 arrests in connection with football-related offences at Premier League and Nationwide League grounds this season. This is comparable with last season's figure of 3,137. Football-related arrests continue to be a small proportion in relation to total attendances, which exceed 25 million per season.

### Disorder (Reduction)

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his baseline for his Department's PSA target to reduce the level of disorder. [159020]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Work is currently in progress to develop an accurate and reliable indicator of the level of disorder. It is expected that the indicator will be based on information gathered from the British Crime Survey. As the relevant questions have been included in the survey only since the start of this year, it is not possible at present to produce a baseline figure. We expect to be able to determine a baseline in the autumn.

### Sexual Offenders

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* accredited offender behaviour programmes and *(b)* accredited offender behaviour programmes for sexual offenders were completed in the financial year 2000–01. [159030]

**Mr. Boateng:** The total number of accredited offending behaviour programmes completed in Prison Service establishments in 2000–01 was 6,041. Of these, 848 were sex offender treatment programmes. These data are provisional and subject to validation by prisons.

### Glidewell Justice Units

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Glidewell co-located criminal justice units; and if he will make a statement on the targets and performance indicators which he has set for those units. [158952]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** 20 co-located Glidewell Criminal Justice Units had been established in police or Crown Prosecution Service premises in 13 criminal justice areas by 31 March 2001. A further 56 units are planned for establishment by 31 March 2002. The initial sites are at: Bristol, Crewe, Middlesbrough, Durham, Colchester, Harlow, Southend, Laindon, Basingstoke, Newport (Isle of Wight), Folkestone, Maidstone, Preston, Lancaster, Skegness, Caernarfon, Barnsley, Brierley Hill, Halesowen and Halifax.

Criminal Justice Units are a practical example of independent organisations working together to secure reductions in delay and duplication by sharing resources and developing a common administration. Separate targets or performance indicators have not been set for these jointly staffed units. Police and Crown Prosecution Service staff employed within these units will continue to work towards discrete departmental targets that have been set by their respective and independent organisations.

### Young Offenders

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his baseline for his Department's PSA target of reducing by 5 per cent. the percentage of young people who offend. [159018]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office has a Public Service Agreement (PSA) target of reducing the rate of reconvictions of all young offenders by 5 per cent. by 2004 compared to the predicted rate.

The baseline is derived from Police National Computer data on offenders aged 10 to 17 cautioned or convicted in the first half of 1997. The one-year reconviction rate for this period is 33.7 per cent. The target requires that the number of reconvictions be reduced by 5 per cent. by 2004, compared to a predicted rate which incorporates the baseline data as well as other factors. If there were no other factors, the target would require a rate of 32 per cent.

The predicted rate will, however, make allowance for the following:

*(a)* Any changes in the age, sex, offence and previous criminal history profile of sentenced or cautioned offenders. These factors are known to be associated with the risk of reoffending;

*(b)* External factors associated with other PSA targets, which impact on reconviction, but not on the underlying rate of reoffending, where methodology allows. This is likely to focus on reduced delays in achieving a conviction (PSA target 8) and the increased proportion of recorded crimes where the offender is brought to justice (PSA target 6);

*(c)* Subsequent convictions for offences committed prior to the offender commencing the period under study.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases involving persistent young offenders have come before the courts in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001 to date; and how many have come before the courts in the financial years (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000 and (iv) 2000–01. [158938]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Information is not held centrally in the exact form requested. The following figures relate to persistent young offenders, as defined for the purpose of measuring and monitoring the Government's pledge to halve the time between arrest and sentence from 142 days in 1996. The table shows the number of persistent young offenders who were sentenced (rather than attended a

court) in England and Wales during the years requested. A figure for 2000–01 cannot be given, as data for the first quarter of 2001 are not yet available.

| *Year* | *Number of cases* |
|---|---|
| 1997 | 16,010 |
| 1998 | 18,605 |
| 1999 | 21,151 |
| 2000 | 23,131 |
| 1997–98 | 16,840 |
| 1998–99 | 19,131 |
| 1999–2000 | 22,126 |
| 2000–01 | n/a |

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many cases a final warning has been given to a young offender; in what proportion of such cases the final warning has been followed by an intervention; and if he will make a statement. [159007]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, reprimands and final warnings replaced cautions for young offenders (those aged 10–17). They were introduced in seven pilot areas from the end of September 1998 until 1 June 2000, when both reprimands and final warnings became available nationwide.

The table shows, for each quarter, the number of final warnings issued. Those recorded during the final quarter of 1998 were collected as part of the pilot. Data for 1999 and 2000 are as recorded on the Home Office Court Proceedings and Cautions Database. Data for 2000 are provisional, that for the last quarter not yet available.

*Number of persons aged 10–17 given final warnings in England and Wales*

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| *1998* | |
| 4th quarter | [1]580 |
| *1999* | |
| 1st quarter | [1]450 |
| 2nd quarter | [1]640 |
| 3rd quarter | [1]490 |
| 4th quarter | [1]470 |
| *2000* | |
| 1st quarter | [1]970 |
| 2nd quarter | [2]2,760 |
| 3rd quarter | [2]6,620 |
| Total | 12,970 |

[1] Seven pilots areas only
[2] Nationwide from 1 June

Data received from Youth Offending Teams show that 55 per cent. of final warnings were followed by an intervention during the period June 2000 to December 2000 (48 per cent. in the quarter June to September and 63 per cent. in the quarter October to December).

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each police force area, the average number of days from arrest to sentence in cases involving persistent young offenders at the most recent date for which figures are available. [158936]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The latest available figures for the time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders for each police force area are for the year 2000. These figures were published in the Lord Chancellor's Department Statistical Bulletin 3/2001 on 23 March 2001. A copy of this bulletin will be placed in the Library.

## Criminal Justice System

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what targets and performance indicators he has set to meet his Department's objective of tackling attrition in the criminal justice system; [158951]

(2) what is his baseline and what are his targets and performance indicators to meet his Department's objective of achieving a reasonable reduction in attrition. [158937]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Public Service Agreement for the whole criminal justice system, agreed in last year's Spending Review, included a target of increasing the number and proportion of recorded crimes for which an offender is brought to justice. ("Brought to justice" means that an offender has been cautioned, has an offence taken into consideration by the courts in passing sentence, or is convicted of an offence). In "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead", we indicated that, specifically, there will be a criminal justice system-wide target to increase, by 2004, the number of recorded crimes ending in an offender being brought to justice by 100,000. In 1999–2000, 1,270,000 offences were brought to justice, which represented 24 per cent. of the 5,301,000 crimes recorded in that year.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets he has set to improve the satisfaction of *(a)* victims and *(b)* witnesses with the criminal justice system. [159025]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The current target for both victim and witness satisfaction is a five percentage point improvement by March 2002.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish his Department's research findings on public confidence in the criminal justice system. [159026]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The findings of the 2000 British Crime Survey on confidence in the criminal justice system were published on 31 January 2001. A copy of Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate Research Findings No. 137: Confidence in the Criminal Justice System: Findings from the 2000 British Crime Survey was deposited in the Library following publication.

## Organised Crime

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the report prepared for his Department by Professor Michael Levi on laws to combat organised crime. [158950]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Government have undertaken in "Criminal Justice—The Way Ahead" (Cm 5074) to consider whether there is a need to introduce a new offence to cover organised criminal conspiracy. Professor Michael Levi was commissioned by the Home Office last year to study the experience of

countries that had already introduced such offences. A summary of the report is being prepared by officials and will be published later this year. Copies of this summary will be placed in the Library.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is his *(a)* baseline and *(b)* target for the disruption of organised criminal enterprises. [159029]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office Public Service Agreement sets a target of disrupting 10 per cent. more organised criminal enterprises by 2004. The baseline figure will be the number of such groups disrupted during 2000–01, which is currently being determined.

### Prisoner Activity

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average number of hours of purposeful activity per prisoner per week *(a)* in 2000–01 and *(b)* at the most recent date for which figures are available. [158933]

**Mr. Boateng:** The average number of purposeful activity hours per prisoner per week in 2000–01 was 23.8 hours. The average rate during March 2001 was 24.5 hours. The data for March are provisional and subject to validation by prisons.

### "Living without Fear"

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the projects currently being funded by his Department in order to implement the action points of "Living without Fear", indicating the objective, expected duration and cost to public funds of each such project. [159014]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Government's 1999 policy and awareness raising publication, "Living without Fear", set out information on domestic violence and other aspects of violence against women, with examples of the innovative interventions then under way to address them. It was designed as a basis for the future development of policy and described the measures the Government had themselves already undertaken, those they had in hand and those they were committed to taking. A number of these measures were to ensure that relevant issues were properly taken into account in general policy rather than being specifically and exclusively directed at violence against women. Current projects that are so directed are those within the Violence against Women Initiative of the Crime Reduction Programme, and information on them is given in a table which has been placed in the Library.

### Criminal Justice Act (Costs)

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish a report under section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991 on costs. [158931]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Data are currently being collected and a report prepared on costs. Subject to trilateral agreement between the criminal justice agencies, we hope to publish the report before the end of the year.

### Statutory Time Limits (Pilots)

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of statutory time limits pilots. [158928]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Piloting of statutory time limits began on 1 November 1999 in youth courts in six areas. The pilots are being evaluated by independent researchers from the University of Sheffield. The evaluation is in progress and is expected to be completed at the end of the year.

### Probation Service

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the figures *(a)* nationally and *(b)* for each probation area for the number and proportion of cases under supervision by the Probation Service where breach action was taken in accordance with national standards in 2000–01. [158934]

**Mr. Boateng:** The figures for compliance with the national standard on breach are provided by the Association of Chief Officers of Probation audit of probation areas and are shown in the table. This gives the results of the most recent audit. The audit covers supervision of probation orders, community service orders (as community punishment orders and community rehabilitation orders were at the time) and licence cases only. The national totals show that breach action was taken in 65 per cent. of cases in accordance with national standards; in a further five per cent. of cases, management authorisation not to breach was given, also in line with national standards.

*Offenders breached*

| *Area* | *Number breached* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|---|
| Avon | 45 | 83.3 |
| Bedfordshire | 13 | 76.5 |
| Berkshire | 3 | 37.5 |
| Cambridgeshire | 18 | 64.3 |
| Cheshire | 27 | 69.2 |
| Cornwall | 4 | 100 |
| Cumbria | 25 | 80.6 |
| Derbyshire | 41 | 75.9 |
| Devon | 23 | 54.8 |
| Dorset | 19 | 86.4 |
| Durham | 22 | 95.7 |
| Dyfed | 3 | 100 |
| East Sussex | 21 | 75 |
| Essex | 19 | 79.2 |
| Gloucestershire | 18 | 62.1 |
| Greater Manchester | 67 | 68.4 |
| Gwent | 14 | 87.5 |
| Hampshire | 39 | 69.6 |
| Hereford and Worcs | 14 | 73.7 |
| Hertfordshire | 12 | 85.7 |
| Humberside | 46 | 65.7 |
| ILPS | 52 | 36.9 |
| Kent | 17 | 31.5 |
| Lancashire | 60 | 85.7 |
| Leicestershire | 38 | 80.1 |
| Lincolnshire | 24 | 96 |
| Merseyside | 68 | 79.1 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 12 | 66.7 |
| Middlesex | 33 | 45.8 |
| NELPS | 31 | 66.0 |

### Crime (Economic Costs)

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets he *(a)* has set and *(b)* plans to set for reducing the economic costs of crime. [159019]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Public Service Agreement (PSA) for the Criminal Justice System commits Criminal Justice Departments to reduce the economic and social costs of crime by March 2004.

There are a wide range of economic and social costs associated with crime, not all of which are easy to measure, but the Criminal Justice Departments have jointly developed an indicator of the economic and social costs of crime as part of the PSA commitment. The methodology used to measure the economic and social cost of crime was published in a report in December 2000, "The economic and social costs of crime" (Home Office Research Study 217). This sets out clearly how the figures have been derived and estimates the total economic and social cost of crime to England and Wales in 1999–2000 to be £60 billion.

Work is ongoing to develop and improve the estimates as part of the process of monitoring progress in meeting this PSA commitment.

### Community Sentences (Reconviction Rates)

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department's predicted two-year reconviction rate for offenders serving community sentences is in each year from 2001 to 2004, inclusive. [159031]

**Mr. Boateng:** Predicted two-year reconviction rates used in the measurement of Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets are not statistical forecasts, but are adjustments made once actual reconviction rates are known which make allowances for variations in the age, sex, offence and previous criminal history profile of persons commencing community sentences. These factors are known to be associated with the risk of reoffending. The purpose of the "predicted" rate is to ensure that comparisons between the reconviction rate when an improvement target was set and the reconviction rate when improvement is measured are meaningful.

The predicted rates will also take account of external factors associated with other PSA targets, which impact on reconviction, but not on the underlying rate of reoffending. The external factors include reduced delays in achieving a conviction (PSA target 8) and the increased proportion of recorded crimes where the offender is brought to justice (PSA target 6).

The predicted rate can be calculated only when the characteristics of offenders commencing community sentences in a given year are known.

### Firearms Offences

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he plans to take to meet his target of a 3 per cent. annual reduction in the number of offences involving firearms. [159034]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The police and other law enforcement agencies are working to combat the illegal possession and criminal use of firearms and the Government are fully committed to supporting them in this task and in carrying out their general operational responsibilities. The United Kingdom has strict laws governing the possession and use of firearms and the penalties for contraventions are high. Among measures which are currently being taken to tackle gun crime are:

Improved Home Office advice on the safe keeping of firearms to prevent them being stolen;

Stricter standards of deactivation to stop guns from being restored to working order;

Possible restrictions on the sale or possession in public of replica weapons;

Targeted policing measures against particular groups of criminals associated with armed violence;

Proactive intelligence gathering on sources of weapons used in crime. In particular, work is in hand to develop a National Firearms Forensic Intelligence Database which will allow information on firearms (including bullets, cartridge cases, weapons and weapons components) used in crime to be captured, collated and links established between different incidents; and

A national database of firearms certificate holders is being established.

The Government have also supported international efforts to negotiate a United Nations Protocol against the illicit manufacture of and trafficking in firearms.

It is important that action to reduce the number of offences involving firearms which represents about 0.1 per cent. of all offences, is not taken in isolation from other criminal activities which may encourage the possession of guns, such as the drugs trade.

### Commission for Racial Equality

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many charges of racial discrimination have been made by staff of the Commission for Racial Equality against the commission itself in each of the last three years; and how many of these were settled before reaching the employment tribunal. [158879]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The number of complaints of racial discrimination made by the Commission for Racial Equality staff in each of the last three years is as follows:

1998: 8

1999: 3

2000: 3.

Of the 14 cases, none are on-going. Six cases were settled before reaching the employment tribunal, six were dismissed by tribunals and two were withdrawn.

### Car Phones

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drivers have been prosecuted for not having proper control of their vehicle while driving and holding a mobile phone in the Greater London area in each of the last three years. [158521]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The information requested is not available.

There is no separate offence of driving a vehicle using a mobile telephone, and any prosecution is likely to be for driving without due care and attention, for which there were 9,900 prosecutions in the Metropolitan Police Area (including City of London) in 1999 with 11,000 in 1998 and 12,300 in 1997. Data for 2000 are not yet available.

It is also possible for such drivers to be prosecuted or issued with a fixed penalty for not being in proper control of a vehicle (Regulation 104 of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986), but such cases cannot be separately identified in the statistics collected centrally.

## Appointments

**Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many appointments he has made since May 1997 in accordance with the Nolan criteria; how many appointees were aged over 60 years at the time of appointment; and how many declared a political affiliation for *(a)* the Conservative party, *(b)* the Labour party and *(c)* the Liberal Democrats. [158535]

**Mr. Straw:** Since May 1997, I have made a total of 440 appointments and reappointments to Home Office public bodies falling within the remit of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Eighty nine of these appointees were aged over 60 years at the time of appointment. Five appointees declared a political affiliation for the Conservative party, 16 for the Labour party and none for the Liberal Democrats.

The Government are committed to equality of opportunity and to increasing the diversity of those appointed to public bodies. Political affiliation was not a criterion for any of the above appointments.

## Race Crimes

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review his policy on the definition of a racially motivated offence. [158269]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The definition of what amounts to a racially aggravated offence is contained in section 28 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 in relation to the nine racially aggravated offences listed in sections 29 to 32 of that Act. Where race is concerned, the definition relating to the aggravating factor in sentencing, for all other offences, is contained in section 153 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000. I believe these to be practical and enforceable definitions.

I will examine the findings of any research into the implementation of the provisions.

## New Hospital (Worcester)

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to consult the residents of Worcestershire before offering advice to Her Majesty the Queen on the name for the new hospital currently under construction in Worcester. [158481]

**Mr. Straw:** In offering advice to Her Majesty The Queen on the use of royal names and titles, I will take into account the views of other appropriate Government Departments, and any other representations received. There is, of course, no guarantee of a successful outcome for any application to use a royal name or title.

## Crime (Lancashire)

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate has been made of the percentage of recorded crime in Lancashire that was drug-related in the last five years. [158403]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Recorded crime statistics include statistics on drugs offences, but do not record whether other offences are related to offenders' drug habits. The percentage of drugs offences in overall recorded crime in Lancashire in the last five financial years for which figures are available is given in the table. It should be noted that there was a change in counting rules on 1 April 1998 which increased the drugs offences counted. Before this date, only drugs trafficking was counted, whereas after this date possession and other offences were also counted. The change in counting rules also affected the general counting of offences, including other expansions of the offences counted, and so the percentages of drugs offences counted before and after 1 April 1998 will not be directly comparable.

| *Year ending March* | *Recorded drugs offences as a percentage of all recorded crime in Lancashire* |
|---|---|
| 1996 | 0.4 |
| 1997 | 0.5 |
| 1998 | 0.5 |
| 1999 | 3.5 |
| 2000 | 2.9 |

Both the British Crime Survey and the new England and Wales Arrestees Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) programme of interviewing and drug testing arrestees shed some light on the links between drugs and crime, although these conclusions do not relate specifically to Lancashire.

For England and Wales as a whole, the British Crime Survey 2000 reported that 18 per cent. of victims of violent crime believed their attacker was under the influence of drugs.

The second report on the NEW-ADAM programme of interviewing and drug testing arrestees was published in August 2000 (Home Office Research Study 205, Drugs and Crime: The results of the second developmental stage of the NEW-ADAM programme). The research, undertaken by the University of Cambridge at four sites (London, Liverpool, Nottingham and Sunderland), found that 69 per cent. of arrestees tested positively for at least one drug, excluding alcohol.

It should be remembered that because an arrestee tested positive for drugs or a victim believed that a perpetrator was under the influence of drugs it does not necessarily mean that the consumption of drugs caused the crime to be committed. As a result, while the NEW-ADAM study and the British Crime Survey advance our knowledge of the links between drugs and crime, it will always be difficult to calculate a single percentage figure calculating precisely what proportion of crime is drug-related.

## Crime (West Sussex)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* crimes and *(b)* violent crimes were recorded in west Sussex in (i) the latest year for which figures are available, (ii) 1996 and (iii) 1997. [158574]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** As west Sussex is a part of the Sussex police force area, figures for west Sussex are not generally available. Recorded crime data for the Sussex police force area are given in the table. There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, and also an expansion of the offences recorded, which mean that figures before and after that date are not directly comparable. For example, from that date, figures for offences of violence against the person additionally include figures for common assault and assault on a constable, among other offences.

| | *All recorded crime* | *All violent crime* |
|---|---|---|
| 1996 | 118,086 | 7,848 |
| 1997 | 111,624 | 7,561 |
| Year ending September 2000 | 137,961 | 19,624 |

Data for some offences, including the components of violent crime (violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery), have been recorded on a Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) area basis for the period since 1 April 1999. Totalling CDRP figures for west Sussex shows that there were 8,702 violent offences recorded in that area in the year ending September 2000.

## Animal Rights Extremists

**Ms Kelly:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements he has made for the co-ordination of Government action to prevent intimidation by animal rights extremists. [159533]

**The Prime Minister:** I am answering this question, as I have responsibility for establishing ministerial committees.

On 28 March the Government announced a range of measures to prevent the intimidation of people who work in, or are connected with, legitimate animal research establishments in our consultation paper "Animal Rights Extremism: Government Strategy", which was published that day. A new ministerial committee has now been formed with the task of taking forward, and wherever possible adding to these initiatives, with the overall aim of reassuring people involved in legitimate research upon animals, whether as scientific workers, managers, or investors, that criminal intimidation will not be allowed to succeed.

The terms of reference for the committee will be:

"To co-ordinate policy to protect those who work in, or are connected with, legitimate animal research establishments against intimidation by extremist groups."

The membership will be:

Secretary of State for the Home Department (Chairman)

Minister of State, Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions

Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

Minister of State, Department for Education and Employment

Minister of State, Scotland Office

Economic Secretary to the Treasury

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Home Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Trade and Industry

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Wales Office

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office.

The Chief Scientific Adviser will also be invited to attend meetings of the group. Other outside experts will be invited to attend as necessary.

## Criminal Records Bureau

**Ms Kelly:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the code of practice in connection with the use of information provided to registered persons by the Criminal Records Bureau. [159532]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The code of practice for registered persons and other recipients of disclosure information is being published today under section 122(1) of the Police Act 1997, and will be placed on the Criminal Records Bureau's website as well. The code has also today been laid before Parliament in accordance with section 122(2) of the Act. In addition, we are publishing today an explanatory guide for registered persons and other recipients of disclosure information, and I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Friday 27 April 2001*

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Pig Farming

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many pig farmers were offered aid under the Outgoers 1 Scheme; on what basis tenders were assessed; and if he will make a statement. [159829]

**Ms Quin:** The Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme (PIRS)—Outgoers, closed for applications on 2 March, and all applicants were informed of their success or otherwise on 23 March. There were a total of 1,237 bids in the UK as a whole (England 650, Northern Ireland 510, Scotland 53, Wales 24). A total of 205,327 sow places were offered, greatly exceeding the target of 120,000 sow places.

As was made clear from the beginning, successful bids under PIRS—Outgoers would be assessed on a value for money basis. To achieve this, bids were assessed using value for money criteria agreed by MAFF and the devolved authorities in advance of opening the bids. This was done in order to avoid any accusations of manipulating the criteria to achieve a specific result.

The criteria defined what would be judged as value for money in terms of cost per sow place. It was agreed that bids greater than 125 per cent. of the average (the top 10 per cent. and bottom 10 per cent. of tenders were removed while calculating the average figure) tender bid in terms of £ per sow place would be rejected. The highest tender to be accepted was calculated at £237 per sow place, giving a maximum payment of £142 per sow place (the full 60 per cent. allowable was paid to successful applicants).

The final result of PIRS—Outgoers was a total of 432 accepted bids (England 315, Northern Ireland 87, Scotland 20, Wales 10), with an average tender of £185 per sow place (average payment of £111 per sow place). A total of £10.6 million has been offered to the successful applicants.

Payments are now being made to the first claims under PIRS—Outgoers from successful applicants.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Watts:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the estimated cost is to each British family of the measures taken to eradicate *(a)* foot and mouth disease and *(b)* BSE in Britain. [156268]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* It is, at present, too soon to carry out an estimate of the cost of measures taken so far to eradicate foot and mouth disease to each British family.

The total cost of the BSE crisis to the UK up to and including 2000–01 was approximately £3.5 billion. This figure relates to various financial measures, and not solely eradication measures. To calculate a more specific figure, relating solely to eradication measures and the average cost per family, would involve disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he has given to the operators of landfill sites about the precautions they should take to prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease. [153822]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 15 March 2001]:* The disposal of carcases during the foot and mouth outbreak takes place in accordance with the detailed 'Best Practice' protocol prepared by the Environment Agency, MAFF and the Environmental Services Association. This protocol provides in-depth advice to landfill site operators, in order to minimise the risks of disease spread.

My Department authorises the disposal of carcases under the Animal By-Products Order 1999 for each and every landfill site. The Environment Agency is responsible for modifying the waste management licences to allow the burial of carcases, and each licence modification refers to the 'Best Practice' protocol.

**Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what compensation will be available to livestock farmers who have been unable to move stock to slaughter as a consequence of their being in foot and mouth exclusion zones. [155657]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 27 March 2001]:* Compensation is not generally payable for consequential losses caused by foot and mouth controls, for example those caused by movement restrictions. There are no plans to make such payments in response to the current outbreak, but the situation will be kept under review.

The Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme was opened to applicants on 22 March 2001. As with the Pig Welfare Disposal Scheme in Norfolk and Suffolk last year, this voluntary slaughter scheme is intended to help resolve serious animal welfare difficulties arising from disease control measures which cannot be alleviated by movement under licence or in other ways. It is not a market support measure. The Government will meet the costs of transport, slaughter and disposal of animals under the scheme.

**Mr. Pickles:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if *(a)* he, *(b)* ministerial colleagues and *(c)* his officials were in discussions with timber merchants with a view to supplying pyres for the disposal of carcases for foot and mouth in the three months prior to 19 February. [155268]

**Ms Quin:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) on 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 50W. Ministers were not involved in any such discussions with timber merchants.

**Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for what reason the Government have prevented chemists and other parties from offering advice on the efficacy of homoeopathic Borax in the prevention of foot and mouth disease. [157709]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* Products that are presented for the treatment or prevention of disease in animals, or which have that function, must be authorised under the terms of the Marketing Authorisations for Veterinary Medicinal Products Regulations 1994 before they can be legally sold or supplied in the United Kingdom. This ensures that such products are properly assessed and are demonstrated as being safe, of consistent good quality and effective when used in accordance with the label instructions.

Some pharmacies have advertised the homoeopathic product Borax 30 as a preventive measure against foot and mouth disease. However, this product has not been authorised under these regulations. We have received no scientific evidence to demonstrate its effectiveness against foot and mouth disease and we have not assessed its safety or quality.

**Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with homoeopathic vets concerning the use of homoeopathic Borax in the prevention of foot and mouth disease. [157707]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* My officials have been in correspondence with the Veterinary Dean of the Homoeopathic Faculty in London on the use of the homoeopathic product Borax. In this correspondence we have stressed that foot and mouth disease is a notifiable disease and, if suspected, must be notified to the local MAFF Divisional Veterinary Manager.

**Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has assessed on the *(a)* safety and *(b)* quality of homoeopathic borax in the prevention of foot and mouth disease. [157711]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 257W.

**Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Government will issue advice to farmers on the use of homoeopathic borax in the prevention of foot and mouth disease. [157708]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* Advice regarding the use of the homoeopathic product Borax has been given to farmers via the MAFF foot and mouth website, and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate website.

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to offer financial compensation for residents of properties who have been subject to extreme inconvenience and disruption from prolonged burning of carcases adjacent to their homes. [157714]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* Compensation is payable for the market value of animals slaughtered to control foot and mouth disease. It is not payable for the consequential losses caused by foot and mouth controls, or for any inconvenience caused to residents by the cremation of animal carcases.

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many *(a)* farmers and *(b)* others are prevented from (i) sending or (ii) receiving mail due to the restrictions imposed as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak; what mechanisms he intends to put in place to ensure that such persons will be able to vote by post at the forthcoming local elections; and if he will make a statement about the implications of the foot and mouth outbreak for those who wish to vote by post. [156811]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 3 April 2001]:* There is no reason why farmers on infected premises should be prevented from sending and receiving mail. Movements on and off an infected premises are licensed by the State Veterinary Service. These licences would set out the cleansing and disinfection arrangements that should be followed and might specify a prescribed route so as to minimise the risk of spreading disease. In some cases arrangements have been made for mail to be left at, and collected from, the farm boundary.

The new rules on absent voting allow for postal votes on demand. The Home Office has made large quantities of postal vote leaflets (including application forms) available to electoral registration officers. They have been encouraged to publicise the availability of postal votes, particularly in areas affected by foot and mouth disease to ensure that no one is disfranchised.

**Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent research he has commissioned on the risk associated with grain exports being a source of infection for foot and mouth disease. [156742]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 3 April 2001]:* A general risk assessment of the grain trade spreading foot and mouth disease has been carried out and posted on the MAFF website http://www.maff.gov.uk/. Grain that is now available for export will have been harvested in the summer of 2000 (or earlier). It could not have been infected at the time of harvest as foot and mouth disease was not present in the country at that time. The grain is stored under conditions which would effectively prevent surface contamination, and is protected during transport in covered vehicles. In addition, no movement of grain is permitted from UK farms where foot and mouth is suspected or has been confirmed. There is therefore no reason why grain exports should not continue.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has for sheep to be ear tagged; and if he will make a statement. [159379]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The Sheep and Goats Identification (England) Order took effect on 1 September 2000. This legislation requires all sheep and goats born after 1 January 2001 or first moved off their holding of birth after that date to be permanently identified with an eartag or tattoo identifying the animals' holding of birth.

In my right hon. Friend the Minister's statement of 27 March he indicated that, once we were beyond the current difficulties, we would be looking at a range of issues surrounding the operation of the livestock sector to see if more could be done to minimise disease risks still further. This work will include consideration of the identification and tracing of sheep.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received concerning meat imports from countries within the EU where foot and mouth has been diagnosed; and if he will make a statement. [158963]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* I have received a number of representations concerning the importation of meat from EU countries in which foot and mouth disease has been diagnosed. These countries are France, the Republic of Ireland and the Netherlands and in all cases, import restrictions were placed on products derived from foot and mouth disease susceptible species in line with Community legislation. Restrictions have now been lifted in respect of France and the Republic of Ireland.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what role tag markings play in tracing animal movements from auction marts to farms during the foot and mouth crisis. [154284]

**Ms Quin:** Cattle have a unique individual identification displayed on their eartag. When an animal moves an entry must be made in the farm register recording the animal's unique identity and where it has moved to. This information must also be sent to the British Cattle Movement Service at Workington, for entry on the Cattle Tracing System database. Movements of cattle via auction marts can therefore be traced by reference to farmers' records, to auction marts' records and to those held at the BCMS.

Sheep and goats born after 1 January 2001, or moved off the holding of birth after that date are required to be identified by means of an eartag (or tattoo). There is no requirement for markets to record eartag details. Sheep, goats and pigs when they move within Great Britain are required to be identified by a temporary paintmark which identifies the premises from which the animal last moved. Markets are required to keep records of all batches of sheep, goats and pigs moving through the market and their temporary mark.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many livestock in Wales he estimates will be slaughtered owing to foot and mouth disease outbreaks; and how many have been slaughtered to date. [155017]

**Ms Quin:** As of 10 April 2001, a total of approximately 84,600 sheep, 7,800 cattle, 500 pigs and 17 goats have been slaughtered in Wales.

The Government have published independent research on the epidemiology of the foot and mouth outbreak. The reports support the view that this outbreak will last several months and that there will continue to be new cases throughout that time. The epidemiological forecasts foresee the outbreak lasting at least until June and possibly beyond July. However, the Chief Veterinary Officer will not make a specific prediction on how long the outbreak will last, nor can we make a specific prediction of the number of animals that will be slaughtered.

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what virus dissemination prediction *(a)* models and *(b)* equipment are in use in connection with foot and mouth disease. [156920]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 27 March 2001]:* The Ministry has access to a *Gaussion* plume dispersion model for modelling spread up to 10 kilometres, and access to a Meteorological Office *NAME* model for predicting spread over long distances. There is also a collaborative arrangement with the Danish Meteorological Institute and the Risø National Laboratory using the *Rimpuff* model and numerical weather prediction models. These models have all been scaled specifically for the biological parameters for foot and mouth disease and validated against previous outbreaks. The output from the UK Meteorological Office is input into MAFF geographical information systems to link with our database of farms and infected premises.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the frequency was of contact between his Department, including its regional offices, and suppliers of materials required to deal with the current foot and mouth epidemic in the last 30 years. [156416]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 April 2001, *Official Report,* column, 50W in connection with a number of related questions.

**Mr. Breed:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the potential benefits of the use of homeopathic Borax as a means of preventing the spread of foot and mouth; and if he will publish the scientific evidence he has received on this. [158498]

**Ms Quin:** We have not received any evidence of the effectiveness of Borax against foot and mouth disease nor have we received any other scientific evidence to demonstrate its efficacy, safety or quality. Without such evidence which is required for the authorisation of a veterinary medicinal product, no claim for treatment or prevention of disease is allowed under the legislation.

## Animal Exports

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what personnel resources are available within his Department to monitor compliance with United Kingdom legislation in respect of animal exports. [154665]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 20 March 2001]:* All export consignments of farm livestock and most other animals may only be exported with an export health certificate. The drafting and issuing of such certificates is carried out by staff in MAFF's Animal Health International Trade Unit and Veterinary International Trade Team, and issuing is carried out by all Animal Health Divisional Offices (AHDOs). Local veterinary inspectors certify on behalf of MAFF whether the animals meet the animal health requirements in the certificate, and are fit to travel, after inspecting animals destined for export. Staff from the MAFF portal office also check every export consignment of sheep through the Port of Dover.

Where exporters are required to draw up route plans under the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997 (WATO), applications are submitted to AHDOs. If satisfactory, the plans are then stamped and sent to the local veterinary inspectors for issue with the linked export health certificate.

The operations team within the London based Animal Welfare Divisions advises AHDOs whether any new routes comply with statutory journey time limits. They also maintain and monitor a database of transporter authorisations and reported infringements of WATO

and arrange non-discriminatory checks on animals in co-operation with other member states. Primary responsibility for enforcement of the transport rules rests with local authorities with whom AWD liaise on a regular basis.

### Farming Subsidy

**Mr. Watts:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will publish the amounts paid to the top 20 recipients of farming subsidy in Britain for each year from 1997 to 2001 inclusive. [158455]

**Ms Quin:** The Ministry is responsible for making CAP subsidy payments in England. The devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are responsible for making subsidy payments in those parts of the United Kingdom.

The amounts paid to the top 20 recipients of farming subsidy in England in the years 1997–98 to 2000–01 were as follows:

*Amounts in pound sterling (£)*

| | *2000–01* | *1999–2000* | *1998–99* | *1997–98* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | 1,802,158 | 2,300,908 | 1,910,463 | 2,187,283 |
| 2. | 1,156,148 | 1,742,094 | 1,576,178 | 1,442,703 |
| 3. | 1,161,308 | 1,119,379 | 1,135,536 | 1,232,225 |
| 4. | 1,093,565 | 1,064,246 | 1,114,764 | 1,085,269 |
| 5. | 1,009,664 | 1,055,409 | 999,079 | 1,000,008 |
| 6. | 991,358 | 982,137 | 965,428 | 988,090 |
| 7. | 932,953 | 928,375 | 913,603 | 981,514 |
| 8. | 743,651 | 869,752 | 903,401 | 783,316 |
| 9. | 739,173 | 762,271 | 756,124 | 707,736 |
| 10. | 737,461 | 750,625 | 669,144 | 689,791 |
| 11. | 723,750 | 733,734 | 668,847 | 666,559 |
| 12. | 715,172 | 728,555 | 657,449 | 658,615 |
| 13. | 693,404 | 728,323 | 640,406 | 652,879 |
| 14. | 635,948 | 694,145 | 605,350 | 631,607 |
| 15. | 629,247 | 663,086 | 602,188 | 589,829 |
| 16. | 622,638 | 655,798 | 590,882 | 584,956 |
| 17. | 616,175 | 652,749 | 563,821 | 570,006 |
| 18. | 603,091 | 631,751 | 558,024 | 563,382 |
| 19. | 586,159 | 616,694 | 547,768 | 551,612 |
| 20. | 578,178 | 610,307 | 546,132 | 551,106 |

### Meat Imports (South Africa)

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when the European Union converted its temporary suspension on South African livestock imports into a formal import ban following the outbreak of swine fever in KwaZulu-Natal; and how the terms of the ban differed from those of the suspension; [153244]

(2) what period and on which products and geographical areas the European Union imposed a temporary suspension of South African livestock imports following the outbreak of foot and mouth in KwaZulu-Natal last year. [153245]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** EU rules do not allow imports of livestock into the Community from South Africa. EU measures introduced last year in relation to KwaZulu-Natal related only to imports of fresh meat.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information his Department provided to *(a)* staff at third country border inspection posts and *(b)* importers in response to the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in KwaZulu-Natal last year. [153365]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** Letters explaining the situation were sent to border inspection posts and traders after a Declaration was issued on 5 January 2001 suspending imports of fresh meat and certain products of animal origin from South Africa and Swaziland. Prior to that, on 22 September, the South African authorities suspended issue of export health certificates for live animals, animal products and genetic material from the affected areas, thereby effectively preventing exports.

### Vets

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many vets were employed at each third country border inspection post in the United Kingdom in each year since 1997. [153243]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** Each third country Border Inspection Post (BIP) is under the authority of an official veterinarian who is responsible for carrying out veterinary checks on imports of live animals and animal products. One or more veterinary staff work at BIPs at any one time, according to workload. Checks at live animal BIPs are carried out by State Veterinary Service veterinary staff, assisted by technical and administrative staff from the local Animal Health Divisional Office. Checks at product BIPs are the responsibility of local authorities who employ the necessary veterinarians and support staff.

### Departmental Consultants

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the total gross running costs to his Department of fees and disbursements paid to consultants in the last 12 months. [149148]

**Ms Quin:** From information held centrally, the gross running costs to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of fees and disbursements paid to consultants in the last 12 months, up to 31 January 2001, was £12,851,425.

### Ministerial Meetings

**Mr. Randall:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many ministerial meetings with hon. Members have been cancelled by Ministers since 1 January. [155245]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** My right hon. Friend the Minister of State has postponed three meetings with hon. Members since 1 January, while my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has postponed one.

### Classical Swine Fever

**Mrs. Shephard:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when farmers affected by last summer's outbreak of classical swine fever will receive their producer levy payments. [158883]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* On 19 April the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food announced an interest-free loan of £4 million to the MLC to enable the immediate payment of the industry top-up to the Pig Welfare Disposal Scheme payments. The

Intervention Board began processing payments that day and estimate that they are now about halfway through making the payments.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Illegal Logging

**Ms Walley:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action her Department is proposing to stop imports of illegally logged timber entering the United Kingdom. [158760]

**Clare Short:** The enforcement of import policy is a matter for the Department of Trade and Industry and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

In developing countries my Department provides capacity-building assistance to Governments and institutions to help them monitor logging and enforce forestry laws. For example, last year we initiated a £25 million project in Indonesia which will, among other things, help civil society groups and reformers in the Government tackle the illegal logging problem in their country. We are also co-sponsoring, with the World Bank and other donors, a ministerial-level East Asia Forest Law Enforcement Conference later this year.

The UK has also taken a lead in the G8 in promoting action to tackle illegal logging. Following the Okinawa Summit last July, central Government Departments are now required actively to seek to purchase timber and timber products from legal and sustainable sources. DFID is funding research into options for intergovernmental action to address illegal logging, including the possible creation of an international legal framework.

### Sudan

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the size of the food deficit in *(a)* The Upper Nile, *(b)* the Southern Blue Nile, *(c)* Twitch County, *(d)* The Nuba Mountains and *(e)* Eastern Equatoria regions of Sudan. [158773]

**Clare Short:** There are indications that there may be food deficits in some parts of Sudan this year. We are monitoring the situation closely, both from London and through our DFID representative at the British Embassy in Khartoum. In terms of the specific areas mentioned, UN assessments have suggested that there may be food deficits emerging as a result of variable agro-climatic conditions, compounded by security-related disruptions to production.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the 2001 UN World Food Programme Appeal for Sudan has requested; how much her Department has provided for the 2001 appeal; how much the EU has provided; and how much the US has provided. [158772]

**Clare Short:** The funding required for the World Food Programme (WFP) under the 2001 United Nations Consolidated Inter-Agency Appeal for Sudan is $145,844,286. DFID is considering a contribution towards the WFP's food aid operations. To date, the US has promised 41,870 metric tonnes of food aid to Sudan, at least 15,000 of which will go through WFP. The EU have announced they will be contributing 13,000 metric tonnes of food aid: this will be made direct to their implementing INGOs, rather than through WFP.

## DEFENCE

### New DERA

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* consultancy and *(b)* other fees were paid in finding a name for the public company taking over the role of New DERA. [158863]

**Mr. Hoon** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) on 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 233W.

### Defence Fire Service

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the locations served by appliances and firefighters of the Defence Fire Service in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* outside the United Kingdom. [159162]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The areas specifically served by Defence Fire Service (DFS) appliances and firefighters based in the United Kingdom and overseas are set out in the table.

*Defence Fire Service*

| *Locations* | *County/Country* |
|---|---|
| *UK based* | |
| HMNB Clyde | Faslane, Scotland |
| RNAD Coulport | Dunbartonshire, Scotland |
| DSDC Bicester | Oxfordshire |
| DSDC Donnington | Shropshire |
| DM East Riggs | Dumfrieshire, Scotland |
| DM Kineton | Warwickshire |
| DM Longtown | Cumbria |
| Marchwood Mil Port | Hampshire |
| AAC Middle Wallop | Hampshire |
| AAC Netheravon | Wiltshire |
| RMCS Shrivenham | Oxfordshire |
| AAC Wattisham | Suffolk |
| RAF Aldergrove[1] | Northern Ireland |
| RAF Boulmer | Northumberland |
| RAF Cosford | West Midlands |
| RAF Fylingdales | North Yorkshire |
| 202 Sqn Det Leconfield | North Humberside |
| RAF Leeming | North Yorkshire |
| RAF Leuchars | Fife, Scotland |
| RAF Linton on Ouse[2] | North Yorkshire |
| RAF Lossiemouth | Morayshire, Scotland |
| RAF Lyneham | Wiltshire |
| RAF Northolt | Middlesex |
| RAF Neatishead | Norfolk |
| RAF Oakhanger | Hampshire |
| RAF Sealand | Flintshire |
| RAF Shawbury[3] | Shropshire |
| RAF Spadeadam | Cumbria |
| RAF Stafford | Staffordshire |
| DM Welford | Berkshire |
| LATCC West Drayton | Middlesex |
| USAF RAF Menwith Hill[4] | North Yorkshire |
| USAFE RAF Mildenhall[4] | Suffolk |
| USAFE RAF Fairford[4] | Gloucestershire |
| USAFE RAF Croughton[4] | Northamptonshire |
| USAFE RAF Lakenheath[4] | Suffolk |
| USAFE RAF Alconbury[4] | Cambridgeshire |

*Defence Fire Service*

| *Locations* | *County/Country* |
|---|---|
| *Based overseas* | |
| RAF Akrotiri | Cyprus |
| Ayios Nikolaos Station | Cyprus |
| Dhekalia Garrison | Cyprus |
| BF Episkopi | Cyprus |
| Troodos Station | Cyprus |
| RAF Gibraltar | Gibraltar |
| DSDC Dulmen | Germany |
| Gutersloh Garrison | Germany |
| BF Fallingbostel | Germany |
| UKSC(G) Rheindahlen | Germany |
| BF Sennelager | Germany |
| BF Sipovo | Bosnia |
| BF Banja Luka | Bosnia |
| BF Pristina | Kosovo |
| BF Podujevo | Kosovo |

[1] Includes Bessbrook
[2] Includes Dishforth/Topcliffe/Church Fenton
[3] Includes Tern Hill
[4] USAF provides appliances

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultation has been held with the representative body of fire-fighters serving in the Defence Fire Service about *(a)* the Fire Service Study 2000 and *(b)* the competitive tendering for the defence fire services; and if he will make a statement. [159163]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Fire Service Study 2000 has been developed with full Fire Service and Trade Union consultation and support. In addition, one of the two new working groups currently being formed to handle the final stages of the study will include full Trade Union representation.

The plan to seek bids for airfield support services, which includes the capability currently provided by the Defence Fire Service, is covered by the Airfield Support Services Project (ASSP). This project is looking at the viability of a PFI/PPP solution for the provision of airfield support services to the Ministry of Defence (MOD) world-wide. MOD Trades Unions were consulted in December 1996 on the proposals for a Feasibility Study and again in February 1998 following the outcome of the study. Further meetings were held between Project staff and the TGWU on 29 April 1999 and 17 November 1999. The most recent pan-Trades Unions meeting took place at RAF Brampton on 10 November 2000. Formal consultation on the proposals for the next stage of the process was initiated on 18 April 2001.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what circumstances have caused bids to be sought for the running of the service provided by the Defence Fire Service, (b) who authorised the soliciting of such bids and *(c)* if he will detail the conditions relating to such bids; and if he will make a statement. [159164]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The Government are committed to seeking value for money through Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) by involving private sector management expertise, innovation and capital investment in the delivery of services to the public sector. Against this background, a feasibility study, commissioned in 1995, reported in 1997 that there was significant private sector interest in providing airfield support services and that the private sector had the necessary expertise and ability to provide it.

Further work has established a good case that PFI/PPP arrangements have the potential to provide the Ministry of Defence's requirement for airfield support services, which includes the service provided by the Defence Fire Services, at the greatest value for money. In the light of this, ministerial approval was given in early April 2001 to issue Invitations To Negotiate (ITN) seeking proposals from three consortiums for PFI/PPP solutions for airfield support services.

The ITN will seek bids for both a 15 and 25-year solution and the service provision will be specified in output terms. Bidders will be required to examine the feasibility of the employment of Sponsored Reserves within the project. Bids will be required to demonstrate value for money and provide the manpower and equipment to maintain the required operational capability.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions, and for what purposes, Defence Fire Service personnel have been deployed overseas in the last two years. [159161]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason he has not announced to the House his plans to seek tenders to run the Defence Fire Service; and if he will make a statement. [159170]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence plans to issue, in July, Invitations to Negotiate (ITN) seeking binding proposals from three consortiums for Private Finance Initiative/Public Private Partnering (PFI/PPP) solutions for airfield support services. The PFI/PPP process follows a well-established system and would not always involve announcements to the House, particularly at this early stage of the PFI process.

## Porton Down

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what breaches of security at the Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment at Porton Down have been reported in the past 12 months. [157560]

**Dr. Moonie** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA at Porton Down has not reported any breaches in security during the past 12 months.

## Alternative Landing Ships Logistics

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the latest in-service date is for the 4 Amphibious Landing Ships Logistics. [157729]

**Dr. Moonie** *[holding answer 24 April 2001]:* The approved in-service dates for the two Alternative Landing Ships Logistic to be built by Swan Hunter (Tyneside) Ltd. are October 2004 and June 2005. Pending the outcome of negotiations with BAE Systems Marine, we expect all four ships to be in service by the summer of 2006.

### Chemical Agent CR

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date the chemical agent CR was first authorised for use in 1973; and in what formats it was weaponised *(a)* then and *(b)* subsequently. [158788]

**Mr. Spellar:** CR was first authorised for use by British forces in October 1968, although authorisation for its use in Northern Ireland, in special circumstances only, was not given until October 1973. Strict guidelines govern both deployment and use of CR.

In 1973 CR was available both in aerosol form and for use in water cannon. Subsequently, a wheeled dispenser was introduced in December 1974, a vehicle-based version was deployed in 1976, and a projectile delivery device was authorised for use in 1977.

### Chinook Crash

**Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the Defence Research Agency's report on the 1994 Chinook helicopter crash on the Mull of Kintyre supports the RAF Board of Inquiry's verdict that the pilots were guilty of gross negligence. [158907]

**Mr. Spellar:** The RAF Board of Inquiry analysed the information provided by the Defence Research Agency's report to help build up a picture of the aircraft's flight path shortly before impact. This report was a part of the evidence available to the Board of Inquiry, against which the determination of the reviewing officers was made.

### Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the partners in the consortiums bidding for the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft project. [158862]

**Dr. Moonie** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

## HEALTH

### Osteoporosis

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a screening programme to identify those at risk from osteoporosis. [158766]

**Yvette Cooper:** Screening for osteoporosis was considered by the United Kingdom national screening committee (NSC) in June 1999. The NSC recommended that screening should not be offered as there was no simple, reliable test for osteoporosis that would meet its criteria for a screening programme. At present there is a comprehensive approach for the prevention and treatment of this disease (hormone replacement therapy, diet, exercise and the use of specific drugs) which can be directed towards the general population.

### Matrons

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to reintroduce matrons into the NHS. [159373]

**Mr. Denham:** Guidance was issued to the National Health Service on 4 April. Health Service Circular 2001/10, "Implementing the NHS Plan—Modern Matrons", sets out the action required to establish matron posts by April 2002. Copies are available in the Library.

### TB Vaccine

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of tuberculosis vaccine shortages in England in each of the last 10 years. [158964]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* BCG vaccine has been in limited supply for some time owing to severe manufacturing problems encountered by the sole United Kingdom licensed source. As a result, we had no alternative but to request that health authorities suspend their routine schools immunisation programme for 10 to 14-year-olds from September 1999. This allowed us to maintain supplies of the vaccine for all those at a higher risk of tuberculosis (TB).

In July 2000, we advised that there was a sufficient supply of vaccine to initially restart the routine schools programme in the London area, where the highest rate of TB in the country currently occurs, in addition to the continued use for those in higher risk categories.

On 24 March, we announced that the routine schools BCG programme could begin again in schools across the country.

The 1994–95 school BCG programme was delayed in some areas because of the measles/rubella campaign.

Information about BCG vaccinations is contained in the statistical bulletin "National Health Service immunisation statistics, England: 1999–2000". A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and can also be found on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0026.htm.

### Correspondence

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 19 February on behalf of his constitutent Mr. R. Cawood; [159222]

(2) when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 19 February on behalf of his constituent, Mrs. J. Wort; [159213]

(3) when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 19 February on behalf of his constituent, Dr S. A. Steel; [159215]

(4) when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 19 February on behalf of the British Organ Donor Society; [159208]

(5) when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 19 February on behalf of his constitutent Mr. S. O'Keeffe. [159217]

**Mr. Denham:** Replies to the right hon. Member's letters were sent on 23 April 2001.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Recruitment Industry

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what estimate he has made of the impact of allowing a maximum four week quarantine period for *(a)* temp to temp fees and *(b)* temp to third party fees for specialist IT employment businesses; and if he will include that estimate in the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations; [159485]

(2) for what reasons an assessment of the impact of a four week quarantine period for *(a)* temp to temp fees and *(b)* temp to third party fees was not included in the draft regulatory impact assessment for the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [159486]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** It was not possible to identify quantifiable costs for most of the measures in the Regulations, since they are likely to lead to changes in the behaviour of the organisations and workers in the private recruitment industry. Moreover, statistical information on the industry is limited. The draft regulatory impact assessment presents the available information.

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what estimate his Department has made of the percentage of the temporary workforce that specialised in IT in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000; and if he will include that estimate in the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations; [159482]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the percentage of IT workers in the UK that worked on temporary contracts rather than permanent employment in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, (c), 1999 and (d) 2000; and if he will include that estimate in the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations; [159481]

(3) what estimate his Department has made of the total number of IT workers who sought work through employment businesses in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000; and if he will include that estimate in the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations; [159480]

(4) what assessment his Department has made of the importance to the UK economy of IT workers seeking work through employment businesses; and if he will make a statement. [159483]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** Detailed information on specific occupational groups of agency workers is not available.

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the ability of employment businesses to continue to offer internet services to work-seekers in the light of Clauses 2 and 14 of the proposed Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Business Regulations; and if he will make a statement. [159487]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** The Regulations have been designed to cover internet-based services, and will allow most dealings between employment businesses and work-seekers to be conducted electronically. The Regulations should therefore improve the ability of employment businesses to offer services to work-seekers via the internet.

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the average cost of a specialist IT employment business placing a specialist IT worker in a six month temporary contract; what proportion of these costs relate to *(a)* placement fees and *(b)* payroll costs; and if he will make a statement. [159484]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** I have made no such estimate. Our draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 2001 are designed to benefit recruitment agencies, employment businesses, their clients and those seeking employment through them. They will remove unnecessary restrictions on organisations in the recruitment industry, including the IT sector, and the services they can offer, while protecting the interests of work seekers and vulnerable groups. I recognise that the IT sector plays an increasingly important role in the recruitment industry.

### British Nuclear Fuels

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from British Nuclear Fuels regarding the future of new nuclear power plant development in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the rest of the UK. [159443]

**Mr. Hain:** None.

### Property Values (Stoke-on-Trent)

**Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the report into the impact of mine shafts on property values in Stoke-on-Trent will be published. [159476]

**Mr. Hain:** My Department has now received the final version of the report from Heriot-Watt University on the impact of former coal-mine shafts on the property market in Stoke-on-Trent. I intend to publish and respond to the final report when I have had an opportunity to consider its findings and will place a copy in the Library of the House.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Arms Sales (Iran)

**Mr. Gareth R. Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on arms sales to Iran. [156807]

**Mr. Wilson:** I refer my hon. Friend to the statement on arms embargoes made by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) on 28 January 1998, *Official Report*, columns 274–75W. In accordance with his undertaking of 28 July 1999, we will continue to keep the House updated on an annual basis.

### Middle East

**Mr. Stephen Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has

taken since the meeting between the Minister of State and Nabil Sha'ath on 20 March regarding Palestinian violence. [R] [156898]

**Mr. Wilson:** Since my meeting with Palestinian Minister for Planning and International Co-operation Nabil Sha'ath on 20 March, the UK has continued to be actively engaged in the search for peace in the middle east. The Foreign Secretary spoke to Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres on 21 and 28 March, and to Nabil Sha'ath on 27 March. His messages to his Israeli and Palestinian counterparts were reinforced by his statement of 29 March, which called for an end to the cycle of violence and retaliation.

I met Jordanian Foreign Minister Abdul Illah Al-Khatib on 3 April. At the Prime Minister's request and with the support of the Foreign Secretary, Lord Levy travelled to Israel and the Palestinian Authority on 4–5 April as the Prime Minister's personal envoy. He met, among others, Prime Minister Sharon and President Arafat. He urged both parties to take immediate steps to stop the violence and build confidence. EU Foreign Ministers discussed the situation in the middle east at the General Affairs Council in Brussels on 9 April.

On 18 April, the Foreign Secretary spoke again to Shimon Peres and Nabil Sha'ath, and to Syrian Foreign Minister Farouq al-Shara'a and US Secretary of State Colin Powell. He also issued a statement calling on both sides to show restraint and draw back from confrontation. I reiterated our position in discussions on the situation in the middle east during my attendance at meetings of EU and Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) Ministers in Bahrain on 22–23 April.

### Biological Weapons Convention

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made in the negotiations in Geneva on a protocol to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention. [157441]

**Mr. Wilson:** On 30 March the Chairman of the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) Ad Hoc Group, Ambassador Tibor Toth of Hungary, tabled the text of a draft Protocol to the BWC. This has been sent to all States Parties and will come under discussion at the next negotiating session which begins in Geneva on 23 April. The UK has played a leading role throughout these negotiations as we have had responsibility for the section of the text on compliance measures—the core of the future Protocol. We welcome the appearance of the text and are currently assessing its overall content. A successful outcome by the time of the BWC Review Conference remains a possibility but will depend upon the reaction to the text from all countries involved over the coming months. An effective BWC Protocol remains an important arms control objective for the United Kingdom as it will help fill the last remaining gap in Treaty provisions designed to stem the proliferation of WMD.

**Mr. Gerrard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the most recently available text of the protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention being negotiated in Geneva. [157604]

**Mr. Wilson:** The text of the draft Protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention, which was tabled on 30 March, is now a formal document of the BWC Ad Hoc Group and will be under discussion for the first time at the negotiating session which started on 23 April. Its reference number is BWC/Ad Hoc. Group/CRP.8. A copy will be placed in the Library of the House at the earliest opportunity.

### Entry Clearance

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 797W, on entry clearance, how many of the cases involving entry clearance were investigated by the Minister for Europe; in how many cases the Department's judgment was overturned; in how many cases *(a)* a constituent of the Minister and *(b)* an individual covered by an interest declared by an hon. Member, was involved; by what mechanism conflicts of interest were avoided; and if he will make a statement. [158333]

**Mr. Vaz:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) on 22 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 316–17W. In accordance with normal Government practice, I do not make decisions on visa cases relating to my own constituency. I will only investigate cases brought to me by right hon. and hon. Members, who I would expect to declare any particular interest in a case when making their representations to me.

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 797W, on entry clearance, by what means waiting times were reduced; what change in entry denial rates routes occurred; and if he will make a statement. [158334]

**Mr. Vaz:** Waiting times for interview in Islamabad were reduced by the posting of additional staff; by the appointment of a new management team; by a reduction in the amount of documentation required from applicants; by the implementation of new procedures recommended by external and internal review teams; and by hard work by the staff at Post. I am very pleased with the efforts made by the staff.

The improvement in waiting times is shown in the table.

| | *December 1999* | *December 2000* | *March 2001* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Visit Visas* | | | |
| Tier 3 | 5 days | 40 days | [1]0 |
| *Settlement Visas* | | | |
| Q1 | 9 weeks | 5 weeks | 5 weeks |
| Q2 | 39 weeks | 18.5 weeks | 13 weeks |
| Q3 | 44 weeks | 24 weeks | 16 weeks |
| Q4 | 50 weeks | 31 weeks | 23 weeks |

[1] Same day service

*Notes:*

Tier 3—Visit visa applications requiring in-depth interview (target: 10 days)

Queue 1—Right of abode cases and Dependant Relatives over 65 (target: 13 weeks)

Queue 2—Spouses and Children under 18 (target: 13 weeks)

Queue 3—Fiancé(e)s and Other First Time Applicants (target: 26 weeks)

Queue 4—Re-applicants (target: 39 weeks)

Refusal rates in Islamabad, as a percentage of the total number of non-settlement and settlement applications received, have been as follows:

| | Percentage | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Non-settlement* | *Settlement* |
| 1998 | 15 | 16 |
| 1999 | 21.4 | 25.5 |
| 2000 | 11 | 20.6 |

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for entry visas made in Pakistan have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused in the last 12 months. [158388]

**Mr. Vaz:** In the year 2000, a total of 75,527 visas were issued in Posts in Pakistan and 15,989 were refused.

In January and February 2001, 4,132 visas were issued in Karachi and 1,123 were refused.

In January 2001, 3,693 visas were issued in Islamabad and 1,686 were refused.

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many applications for entry visas made in India have been *(a)* granted and *(b)* refused in the last 12 months. [158520]

**Mr. Vaz:** In the year 2000, a total of 165,998 visas were issued by Posts in India, and 20,622 were refused.

For the months of January and February 2001, Posts in India issued a total of 16,814 and refused 1,244.

### Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158551]

**Mr. Robin Cook:** Between 31 March 2000 and March 2001 the Foreign Secretary's two special advisers made the following official visits:

*Michael Williams*

*2000*

15–22 April—India/Thailand/Nepal

18–19 May—Croatia

7–9 June—Sierra Leone

25–28 June—China

11–16 September—New York (UNGA)

23–24 November—Zagreb

*2001*

10–15 February—China

*David Clark*

*2001*

12 February—Stockholm.

### Parvez Masih

**Mr. Andy King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Pakistani authorities concerning the case of Parvez Masih. [158923]

**Mr. Wilson:** Although no representations have been made to the Pakistani authorities concerning the arrest of Parvez Masih, my noble Friend Baroness Scotland reiterated our concerns over the position of religious minorities and the abuse of the blasphemy laws with the Pakistani Attorney General and Minister of Law, Justice and Human Rights, Ms Shahida Jamil on 3 April.

### Cryptography Documents

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will release to the Public Record Office the *(a)* cryptographic memorandum No. 101 JNA 10 Naval Attache Code and Additive Cypher and *(b)* cryptographic memorandum No. 119 of June 1946, The JN 11 Cyphers. [158992]

**Mr. Robin Cook** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* These memoranda underwent sensitivity reviews in 1999 and, on the basis of those reviews, will continue to be withheld for the foreseeable future.

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will release to the Public Record Office the *(a)* report on the interrogation of Lt. Frowein of OKM/4SKL/111 on his work on the security of the German naval four-wheel Enigma (TICOM 1–38), *(b)* OKW/Chi cryptanalytic research Enigma, Hagelin and cipher teleprinter machines (TICOM 1–45), *(c)* paper by Dr. Otto Buggisch of OKH/In7/V1 and OKW/Chi on TYPEX (TICOM 1–66), *(d)* first part of the report by Wm Buggisch on SG41 (TICOM 1–72), *(e)* translations of joint report made by doctors Huettenhain, Fricke on the Zaehlwerk Enigma (TICOM 1–77) and *(f)* further statement on Typex by Huettenhaim, Fricke and Mettig (TICOM 1–61). [158991]

**Mr. Robin Cook** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The reports in question will undergo a sensitivity review in about 18 months time. If they are deemed releasable, and are accepted by the Public Record Office, they will be made available to the public in about two years from now.

### Religious Freedom

**Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for International Development about the promotion of religious freedom in Government aid programmes. [159392]

**Mr. Battle:** According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. However, reality can fall far short of the standards set down in international law.

Promotion of human rights is at the heart of our foreign policy and we regard religious freedom as a fundamental human right. We condemn instances where individuals are persecuted because of their faith, wherever it happens and whatever the religion of the individual or group concerned.

We take every opportunity, often working with our EU partners, to urge states to pursue laws and practices which foster tolerance and mutual respect and to protect religious minorities against discrimination, intimidation and attacks. We also regularly raise specific cases of religious persecution with the Governments concerned.

Wherever possible we aim to work with officials, religious leaders and non-governmental organisations at international and local level to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. Where the possibility of meaningful dialogue on human rights issues exists, we believe that this is the best way to achieve lasting change.

## WALES

### Brookhill Landfill Site

**Mr. Barry Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary concerning the representations of Flintshire county council against the disposal of carcases at the Brookhill landfill site; and if he will make a statement; [159236]

(2) what discussions he has had with the First Secretary concerning the disposal of carcases following welfare culling at the Brookhill landfill site at Buckley, Flintshire; and if he will make a statement. [159235]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** I meet the First Secretary regularly to discuss a range of issues including measures to control the current outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

The National Assembly approves the use of landfill sites for the Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme on the basis of Environment Agency advice as to suitability. Carwyn Jones, Assembly Secretary for Rural Affairs, recently met representatives of Flintshire county council and the Brookhill site operators to discus local concerns.

## ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

### London Underground

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many suicides and attempted suicides there were on London Underground property in each of last 10 years and in each of the past 12 months. [157470]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* London Underground emphasise that safety and security are their top priorities, and they do everything possible to prevent suicide attempts. They have provided the following information on all incidents where, after full examination of the incident, they have recorded suicide or attempted suicide as a cause.

| | *Total* |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 45 |
| 1997–98 | 52 |
| 1998–99 | 48 |
| 1999–2000 | 52 |
| 2000–01 | 47 |

| | *2000–01 total* |
|---|---|
| April 2000 | 1 |
| May 2000 | 7 |
| June 2000 | 4 |
| July 2000 | 4 |
| August 2000 | 0 |
| September 2000 | 4 |
| October 2000 | 5 |
| November 2000 | 3 |
| December 2000 | 3 |
| January 2001 | 4 |
| February 2001 | 7 |
| March 2001 | 5 |

Figures for years before 1996–97 could be provided only at disproportionate cost. It should be noted that Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate separately publish figures in the HMRI Annual Report on Railway Safety, which include totals of suicides and attempted suicides on London Underground. However, those figures are lower because they are based on statutory returns from Coroners made under the Coroners Act 1988. The LUL figures are based on LUL's subsequent investigation into each fatality.

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate has been made of the average punctuality and reliability of services on each of the London Underground lines in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [157480]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* This is an operational matter for London Underground who inform me that although they do not keep statistics on punctuality of services, they do keep information on train service reliability in terms of the percentage of scheduled kilometres operated. The table shows the percentage of scheduled kilometres operated for each of the Underground lines over the last five years.

*Percentage*

| *Lines* | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Bakerloo | 91.4 | 93.6 | 92.5 | 90.5 | 83.0 |
| Central (inc. Waterloo and City) | 95.3 | 95.2 | 95.3 | 96.6 | 97.0 |
| Circle and Hammersmith | 90.9 | 93.0 | 91.4 | 89.7 | 81.6 |
| District | 96.0 | 98.3 | 97.4 | 97.0 | 93.0 |
| Jubilee | 96.4 | 98.0 | 97.5 | 92.7 | 89.8 |
| East London | 97.3 | 97.3 | 92.7 | 95.7 | 94.5 |
| Metropolitan | 95.9 | 98.0 | 97.5 | 96.7 | 95.4 |
| Northern | 94.4 | 95.5 | 90.2 | 94.9 | 96.6 |
| Piccadilly | 93.5 | 92.9 | 89.5 | 90.9 | 86.9 |
| Victoria | 95.0 | 95.1 | 96.1 | 97.4 | 96.1 |
| Total | 94.5 | 95.5 | 93.6 | 94.3 | 91.9 |

In 2000–01 the reliability figure of 91.9 per cent. shown in the table for the year to February reflects the demands of a substantial increase in kilometres operated, and continuing strong growth in passenger demand. LUL's performance was measured against an original target of operating 67.3 million train kilometres in the year (an increase of 4.2 million on 1999–2000 performance). Although this was not attained, the underlying figures for actual train kilometres delivered during 2000–01 and earlier years have been on an increasing trend, as follows:

| | *Train kilometres operated (million)* |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 58.6 |
| 1997–98 | 62.1 |
| 1998–99 | 61.2 |
| 1999–2000 | 63.1 |
| 2000–01 | '64.1 |

' Current estimate

### Whistleblowers

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his policy is on introducing protection for whistleblowers who reveal that a company is breaking environmental laws. [158671]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998 protects workers who make qualifying disclosures either to the employer or a prescribed person. The Department of Trade and Industry has published a guide to the Act (PL502) which is available on their website. Independent advice is available from the charity Public Concern at Work. I have no evidence that this does not provide protection for those who blow the whistle on companies which break environmental laws.

### Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to implement the policies under the consultation draft of the UK Fuel Poverty Strategy in order to satisfy the requirements of the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000, with particular reference to section 2 (1) of that Act. [158993]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The draft UK Fuel Poverty Strategy will be reviewed in the light of responses to the current consultation, and the final version published in summer 2001. The policies set out in the draft strategy have either been, or are in the process of being, implemented. A Fuel Poverty Advisory Group, consisting of representatives of a range of organisations with experience in this area, will be set up to advise Ministers on practical implementation issues. We intend to monitor progress carefully and remain ready to review and revise policies in the light of practical experience.

As this is a devolved matter, it is the responsibility of the respective Parliament and Assemblies to comment on the situation in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

### Waste Recycling

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures his Department is taking to promote the recycling of waste. [159368]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The Government's policy on recycling is set out in Waste Strategy 2000, published last May. We have now set statutory performance standards for each local authority under the best value regime which will triple the recycling of household waste to 25 per cent. in 2005–06 and announced in last year's spending review significant extra funding for local authorities to help meet those targets. In Waste Strategy 2000, the Government also set a target of reducing the amount of industrial and commercial waste sent to landfill by 2005, to 85 per cent. of that landfilled in 1998.

We continue to implement EC legislation and voluntary agreements on producer responsibility on a range of materials including packaging. The landfill tax will continue to rise and the aggregates levy will come into force in April 2002, both of which provide incentives to find alternative uses for materials.

In November, the Government established the new Waste and Resources Action Programme with a budget of £40 million over three years to tackle the market obstacles to recycling. Most recently, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport consulted on proposals for the next round of lottery funding (the New Opportunities Fund), including a programme to expand community sector waste re-use, recycling and composting.

### Road Deaths

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people have died in road accidents in each of the last four months. [158875]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* National statistics for deaths in road accidents in the last four months are not yet available.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Ludlow of 4 April on the Rural Task Force. [159385]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** I replied to the hon. Member's letter on Tuesday 24 April.

### Kirkham and Wesham Station

**Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his Department's role in considering Railtrack's decisions to cancel its contributions towards the building of a passenger lift at Kirkham and Wesham station. [159237]

**Mr. Hill:** Such decisions are matters for Railtrack. However, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) will consider better access to the network, particularly for those with disabilities, when assessing bids for replacement franchises.

### Housing Developments

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what powers are available to local authorities to use their planning powers to specify the tenure of housing in a new development; what plans he has to review those powers; and if he will make a statement. [159430]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The Government's policy on planning for affordable housing is set out in Planning Policy Guidance note 3: "Housing" and Circular 6/98, "Planning and Affordable Housing". This states that planning policy should not be expressed in favour of any particular form of tenure and that the term "affordable housing" encompasses both low-cost market and subsidised social housing. Based on their own assessments of need in their area, and development plan policies which state their intention to seek an element of affordable housing in suitable developments, local planning authorities may negotiate with developers for the types of affordable housing that will best meet local housing needs. We have no plans at present to revise the guidance.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Porton Down

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library copies of the sections of each version of the War Pensions Manual produced since 1993 by the War Pensions Agency which relate to former service personnel claiming disablement as a result of experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment at Porton Down. [157302]

**Mr. Bayley:** It is not current practice to place individual items from the departmental guidance manuals in the Library, however we have arranged to place the complete manuals in the Library today.

### Vaccine Damage Payment Scheme

**Mr. Denis Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims have been made to the Vaccine Damage Payment scheme in each of the last five years; and how much compensation has been paid by the scheme since June 2000. [158459]

**Mr. Bayley:** The Vaccine Damage Payment (VDP) scheme, which has been in place since 1979, provides a one-off payment to people severely disabled as a result of vaccination against certain diseases. The scheme is not intended as compensation but is designed to ease the burdens of those suffering from vaccine damage and their families.

The number of claims to the scheme in each of the last five years is in the table. On 27 June 2000 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced an increase in the VDP for new cases from £40,000 to £100,000 as well as other enhancements to the scheme. This included top-up payments to all existing cases so that they are put on an equal footing in real terms with new claimants. 825 such payments have been made totalling £55.7 million. Since June 2000, one new award has been approved and is awaiting payment of £100,000.

| *Year* | *Number of claims made* |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 70 |
| 1997–98 | 201 |
| 1998–99 | 135 |
| 1999–2000 | 75 |
| 2000–01 | 203 |
| Total | 684 |

### Personal Pensions

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out his Department's policy in relation to the application of a cap on rebates to appropriate personal pensions from 2002 onwards. [159396]

**Mr. Rooker:** Age-related rebates to appropriate personal pensions are capped for two reasons. First, the cap restricts the cost to public funds. Secondly, the cap also discourages those approaching pensionable age from making what could be inappropriate pension arrangements, given the short amount of time they would have to benefit from investment growth in a money purchase scheme.

We have increased the cap which will apply to age-related rebates in respect of earnings from April 2002, so that all those who are currently unaffected by the cap (that is those who will be up to age 50 in April 2002) will remain unaffected by it.

### Rachel Akuany

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when he expects the Benefits Agency to reach a decision on the claim for Income Support from Ms Rachel Akuary. [158942]

**Mr. Bayley:** The administration of Income Support is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Hilary Benn, dated 26 April 2001:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking when he expects the Benefits Agency to reach a decision on the claim for income support from Mrs Rachel Akuany.

As details about individual customer claims are confidential I will write to you privately on this matter.

## TREASURY

### Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 19 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 29W, on CCTA, (1) what the total income and expenditure of the CCTA in the last five financial years for which information is available was; [155828]

(2) if he will place details of the CCTA's methods for calculating the savings from S-Cat and G-Cat in the Library; and what independent verification mechanism was used; [155830]

(3) on what dates reviews were completed of whether G-Cat and S-Cat are compliant with EC tendering rules; which organisation conducted these reviews; and if he will place copies of the reviews in the Library; [155831]

(4) what compulsion is on a G-Cat or S-Cat purchaser to put information on their contracts in the public domain; [155832]

(5) pursuant to his answer of 19 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 29W, on CCTA, what the total value of orders placed through G-Cat and S-Cat in each of the past five years was. [155829]

**Mr. Andrew Smith** *[holding answer 27 March 2001]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Office of Government Commerce, whom I have asked to reply.

*Letter from Bob Assirati to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 26 April 2001:*

I have been asked to reply to your further Parliamentary Questions regarding GCat and S-CAT, and CCTA's costs and revenues.

You may wish to be aware that CCTA ceased to exist from the 31st of March 2001, but its functions have been absorbed within the Office of Government Commerce. Responsibility for GCat and S-Cat now rests with the OGC Trading Arm, OGC Buying.Solutions. The outcome of the review of OGC and its Agencies was announced in a Parliamentary Question to the Chief Secretary of the Treasury from Ms Jackie Lawrence MP on 19th December 2000. I am therefore writing to you as the outgoing Chief Executive of CCTA.

The original assessments of compliance with the EC tender rules in respect of GCat and S-CAT were conducted by CCTA before the contracts were let. In 1997, the position of GCat and S-CAT was considered jointly by CCTA, HM Treasury and the Treasury Solicitor. It was felt that the original assessments remained valid and customers were advised accordingly. In March 2000 both catalogues were again confirmed as fully compliant with EC Directives.

The details of the review processes referred to above are of a commercial/confidential nature and formed part of CCTA's normal day-to-day business operations.

The total value of orders exceeding £200,000, in each of the past five years, for the catalogue services are as follows:

*Total value of GCat and S-CAT orders over £200,000*

*£ million*

| | *GCat* | *S-CAT* |
|---|---|---|
| 1996 | n/a | 0 |
| 1997 | n/a | 0 |
| 1998 | 26.65 | 10.187 |
| 1999 | 46.54 | 8.657 |
| 2000 | 43.96 | 40.393 |

*Notes:*

1. The GCat and S-CAT schemes were established in April 1996 and October 1997 respectively.

2. Unfortunately, the figures for GCat prior to 1998 are not available through the current computer systems and can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The total value of orders placed, in each of the past five years, through the catalogue services are shown below:

*Total value of all GCat and S-CAT orders*

*£ million*

| | *GCat* | *S-CAT* |
|---|---|---|
| 1996 | 7.32 | 0 |
| 1997 | 55.69 | 0.063 |
| 1998 | 129.99 | 21.52 |
| 1999 | 188.3 | 29.2 |
| 2000 | 215.55 | 67.23 |

At times of contract procurement and subsequent re-competition, it was CCTA's practice to issue as much information as possible to potential bidders about the actual or potential users of the schemes, the nature of the goods and services which may be procured through them and the total annual value of orders that are likely to be placed. Neither the existing procurement directives nor the EC's draft proposals on framework contracts specifically require individual users of such contracts to place information about their orders through the OJEC procedure (though some may do so voluntarily). However, CCTA expected individual users of GCat and S-CAT to comply with the obligations placed on them by open government policies/legislation (e.g. the Code of Practice on Access to Official Information and the Freedom of Information Act 2000) as appropriate.

Details of the rationale for using framework contracts and catalogues for routine purchases are contained in the Comprehensive Spending Review of Efficiency in Civil Government Procurement Expenditure issued in April 1998, and the case for greater co-ordination and aggregation of Government spending is contained in the Gershon Review of Civil Procurement in Central Government issued in April 1999. I assume that copies of these reports are already available through the H of C Library.

The total income and expenditure, in the last five financial years for CCTA, was as follows:

*£000*

| | *CCTA total* | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Income* | *Expenditure* |
| 1996–97 | 20,835 | 28,676 |
| 1997–98 | 22,544 | 22,486 |
| 1998–99 | 25,200 | 23,454 |
| 1999–2000 | 28,353 | 27,646 |

*Notes:*

1. There are no figures available prior to CCTA becoming an agency in April 1996.

2. These figures are published in CCTA's Annual Report and Accounts for 1998–99 and 1999–2000 House of Commons references numbers 370(98/99) and 740(99/00).

## Census Helpline

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many telephone information lines are available on the Census helpline; [158957]

(2) how many calls have been taken by the Census helpline; [158958]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Miss Anne McIntosh, dated 30 April 2001:*

As Registrar General for England and Wales, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions asking about callers to the Census Helpline (158957,158958).

In the three weeks since the beginning of the Census 2001 campaign, up to 25 April, the Helpline has received more than 1 million calls, with 240,000 calls received on 23 April alone. This level of response in such a short period of time is unprecedented for a government campaign. In comparison, in 1991 some 125,000 calls were received by the Helpline before Census day and a further 85,000 calls after it.

The Office for National Statistics is working with Cable and Wireless, who operate the Helpline, to meet demand. The number of telephone lines on the Main Helpline was increased to 1,000 lines on 26 April. The system has also been amended to try and answer the most common queries with recorded information.

In addition a new dedicated Helpline with 500 lines is operating for 27 April for those people who have not yet received their Census form. The additional Helpline number, which is being advertised in the media, is 0845 301 3000.

A copy of a recently issued Press Release on the Census Helpline is attached.

*Helping the public with the census—Press Release 24 April 2001*

*240,000 calls received by helpline in one day.*

The Office for National Statistics is appealing to the media and community groups for assistance in answering the nation's questions about the census. With five days to go to Census Day on Sunday 29 April 2001, the census helpline is receiving an incredible number of enquiries so that some people are unable to get through to the recorded information or speak to an operator.

In the three weeks since the beginning of the census 2001 campaign, the helpline has received more than 650,000 calls with 240,000 calls received yesterday. This level of response in such a short period of time is unprecedented for a government campaign. In 1991, 125,000 calls were received by the helpline before census day and a further 85,000 calls after it.

Graham Jones, Director of the Census said, "We are appealing to the media to help us answer the most common enquiries to take some of the pressure off the helpline. The same questions keep coming up. The public are responding quite remarkably in their quest to get the census form right".

"We have been working with community groups to provide them with material to help people to complete their form or they can pass on enquiries to local census staff."

The most frequent enquiry is from people who have yet to receive their form and are seeking advice about what they should do. Other common queries are from students (who want to know where to complete the form), retired people (who want advice on the section of the form that refers to employment) and people with second homes. (Common questions and answers attached).

The Office for National Statistics is working with Cable and Wireless who operate the helpline to meet the demand. The number of telephone lines is being increased by 450 to over 800 lines and the number of helpline operators is also being increased and will reach 100 today (Tuesday) and 190 later this week. The system has been amended to try and answer as many common queries as possible with recorded information.

If people need assistance and they cannot contact the helpline they can speak to the enumerator who calls at their home or visit the Census website at www.statistics.gov.uk. In addition, information packs have been sent to organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux, Age Concern, ethnic or religious organisations to help them deal with enquiries from the public. Three thousand national and regional organisations have been contacted about the census and many more have been contacted by local census managers seeking support for the census.

Graham Jones said, "We want to reassure people. Census forms are still being delivered. Census forms do not have to be back on 29 April. You can complete and return the form after that date. The helpline will stay open after census day throughout May."

Tony Chorley, Census Account Manager, at Cable and Wireless the company that runs the census helpline said, "This level of response is unprecedented for a government campaign. The helpline is now taking an huge volume of calls daily, a significant proportion of which are quite complex and taking some time to resolve. We are increasing the number of helpline operators and significantly extending the system to meet demand."

*Most Commonly Asked Questions*

I don't have a form yet

Don't worry. Forms are still being delivered—they will be delivered throughout this week.

What if I am away on census day?

You should complete your form as soon as you can and post it back to us in the pre-paid envelope supplied with your form. (This year the census wants to record you at your usual place of residence).

Can I sign the form on behalf of someone else?

Yes, if you've helped someone complete the form or completed the form on their behalf you can sign the form.

Retired people asking whether we really need to know about the former occupations

If you are under 75 then you should complete the questions about education and employment (questions 16–35)/ If you are over 75 it is not compulsory to complete these questions (although you can do if you wish).

Where should students complete the form—at college or at home?

Students should complete the form at their term time address. They should be included in Table 1 and answer questions 1–6 only on the form for their home address.

2nd homes—what do I do?

Fill in the full form at your usual address. The form for your second home will arrive at that property. If you are there, or on your next visit, you should only complete questions H1-H5 in the section entitled "Household Accommodation" on page 3 and sign the declaration on the front of the form. No further questions need to be answered. Please return the form in the pre-paid envelope. Or, if someone is staying in your property (but it is not their usual residence) then they should complete Table 2 and questions H1-H5 on the section entitled "Household Accommodation" on page 3, sign the declaration on page 1 and return the form in the pre-paid envelope.

## Climate Change Levy

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what forecast he has made of annual Exchequer revenues deriving from climate change levy to be paid by the hotel and restaurant industry. [159382]

**Mr. Timms:** It is not possible to say what the precise effect of the levy will be on any one particular industry. The impact of the levy and the associated reduction in NICs will depend on a number of factors, including: the future energy consumption by firms; the level of employment in those firms; what use they make of electricity generated from 'new' renewable sources of energy; and the extent to which they take advantage of the proposed introduction of a system of enhanced capital allowances for energy saving investments. The hotel and restaurant industry stands to benefit from the exemption of electricity generated from 'good quality' combined heat and power plants.

## Correspondence

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 21 March on behalf of his constituent, Mr. Chilton; [159209]

(2) when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 6 March on behalf of his constituent, Mr. D. Pears. [159211]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** I have already replied to the right hon. Member's letters.

### National Insurance

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the publicity campaign run by his Department in 2000 aimed at women who held a valid election to pay National Insurance contributions at the reduced rate. [159224]

**Dawn Primarolo:** An Inland Revenue Press Release published on 29 September 2000 provided details of the letter which was issued throughout October 2000 to around 250,000 women who had previously elected to pay reduced rate National Insurance contributions. The letter informed them of changes to the structure of employee National Insurance contributions introduced from April 2000 and advised them to consider their elections in light of these changes but taking into account their own particular circumstances. A dedicated helpline was set up to provide further information and assistance and some 63,000 telephone inquiries were received.

### IR35

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes have been made to Inland Revenue guidelines on the implementation of IR35 since 1 April. [159269]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The wording of the guidance manual provided to Inland Revenue employees regarding the interpretation and application of the law on employment status is being reviewed; the underlying case law has not been changed.

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revision has been made since 1 April to his Department's estimate of the revenue which will be raised by IR35. [159268]

**Dawn Primarolo:** None.

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what cost has been incurred to date in the implementation of IR35; and what the projected cost is for the 2001–02 financial year. [159226]

**Dawn Primarolo:** So far, the main additional activity undertaken by the Inland Revenue associated with the introduction of the 'ir35' legislation has been the provision of advice to taxpayers and their advisers. This service has been provided by existing staff as part of their normal duties.

### VAT (Hearing Aids and Spectacles)

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about changes he has made in VAT charges on *(a)* hearing aids and *(b)* glasses since May 1997. [158878]

**Dawn Primarolo** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]*: VAT was introduced on hearing aids and spectacles at the standard rate of 15 per cent. in 1988. The standard rate of VAT was increased to 17.5 per cent. in 1991. There have been no changes to VAT charged on hearing aids or spectacles since then.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if asylum seekers are given health checks; if they are treated for *(a)* TB, *(b)* AIDS and *(c)* other infectious diseases; and what arrangements are made for maintaining such treatment when asylum seekers are dispersed by private sector accommodation providers. [158919]

**Mrs. Roche:** Asylum seekers are eligible for free treatment by a General Practitioner (GP) and hospital care on the same basis as anyone else eligible to receive National Health Service treatment. Health authorities are encouraged to make contact with asylum seekers and to offer them screening for tuberculosis.

The National Asylum Support Service is responsible for destitute asylum seekers and, where they give consent, is able to pass their names and addresses on to the health authority responsible for the area to which they are dispersed. Both the accommodation provider and the local one stop service will assist the asylum seekers with registration with a GP.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the reasons were for the increase in the projected costs of *(a)* the Warnings Index and *(b)* the National Asylum Seeker's Service IS/IT system as listed on page 116 of his Department's Annual report. [159427]

**Mrs. Roche:** The projected cost of the Warnings Index Redevelopment Project has risen to allow for additional terminals at ports and Immigration Service offices as part of the expansion of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. While there has been delay to the date of expected completion of redevelopment, this has not added to expected payments from Home Office to ICL as it is a fixed price contract.

The original cost estimate for Information System/Information Technology (IS/IT) for the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) was £6 million in 1999–2000 and 2000–01, for a 'day one' system when NASS started on 1 April 2000 and subsequent enhancements. The £15 million cost estimate plans for possible further developments up to March 2004, though these have not yet been fully designed or commissioned.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the latest out-turn is for the percentage of substantive asylum applications decided within two months. [159407]

**Mrs. Roche:** Provisional estimates from the Immigration and Nationality Directorate indicate that about half of substantive new applications made in January 2001 (the latest month where data are available) received an initial decision within two months.

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to publish the results of a review of the voucher system for persons seeking asylum in the UK. [158970]

**Mrs. Roche** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* We had hoped to complete the review early this year. Unfortunately it is taking longer than anticipated to address the issues arising from the review. We now aim to announce our conclusions as early as possible in the summer.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to achieve his PSA target of reducing asylum decision times to two months or less in 70 per cent. of cases. [159032]

**Mrs. Roche** *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) Business Plan target for 2000–01 was to decide 70 per cent. of new substantive asylum applications within two months by March 2001. Provisional estimates from IND indicate that about half of substantive new applications made in January 2001 received an initial decision within two months. Performance on applications made in February and March is improved and we are on course to deliver our Public Service Agreement target of deciding 60 per cent. of new substantive asylum cases within two months for the 12 months from April 2001.

**Mr. Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers who arrived from Kosovo as minors and applied for refugee status in 1999 are awaiting a decision on their case; and when Miss Klaida Eminaj, a constituent, who entered the United Kingdom in 1999 will get a decision on her case. [158742]

**Mrs. Roche:** Information on the number of asylum seekers who arrived from Kosovo as minors and applied for asylum in 1999 is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case files. Information relating to the total number of applications from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) includes the Kosovo figures, and is published in the Asylum Bulletin 1999, a copy of which is available in the Library.

A decision has been reached on Miss Eminaj's application and this will be notified to her via her representative shortly.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to announce the conclusions of his review of the asylum voucher system. [159405]

**Mrs. Roche:** We had hoped to complete the review early this year. Unfortunately it is taking longer than anticipated to address the issues arising from the review. We now aim to announce our conclusions as early as possible in the summer.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which organisations have made representations to him during his review of the asylum voucher system, if he will place copies of these representations in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [159404]

**Mrs. Roche:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) on 8 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 421W.

### Oakington Reception Centre

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Oakington Reception Centre will operate at full capacity. [159402]

**Mrs. Roche:** Oakington has been fully operational since 28 January 2001.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applicants were held at Oakington during the financial year 2000–01; what the average period of time was for which an asylum seeker stayed at Oakington; and if he will make a statement. [159403]

**Mrs. Roche:** From 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, there were 5,064 principal applicants received at Oakington. These consisted of 4,430 single applicants and 634 families (with 1,210 dependants). Although data for the financial year are not available, the Immigration and Nationality Directorate estimate that the average stay was between seven and 10 days.

### Home Office HQ

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to sign a contract to move to a new London headquarters. [159398]

**Mr. Straw:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on 28 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 1167W. Contract negotiations for developing the Marsham Street site as a public private partnership project are currently in progress with Anne's Gate Property plc, the preferred bidder. These negotiations are not expected to complete until later this year.

### Race Awareness Training

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which Ministers in his Department have completed a course of race awareness training. [159397]

**Mr. Straw:** The Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Minister for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) and my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State have completed a specific race awareness training course.

### Operation Leighton

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been *(a)* arrested, *(b)* detained and *(c)* charged with offences; how many had removal or deportation proceedings instituted against them as a result of Operation Leighton; and if he will make a statement. [159429]

**Mrs. Roche:** Operation Leighton, conducted on the morning of 24 April, resulted in 18 people being arrested on suspicion of involvement in facilitation, production of false documents and organising labour. A further 107 persons were arrested on suspicion of entering the United Kingdom illegally, overstaying or working in breach of entry conditions, of that total 94 were detained. To date 77 have been removed.

### Commission for Racial Equality

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the purpose is of the increase in the budget of the Commission for Racial Equality for 2001–02 as set out on page 117 of his annual report. [159428]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** Additional grant-in-aid has been provided to enable the Commission for Racial Equality to meet its new responsibilities under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and to modernise the organisation.

### Asur Saribal

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will review the refugee status of Mr. Asur Saribal. [159494]

**Mrs. Roche:** A final decision concerning Mr. Saribal's immigration status will be made when we have completed our inquiries and considered all the issues which have been raised in this case.

### Correspondence

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 20 March on behalf of his constituent, Mr. W. L. Wainscott. [159210]

**Mr. Straw:** I am sorry that I have not yet replied to the right hon. Member's letter of 20 March on behalf of Mr. Wainscott. The delay has been caused by difficulties in locating case files which had been put into storage. I understand that these papers are now available and I will reply to the right hon. Member shortly.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 6 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 499W, when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive the reply which was promised. [159227]

**Mr. Straw:** I have replied to the right hon. Member's letter today. As the right hon. Member is aware, my Department had no trace of receiving his original letter. I am afraid that the copy was then misplaced. I am very sorry that the reply has been so severely delayed.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 15 February on behalf of his constituent, Miss R. G. G. Bird. [159212]

**Mr. Straw:** I am sorry that I have not yet replied to the right hon. Member. The delay has been caused by a sudden increase in the volume of correspondence on sentencing issues. I have written to the right hon. Member today.

### Immigration Detainees

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those people currently held in detention under immigration law, indicating the number held in each *(a)* institution, *(b)* prison and *(c)* police station. [158973]

**Mrs. Roche** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The latest available information, relating to the number of persons detained under Immigration Act 1971 powers in each place of detention is given in the table. Information on persons detained in police stations is not held centrally and could be obtained only by examining individual case files at disproportionate cost.

*Persons recorded as being in detention[1] in the United Kingdom solely under Immigration Act powers as at 31 March 2001, by place of detention*

| *Location* | *Total detainees* |
|---|---|
| *Immigration Detention Centres*[2] | |
| Campsfield House | 179 |
| Dover Harbour | 23 |
| Harmondsworth | 90 |
| Harwich | 2 |
| Longport | 4 |
| Tinsley House | 100 |
| *Prison establishments*[3] | |
| Acklington | 2 |
| Bedford | 5 |
| Belmarsh | 52 |
| Birmingham | 6 |
| Brixton | 14 |
| Canterbury | 4 |
| Cardiff | 49 |
| Chelmsford | 6 |
| Cornton Vale | 2 |
| Craiginches | 7 |
| Doncaster | 11 |
| Dorchester | 4 |
| Durham | 3 |
| Feltham | 6 |
| Forest Bank | 6 |
| Gateside | 45 |
| Glen Parva | 2 |
| Haslar | 135 |
| High Down | 69 |
| Highpoint | 2 |
| Holloway | 22 |
| Holme House | 50 |
| Leeds | 2 |
| Lewes | 2 |
| Lincoln | 2 |
| Lindholme | 105 |
| Liverpool | 76 |
| Magilligan | 12 |
| Manchester | 4 |
| New Hall | 2 |
| Norwich | 3 |
| Pentonville | 13 |
| Rochester | 172 |
| Wandsworth | 60 |
| Winchester | 47 |
| Woodhill | 2 |
| Wormwood Scrubs | 22 |
| Other Prison establishments | 12 |
| Oakington Reception Centre | 307 |
| Total | 1,743 |

[1] Figures exclude persons detained in police cells (other than at Dover Harbour).
[2] Figures include the use of police cells at Dover Harbour.
[3] The figures for Prison establishments may include some persons detained under dual immigration and other powers.

### Prison Inspections

**Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what decisions have been taken about the renewal of the contract of HM Chief Inspector of

Prisons when the present contract expires; and if he will recommend the re-appointment of Sir David Ramsbotham for a further term. [158377]

**Mr. Boateng:** Sir David Ramsbotham was appointed for a period of five years, which expired on 30 November 2000. The terms of his appointment allow it to be extended for a maximum period of three years by mutual agreement. Sir David accepted an extension of his appointment until the end of July 2001. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 9 June last year that Sir David would retire on that date, 9 June 2000, *Official Report*, column 392W, and on 14 November that the post of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons would be advertised in the New Year, *Official Report*, column 638W. We are recruiting a successor to Sir David in accordance with the guidelines issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

**Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action was taken by *(a)* him, *(b)* his officials and *(c)* the Director of the Prison Service on receipt of Sir David Ramsbotham's recommendation that no more children should be admitted to two specified wings of the Stoke Heath Young Offenders' Institution to ensure that this recommendation was immediately complied with; what changes were introduced in conditions in those wings; and if children are now again being admitted to the two wings. [158375]

**Mr. Boateng:** Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons inspected Stoke Heath in October last year following a difficult period of change. At the time a new governor had just been appointed. With the support of a new management team she immediately began overhauling the regime. Substantial improvements have been made which enable Stoke Heath to continue taking juvenile offenders. In particular:

The numbers of adjudications and applications (i.e. requests and complaints) have fallen since October.

The report counted with alleged assaults all incidents needing completions of an injury or near miss form. The total has been halved.

A new anti-bullying unit, supported by confidential questionnaires, is dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

In-cell television has been introduced, leading to a marked improvement in behaviour and in the management of vulnerable trainees. Fewer trainees are harming themselves and there is much less shouting between cells.

First Night Care Officers have been introduced to deal with newly-arrived trainees.

Stoke Heath is meeting and exceeding Prison Service accredited education targets.

The Prison Service and the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (which is responsible for commissioning and purchasing places for young people in the juvenile secure estate) carefully monitor the establishment's progress, and would take further corrective action should it prove necessary.

### Women Prisoners (Children)

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women sent to prison in England and Wales during the last 12 months had children under the age of five years at the time they were sentenced. [158386]

**Mr. Boateng:** Details of the number and ages of children are not recorded on the Prison Service's Inmate Information System. However a survey to determine the level of demand for places in mother and baby units was undertaken in October 2000. Provisional results from the survey show that there were approximately 380 female prisoners with children aged under the age of five. The total female prison population at the end of October 2000 was 3,433.

### Raymond Morris

**Mr. Bruce George:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what tariff has been set for the imprisonment of Raymond Morris, a life sentence prisoner. [158568]

**Mr. Boateng:** Raymond Morris' tariff was set at 25 years. It is now expired.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Job Vacancies (Chelmsford)

**Mr. Burns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many job vacancies were notified to the Chelmsford Jobcentre in each of the last six months. [158189]

**Ms Jowell** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* Responsibility for the subject of the question has been delegated to the Employment Service agency under its Chief Executive. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from Mark Neale to Mr. Simon Burns, dated April 2001:*

As the Employment Service is an Executive Agency, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment has asked Leigh Lewis to reply to your question about the number of job vacancies notified to the Chelmsford Jobcentre in each of the last six months. This is something which falls within the responsibilities delegated to Mr Lewis as Chief Executive of the Agency. I am replying on Mr Lewis' behalf.

Vacancies notified to Chelmsford Jobcentre were as followed:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| October 2000 | 469 |
| November 2000 | 770 |
| December 2000 | 311 |
| January 2001 | 651 |
| February 2001 | 706 |
| March 2001 | 915 |

I hope this is helpful.

### National Grid for Learning

**Mr. Reed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will name the successful applicants for certification under Phase Three of National Grid for Learning Managed Services. [159495]

**Mr. Wills:** National Grid for Learning Managed Services have helped develop a strong, healthy and competitive market for ICT equipment and services to education. Suppliers are proud to hold this certification and it is recognised by both suppliers and customers alike as a quality mark. The NGfL Managed Services Advisory

Board has approved the certification of a further four companies under this the third successive year of competition, bringing the total number of suppliers certified to provide NGfL Managed Services to 22. The successful new applicants under Phase Three are:

The CSE/COMPUSYS Consortium

Education Joint IT Unit, Staffordshire county council

TEKSYS Ltd.

TINY Computers Ltd.

### EC Child Labour Recommendation

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the implications of Commission Recommendation C(2000) 2674 for United Kingdom law, indicating the subsequent proposals under discussion. [158750]

**Ms Jowell:** Commission Recommendation C(2000) 2674 of 15 September 2000 calls on member states, which have not yet done so, to ratify the International Labour Organisation's (ILO) Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, adopted on 17 June 1999. The UK ratified the ILO Convention on 23 March 2000.

### Stockholm European Council

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 10 April, *Official Report*, column 575W, on the Stockholm European Council, what explanatory memoranda he has sent to the Vote or Printed Paper Offices of Parliament in respect of these documents; in respect of paragraph 9 of the Stockholm Conclusions, which body of the European Community is charged with producing a joint report on these topics; and in what manner the Government are represented on this body. [158812]

**Ms Jowell:** The Commission communication on the "future evolution of social protection from a long-term point of view: safe and sustainable pensions" was deposited on 27 November 2000, EM number 12793/00 (21766). The progress report of the Economic Policy Committee on

"the impact of ageing populations on public pension systems"

was preparatory work for the Commission communication on

"the contribution of public finances to growth and employment: improving quality and sustainability"

which was sent to European scrutiny committees 15 January 2001, EM number 5260/01. This work was subsequently taken forward for the Stockholm European Council in the form of the joint Commission and Council report which was sent to scrutiny on 19 March 2001, EM number 6997/01.

The Commission's Economic Paper 138 entitled "The economic consequences of ageing populations" is a Commission internal working document and therefore not depositable in Parliament. However, this text is accessible through the Commission's section of the European Union's "Europa" website.

Paragraph 9 of the Stockholm Conclusions calls on the Commission and the Council to produce a joint report, for the Spring European Council in 2002, on how to increase labour force participation and promote active ageing. The UK Government are represented as a member state of the Council of the European Union and on the various committees which will be involved in the production of this report, for example the Employment Committee.

### Oxford and Cambridge Universities (Admissions)

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make it his policy to require Oxford and Cambridge universities to publish annually in a standardised format information on admissions, disaggregated by college, in respect of previous educational establishment categorised by *(a)* private schools, *(b)* state grammar schools, *(c)* comprehensive schools, formerly grant maintained, *(d)* other comprehensive schools, *(e)* sixth form colleges and *(f)* other further education colleges. [158034]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 25 April 2001]:* The Secretary of State does not have any plans to require Oxford or Cambridge to publish admissions data. Oxford and Cambridge already publish data on applications and admissions which I referred to in my reply on 3 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 124W. Both institutions are aware of the need to continue to review and improve both their admissions procedures and the information which they make publicly available and we look forward to further progress as a result.

### Student Loans

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will accept the recommendation in the report, Student Mobility on the Map, a copy of which has been sent to him, that United Kingdom students studying abroad should have comparable access to student loans to that available to United Kingdom domestic students. [158877]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Financial support is available to UK domiciled students studying abroad as part of a higher education course undertaken at an institution in the UK, through student loans and European programmes such as SOCRATES-ERASMUS. We have no plans to change these policies, which already recognise the benefits of student mobility.

### Vocational A Levels

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of pupils gained a grade A to E in the first unit of the vocational A level examination in the current year. [158851]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The results of the unit tests of the Vocational A level qualification are not graded. They are not qualifications in their own right.

### Beacon Colleges

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the beacon colleges, indicating how much money each has received from the Standards Fund. [158999]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Fifteen colleges have been awarded Beacon status. They are Bishop Burton College, Blackpool and The Fylde College, Carmel College, Greenhead College, Havering College of Further and Higher Education, John Leggott Sixth Form College, Knowsley Community College, Lewisham College, North Lindsey College, Northern College for Residential Adult Education, Park Lane College, Sir John Deane's College, South Cheshire College, St. Charles Catholic Sixth Form College and Tameside College. Every Beacon College is eligible for £50,000 from the Standards Fund to help it promote and disseminate examples of good practice.

### Internet Access

**Mr. Oaten:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the local authorities which have implemented the New Opportunities Fund internet access programme. [158873]

**Mr. Wills** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* All local education authorities (LEAs) in England have implemented the New Opportunities Fund (NOF) programme. A significant proportion of schools in every LEA have now registered with ICT training providers approved by NOF, and the number of LEAs where a majority of schools have registered is increasing rapidly.

### New Deal

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of those people who have left the New Deal since its inception have obtained unsubsidised employment lasting for at least six months. [158844]

**Ms Jowell** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Over 279,000 young people had moved into work by the end of January 2001, 247,840 into unsubsidised jobs. We do not have figures for the length of time each of these jobs lasts but any job can offer considerable benefits to the participant through increased self-confidence and useful work experience. There is no doubt that New Deal is having a positive impact: independent research by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research concluded that without New Deal youth unemployment would be twice as high.

## SCOTLAND

### Special Advisers

**Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many special advisers are employed by *(a)* her and *(b)* the Minister of State; and what the total annual cost was of these advisers for each Minister. [154253]

**Mrs. Liddell** *[holding answer 19 March 2001]:* I have two special advisers and the Minister of State has none. As both advisers joined only in February 2001 no annual cost is yet available.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on how many occasions between 5 June 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158547]

**Mr. Lock:** The Lord Chancellor's Department has one special adviser who has never travelled abroad in an official capacity.

### Family Visit Appeals

**Mr. Malins:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many family visit appeals have been lodged *(a)* for a full hearing and *(b)* for a review of the papers since 2 October 2000: how many of these have been determined and, in each category, how many have been (i) allowed and (ii) dismissed; when she expects to complete the ministerial review; and if she will make a statement. [159206]

**Jane Kennedy:** The Immigration Appellate Authority has received 834 family visit visa appeals in the period from 2 October 2000 through to 20 April 2001. Of that total 326 appeals were received for an oral hearing and 508 for a determination on the papers alone.

Over the same period 538 appeals have been determined by the Adjudicators and the outcomes were as follows:

| | *Allowed* | *Dismissed* |
|---|---|---|
| Oral Appeals | 89 | 46 |
| Paper Appeals | 143 | 260 |

The Immigration Appeal Tribunal, the higher tier of the Authority, has received 14 substantive appeals. Of these, three appeals have been determined on the papers alone and all have been allowed.

The initial ministerial review was completed in January this year, when the Home Secretary announced reduced visit visa fee rates. A review of the wider scheme will be completed by the end of December this year.

**Mr. Malins:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when *(a)* he and *(b)* the Legal Services Commission will make a statement about the procedure to be adopted by those eligible for controlled legal representation to have family visit appeals fees paid as a disbursement. [159207]

**Mr. Lock:** Full guidance on the availability of Community Legal Service funding for family visit appeals is currently being prepared by the Legal Services Commission for consultation and future inclusion in the General Civil Contract. The Commission has set out its initial guidance on this in Issue 34 of its publication "Focus", dated March 2001. Copies of Focus 34 have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Monday 30 April 2001*

## DEFENCE

### Chinook Air Accident

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the E5 fault code found on the FADEC of RAF Chinook ZD576. [158185]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The E5 fault code which was found in the memory of the DECU of RAF Chinook ZD576 indicated that a soft fault had occurred at some point over the life of the DECU since delivery. A "soft fault" cannot affect the safe operation of the control system and is therefore one that has no impact on the normal control of the aircraft.

The rotational speed (N2) of each engine's Power Turbine Spool is detected by two sensors. The E5 code would be displayed either because of a power interrupt (switching from the Auxiliary Power Unit to main generators, or the reverse) or if a discrepancy of 5 per cent. or more is detected between the two N2 signals. When such a discrepancy is detected the lower N2 signal is disregarded (or locked out). If the other signal is then lost, the original locked-out signal will be re-acquired. Should both signals be lost, the fuel to the engines will be maintained at the pre-failure rate.

The "E5" fault on the pre-production software that caused the Wilmington incident was significant as the system at that time operated differently. The team undertaking the test at Wilmington did not appreciate the significance of the E5 signal, which was displayed due to a discrepancy of 5 per cent. or more between the two N2 signals, causing the lowest signal to be latched. The team then removed a connector which resulted in the loss of the only remaining N2 signal. With the one signal latched, and the loss of the remaining N2 signal, unlike the system now, the pre-production software did not re-acquire the original locked-out signal. Instead the DECU "saw" an N2 value of zero, and in order to restore the N2, the system provided more fuel to increase the speed of the power turbine. This caused the rotors to accelerate which seriously damaged the aircraft.

After the Wilmington incident the software was amended hence a similar incident could not have caused the Mull of Kintyre accident. Moreover, as I informed the hon. Member on 21 February 2000, *Official Report*, column 730W, the Air Accidents Investigation Board's report of their technical investigation into the accident found no evidence of a technical malfunction that could have contributed to the accident, with the possible exception of a radar altimeter system fault.

### New DERA

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total cost of changing the name New DERA to QuiniteQ will be. [158864]

**Mr. Hoon:** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 233W, to my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George).

### Marine Richards

**Sir John Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will complete his *(a)* disciplinary and *(b)* other inquiries into the death of Marine Richards; and how many cases involving deaths of service men in the UK have yet to have all proceedings and investigations completed. [159682]

**Mr. Spellar:** The disciplinary and other inquiries related to the death of Marine Richards are legal procedures and are wholly outside MOD Ministers' control in terms of their scope, their duration, and the conclusions they reach. The next stage in the process is the Coroner's Inquest, scheduled for 4–25 June 2001. Due process demands that only after its conclusion can a Military Police investigation be completed. This will be submitted to Headquarters Royal Marines who will then consider whether to recommend disciplinary action against any person or persons in connection with the death. If such a recommendation is made disciplinary action should follow, either summarily or by court-martial. Once any legal or disciplinary proceedings have been concluded, a Board of Inquiry will be convened. Its findings will be conveyed and explained to Marine Richards' next of kin. Though it is impossible to estimate accurately, these procedures are at the least expected to take a number of months to complete. They continue, however, to be pursued with as much speed and diligence as are consistent with thoroughness and proper respect for the rights of all those involved.

We have taken "proceedings and investigations" yet to be completed to include outstanding Coroners' inquests, service and civil police investigations and service Boards of Inquiry. These include not just training accidents but numerous other cases such as road traffic accidents and incidents involving personnel not on duty. For service men in the UK, the figures are:

Army: 81 cases

RAF: 18 cases

RN and RM: 11 cases.

**Sir John Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what lessons he has drawn from the death of Marine Richards; and what procedures have been put into place to avoid deaths in similar circumstances. [159683]

**Mr. Spellar:** The key lesson reinforced by Marine Wayne Richards' tragic death is that, whenever live ammunition is carried during training, procedures to prevent its being mistaken for blank must be continually monitored and frequently reviewed to ensure they are as fail-safe as humanly possible. The Army's independent Training Accident Investigation Team (TAIT) report, completed a month after this fatality, recommended improvements to the orders and procedures for carriage and identification of live ammunition on Woodbury Common. These improvements have been implemented, together with a timetable of frequent checks on compliance with revised orders and procedures, and were jointly reviewed by the TAIT and Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in January 2001. The HSE raised no substantive comments.

The TAIT report has also been promulgated through the Army chain of command, and general recommendations aimed at preventing any recurrence have been issued throughout the armed services.

### COSMIC Security Classification

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the types of information covered by the COSMIC security classification. [159675]

**Mr. Spellar:** The term COSMIC is not a classification but a qualifying marking used by NATO. It signifies that the information is the property of NATO and remains the property of the originator and may not be passed outside NATO without the originator's consent. This qualifying marking is used only with top secret information, the unauthorised disclosure of which would result in exceptionally grave damage to NATO. "COSMIC top secret" is the highest classification marking in NATO and it is equivalent to "UK top secret".

### Depleted Uranium

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the Minister of State's letter of 15 March, D/Min (AF) TS 0301/01/M, what consideration he is giving to the problem of lymph node analysis. [158779]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Ministry of Defence continues to consider what appropriate research is required in respect of DU, and we propose to expose our conclusions to independent scrutiny in due course. In the meantime, I have nothing further to add to the information given to my hon. Friend by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces in his letter of 15 March, a copy of which will be placed in the Library of the House.

### European Armaments Agency

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on the establishment of a European armaments agency; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the 'Masterplan for the European Armaments Agency'. [159282]

**Mr. Hoon:** Work by the nations of the Western European Armaments Group to examine the possible creation of a European Armaments Agency is making steady progress, with the aim of providing advice to national defence Ministers on its principles of operation this autumn. I am placing a copy of the "Masterplan for the European Armaments Agency" dated 17 November 1998 in the Library of the House. Revisions to the Masterplan which take into account developments since its original publication, including to its timetable of activities, are under discussion by the Group's officials.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Aid Policy

**Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what account she takes of religious freedom in developing countries when deciding levels of UK development assistance; [159395]

(2) what plans she has to make compliance with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a feature of UK aid policy; [159394]

(3) what discussions she has had with aid recipient countries about compliance with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; [159391]

(4) if she will list the UK aid programmes that have freedom from religious persecution as their primary objective. [159390]

**Clare Short:** The objective of my Department is the elimination of poverty. Our central focus is therefore respect for the human rights of the poor. Frequently the poorest are ethnic and religious minorities that face discrimination and social exclusion. Our strategy on human rights is set out in "Realising human rights for poor people" published in October 2000.

### Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on how many occasions between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158548]

**Clare Short:** Departmental special advisers from my Department undertook two visits abroad in an official capacity between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001. There are no non-departmental special advisers working for my Department.

### Helplines

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by her Department and its agencies. [159503]

**Clare Short:** DFID operates a Public Enquiry Point which handles written, telephone and email inquiries from the general public. In the period 2000–01, the Public Enquiry Point dealt with a total of 10,410 inquiries.

## SOLICITOR-GENERAL

### Operation Rose

**Mr. Peter Atkinson:** To ask the Solicitor-General when the trials of those accused of serious offences arising from Northumbria police's Operation Rose will be restarted; and if he will make a statement. [159529]

**The Solicitor-General:** Operation Rose is a large scale investigation by Northumbria police into allegations of historic physical and sexual abuse made by former residents of local authority care homes in the counties of Tyne and Wear and Northumberland, dating back to the 1960s. Operation Rose began in 1997, and the first prosecution was brought in the same year. The first trial of an Operation Rose case took place at Newcastle Crown court in 1998.

Thereafter, Operation Rose continued, in a number of distinct phases, throughout 1998, 1999 and 2000. The investigation is now almost complete, and there have been a number of prosecutions during this period.

So far, 27 defendants have been charged with various offences. Nine separate Crown court trials have taken place within the period from 1 January 2000 to 31 March 2001 and one retrial has taken place.

Of the 27 defendants prosecuted, five have been found guilty, eight acquitted by a jury and two have been found not guilty at the direction of the judge. Indictments in respect of seven of the defendants have been stayed by the trial judge in three separate trials, two defendants have died awaiting trial and three defendants are to be tried later this year at Newcastle Crown court.

Trial dates have been set for June and September 2001, in respect of two of the outstanding cases, and it is anticipated that the trial of the final case will take place before the end of the year, although a firm date has yet to be fixed. No further prosecutions are anticipated at this time.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Research and Development

**Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list funding for scientific research and development in *(a)* the United Kingdom and *(b)* from the United States from (i) Government (ii) industry and (iii) charities for the year 1999–2000, in absolute terms, as a percentage of total research and development and as a percentage of gross domestic profit. [158803]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** The latest data from ONS for expenditure on R&D performed in the UK in 1999 are:

| *Sector providing the funding* | *Total £ million* | *Percentage of total* | *Percentage of GDP* |
|---|---|---|---|
| Government Departments | 2,299 | 13.8 | 0.25 |
| Research Councils | 1,199 | 7.2 | 0.13 |
| Higher Education Funding Councils | 1,157 | 6.9 | 0.13 |
| High Education Institutions | 143 | 0.9 | 0.02 |
| Business enterprise | 8,235 | 49.4 | 0.91 |
| Private non-profit | 701 | 4.2 | 0.08 |
| Abroad | 2,930 | 17.6 | 0.32 |
| Total | 16,664 | 100.0 | 1.84 |

Data for previous years can be found in Table 6.3, on page 71 of SET Statistics 2000 (Cm 4902) a copy of which is in the Library of the House, and is also available from DTI's website at http://www.dti.gov.uk/ost/setstats.

The ONS surveys do not identify the source country for expenditure from abroad.

**Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the funding for scientific research and development from *(a)* Government, *(b)* industry and *(c)* charities for each of the years since 1997, in absolute amounts and as a percentage of total research and development spend. [158802]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** The information requested can be found in Table 6.3 on page 71 of SET Statistics 2000 (Cm 4902) a copy of which is in the Library of the House and is also available from DTI's website at http://www.dti.gov.uk/ost/setstats.

### Ultra-low Sulphur Fuel

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects ultra-low sulphur diesel and ultra-low sulphur petrol will be made readily available at all petrol stations. [159374]

**Mr. Hain:** Ultra-low sulphur diesel has been widely available across the UK since the latter part of 1999. Current information is that it is available at the vast majority of retail petrol outlets in the UK.

The latest estimates produced by my Department are that, as of early April, over 80 per cent. of total UK petrol retail sites were converted to supply ultra-low sulphur petrol (ULSP). This means that ULSP accounts for 94 per cent. of total sales of petrol in the UK. All oil companies in the UK are making supplies of ULSP available to petrol stations in the UK. However, the logistical problems of supplying some of the smaller, more remote stations make it difficult to give a date by which all petrol stations will be selling ULSP.

### Broadband

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to fast track regulatory changes, in anticipation of establishing OFCOM, in order to speed up broadband access in the UK. [159478]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The Government's plans to facilitate roll-out of higher bandwidth and broadband services are set out in "UK online: the broadband future", which was published on 13 February 2001. These plans are not dependent on regulatory changes. Legislation to establish OFCOM, as proposed in "A New Future for Communications" (Cm 5010) published on 12 December 2000, will be brought forward at the earliest opportunity.

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets his Department has *(a)* for broadband access by UK households and *(b)* for the number of companies providing broadband access to UK households. [159479]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* As the Government announced in the recent White Paper "Opportunities for All in a World of Change", our goal is for the UK to have the most extensive and competitive broadband market in the G7 by 2005. This commitment was backed up by the publication of an action plan, "UK online: the broadband future", which set out how the Government will facilitate the roll-out of higher bandwidth and broadband services across the country.

"UK online: the broadband future" also described the difficulties in assessing how quickly demand for these services will grow at such an early stage of this market. This analysis still holds and we believe that it would be premature to set targets of the sort that the hon. Member describes. DTI in collaboration with the e-Envoy, and aided by the recently established Broadband Stakeholder Group, will continue to monitor and assist the development of this important new technology.

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to ensure that Oftel will be equipped with adequate personnel with the relevant technical expertise to regulate competition in the broadband market. [159477]

**Ms Hewitt** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The staffing of Oftel is a matter for the Director General. Total resources for Oftel have been increased by 18 per cent. for 2001–02 compared with 2000–01. I and my colleagues meet the Director General from time to time to discuss a range of issues including the development of the broadband market.

### Below-cost Sales

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the reasons given by the Competition Commission not to make recommendations when it had identified adverse effects associated with the sale of products below cost. [159570]

**Dr. Howells:** The Competition Commission, in their report on supermarkets, made an adverse finding in relation to persistent selling below cost of some frequently purchased items, but recommended that no action be taken. In the press notice he issued when the report was published (10 October 2000), my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry outlined the reasons for this conclusion—essentially, the possible remedies would themselves have adverse effects and the intervention and monitoring required would be disproportionate to the problem.

### Religious Freedom

**Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the *(a)* Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and *(b)* Secretary of State for International Development about educating UK businesses to employ business practices that promote religious freedom overseas. [159393]

**Dr. Howells** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* There have not been any discussions between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and his colleagues at FCO and DfID on this issue.

However, promotion of human rights is at the heart of the UK's foreign policy and HMG regard religious freedom as a fundamental human right. The Government condemn instances where individuals are persecuted because of their faith, wherever it happens and whatever the religion of the individual or group concerned.

The Government acknowledge that UK businesses operating in international markets can play an important role in promoting human rights and are keen to help encourage this as part of the work to promote Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Last year I was appointed as Minister with responsibility for corporate social responsibility with a remit including improving co-ordination of activity across Government to promote CSR, including establishment of an Interdepartmental Group of officials. Both FCO and DfID are among the Departments represented on this group.

Government are working in a variety of ways to promote business awareness of human rights. For example, DTI supported Business in the Community's report "Winning With Integrity" which includes practical advice to businesses on how they can ensure their operations respect human rights. The DTI is actively promoting the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprise which refer to businesses respecting human rights and works closely with other Government Departments in these efforts. FCO has established a Global Citizenship Unit with a remit to work with Trade Partners UK, other Government Departments, individual companies, NGOs and posts abroad in support of global citizenship initiatives. British Trade International recognises that companies applying corporate social responsibility principles will have a better understanding of key social and environmental issues and will manage such risks in a more effective and competitive manner.

### Correspondence

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 19 March on behalf of his constituent, Mr. R. G. Reeve. [159691]

**Mr. Byers:** As indicated in the response from my office dated 23 April, the letter has been transferred to the Health and Safety Executive for reply, as the matters raised by Mr. R. G. Reeve fall within its area of responsibility.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will ensure that the request by Holne Chase Hotel in Dartmoor National Park under the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme in respect of a loan of £250,000 is agreed to; and if he will amend his Department's guidelines for the scheme in respect of hotels and tourist attractions in National Parks to take account of the foot and mouth crisis, with particular reference to companies which have already had a loan guaranteed under the scheme. [159607]

**Ms Hewitt:** Applications can be considered only from lenders once they are satisfied there is a viable business proposal that meets Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme criteria and are prepared to make the loan available, subject to a Government guarantee. All loans guaranteed before April 1993 are not counted towards the maximum borrowing under the Scheme. There are no plans to extend this criterion further.

### Chelsea Village Plc

**Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he began an investigation into share trading with the public listed company Chelsea Village; how many hidden trusts own Chelsea Village plc shares; how many of these hidden trusts are registered in the West Indies; and if hidden trusts have traded Chelsea Village shares between themselves. [159527]

**Dr. Howells:** I cannot discuss the affairs of individual companies but if my hon. Friend has information to suggest that there should be an investigation into the ownership of shares of Chelsea Village plc the Department will consider it.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions between 5 June 2000 and 31 March 2001 special advisers of the Chief Whip and Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158549]

**The Prime Minister:** None.

### Prime Minister's Office (Overseas Visits)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions his *(a)* Chief of Staff, *(b)* Chief Press Secretary and *(c)* other members of his office travelled abroad on official business between 5 June 2000 and 31 March 2001. [158591]

**The Prime Minister:** Between 5 June 2000 and 31 March 2001, my Chief Press Secretary, my Chief of Staff and other members of my office have travelled overseas on official business, including accompanying me on official visits, on 39 occasions. All visits have been made in accordance with the rules set out in the Civil Service Management Code.

These arrangements follow the practice of successive Administrations.

### Policy Unit (Overseas Visits)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions members of the Number 10 Policy Unit travelled abroad on official business between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001. [158592]

**The Prime Minister:** Between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 members of the No. 10 Policy Unit have travelled overseas on official business on 63 occasions. All visits have been made in accordance with the rules set out in the Civil Service Management Code.

These arrangements follow the practice of successive Administrations.

### Euro

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Prime Minister which UK companies, in receipt of funds from the European Investment bank since 1997, have lobbied him over UK participation in the euro; which business leaders on the boards of the above companies have been associated with the Britain in Europe Campaign; and if he will make a statement. [158752]

**The Prime Minister:** I regularly meet a wide range of business leaders. The European Investment bank's annual report lists companies which have received funds from them. A list of Britain in Europe board and council members is available on its website www.britainineurope.org.

### Motorola

**Mr. Ashton:** To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with Motorola on the future of its mobile phone factory in Bathgate; and if he will hold similar discussions with Ericsson of Worksop Notts, on the future of its mobile telephone plant. [159120]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]*: I spoke to Motorola on Tuesday 10 April in support of the company choosing to maintain production at Easter Inch, the largest, private sector manufacturing site in Scotland, rather than closing it to focus all its production at the company's plant at Flensburg.

Now Motorola has made its decision the Scottish Executive will pursue with the company future options for the Bathgate site. There are a variety of options to explore with the company—ranging from sale as a going concern including to a contract manufacturer of mobile phones or another related business. The other alternatives include new employment for a new employer purchasing the site. We regret the redundancies, and Invest UK has already begun to assist the Scottish Executive with the task of future options.

In order to assist the individuals affected the Scottish Executive is setting-up a Taskforce with Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian, Employment Service, West Lothian Council, the Careers Service, Benefits Agency and the STUC. The Taskforce will draw up an Action Plan specifically to meet the needs of the Motorola workers. Subject to the agreement of Motorola, this is likely to include an on-site jobshop, business start up workshops and other support to assist people to find jobs. The Taskforce has already begun work today.

Ericsson announced on 26 January 2001 that it will cease manufacture of telephone handsets throughout the world and that in consequence it intends to dispose of its plants making handsets, including Carlton near Worksop and Scunthorpe. The Government have kept in regular contact with the Managing Director responsible for the two sites and with Ericsson HQ in Sweden over new developments. Through the Regional Development Agencies, Government Offices and Invest UK, we are working closely with the company to find a buyer for the sites. Officials from the Department of Trade and Industry, Local Government Offices and Regional Development Agencies have also visited the Carlton and Scunthorpe operations in order to gain a better insight. I know my hon. Friend will shortly meet with the Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Norman:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will announce the terms of reference for the public inquiry into the foot and mouth crisis referred to by the Minister for the Environment in his Statement on 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 25. [159556]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) on 5 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 251W.

### Wal-Mart International

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 6 May 1999, *Official Report*, columns 445–46W, on planning, on what date he met the President of Wal-Mart International for a short courtesy call. [159800]

**The Prime Minister:** It is public knowledge that I met the President of Wal-Mart International in 1999. However it is not the normal practice of Government to provide the precise details of meetings with private individuals or companies.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his reply to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) of 31 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 224W, and to the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood of 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 290W, if he will make a statement on the precedents he followed in not giving details of his meetings with individuals, foundations and companies. [158542]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 27 June 2000, *Official Report*, column 454W.

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Prime Minister what reasons underlie the practice of Ministers not providing details of meetings held when requested in parliamentary questions. [159731]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Mr. Flynn) on 27 June 2000, *Official Report*, column 454W.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Pakistan

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Pakistani authorities over the subject of the treatment of Christians resident there. [159516]

**Mr. Wilson:** On 3 April, my noble Friend Baroness Scotland raised our concerns about the position of religious minorities with the Pakistani Attorney General and Minister of Law, Justice and Human Rights, Ms Shahida Jamil.

### Sri Lanka

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what issues concerning the Tamil community in Sri Lanka have been discussed by his Department with the Sri Lankan Government over the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [158732]

**Mr. Wilson:** We continue to raise with the Sri Lankan Government our concerns about the situation in Sri Lanka, including human rights, the Bindunawewa massacre, the safety of journalists and the need for food and medical supplies to reach citizens in the Vanni. We urge the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to work together with Norway to secure a settlement to the conflict that meets the aspirations of all communities in Sri Lanka.

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what areas of Sri Lanka the British High Commissioner and her staff have visited during the last six months; and if he will make a statement. [158733]

**Mr. Wilson:** The British High Commissioner and her staff regularly visit different regions in Sri Lanka. In the last six months, the High Commissioner has visited Trincomalee, Puttalam, Batticaloa, Galle and Nuwara Eliya. During her visits, she met Government officials, representatives of the security forces, non-governmental organisations, Tamil and Muslim communities and the Catholic clergy to discuss, among other things, the impact of the internal conflict on local communities.

### East Timor

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 797W, (1) if he will make a statement on when the relatives of the British newsmen killed at Balibo, East Timor in 1975 were informed of the investigation of the United Nations; and by whom; [159517]

(2) if he will publish the FCO advice offered to British citizens resident in East Timor at the time of the Balibo conflict in 1975; [159515]

(3) what communications have taken place between the relatives of the British newsmen killed at Balibo, East Timor in 1975 and the FCO over the last 12 months; [159519]

(4) if it remains the view of his Department that the deaths of the British newsmen at Balibo in East Timor in 1975 were accidental; [159514]

(5) what investigations into the death of the British newsmen killed at Balibo, East Timor in 1975 were already under way prior to the formal UN announcement; [159518]

(6) what communications have taken place between the Australian Government and the FCO over the attack by Indonesian troops at Balibo in 1975. [159520]

**Mr. Battle:** Following the arrival of the UN Administration in East Timor (UNTAET), a number of people volunteered fresh information about the events in Balibo in 1975. In the light of this, in August 2000, the UN Prosecutor General took the decision to open an investigation into the deaths. While the investigation continues it would be inappropriate to prejudge its findings.

The UK was not formally notified in advance of 15 September 2000, when UNTAET formally announced this decision to open an investigation. The FCO therefore did not have an opportunity to inform the relatives of the British journalists who died at Balibo beforehand. However, over the past year we have kept in regular touch with the relatives. I wrote to them most recently on 19 March. We have also maintained regular contact with the Australian Government.

There was no formal mechanism to issue travel advice to British citizens prior to the establishment of the FCO Travel Advice Unit in 1990.

## ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

### GM Crops (North Essex)

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has for allowing GM crop trials in the North Essex constituency in the next 12 months; what consultation there has been with local communities and their representatives; and what representations he has received about such trials from them. [157577]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The public register of releases shows that no GM crops are presently being grown in the North Essex constituency under research consents. I also understand that no National List trials of GM crops are presently taking place in Essex. My Department announced the locations of the spring 2001 Farm Scale Evaluations on 3 April; two of these sites, near the village of Wivenhoe, are in the North Essex constituency (TM051 221 and TM056 221). Details of any further GM crop releases, including their locations, will be placed on our web site at www.detr.gov.uk or in the case of National List Trials, on MAFF's web site at www.maff.gov.uk.

My officials have written to parishes and local authorities in which a Farm Scale evaluation is to take place to provide information about the trial and to offer speakers for any public meetings the parish may wish to hold. We have received correspondence from members of the public in the Wivenhoe area about the siting of FSE sites in the parish.

### Departmental Policies (Tiverton and Honiton)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on Tiverton and Honiton of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157808]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The principal funding that this Department has provided to East and Mid Devon district councils and Devon county council in the years 1997–98 to 2001–02 is shown in the tables. These include grants and borrowing approvals for revenue and capital expenditure.

It is not possible to determine how much of this money has been spent on Tiverton and Honiton constituency. It is for the local authority to decide where within its boundary these resources are applied.

*East Devon District Council*

*£ million*

| *Nature of funding* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *[2]2001–02* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Revenue support grant[1] | 2.510 | 2.173 | 2.086 | 1.742 | 2.063 |
| Income from national non-domestic rates[1] | 3.924 | 3.949 | 4.272 | 4.738 | 4.738 |
| Housing investment programme | [2]0.518 | 0.671 | 1.007 | [2]1.715 | [2]3.220 |
| Capital receipts initiative | 0.162 | 0.495 | 0.000 | n/a | n/a |

*Mid Devon Council*

*£ million*

| *Nature of funding* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *[2]2001–02* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Revenue support grant[1] | 1.917 | 1.842 | 1.769 | 1.695 | 1.894 |
| Income from national non-domestic rates[1] | 2.096 | 2.118 | 2.286 | 2.567 | 2.547 |
| Housing investment programme | [2]0.744 | 0.667 | 0.747 | [2]1.772 | [2]2.554 |
| Housing revenue account subsidy | 0.570 | 0.324 | 0.182 | [2]0.191 | — |
| Capital receipts initiative | 0.171 | 0.581 | 0.538 | n/a | n/a |
| Cash incentive scheme | 0.100 | 0.080 | 0 | n/a | n/a |
| Loan charges defective housing | 0.047 | 0.047 | 0.047 | [2]0.047 | [2]0.047 |
| Capital challenge (supplementary credit and basic credit approvals) | 0.120 | 0.080 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

*Devon County Council*

*£ million*

| *Nature of funding* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2999–01* | *[2]2001–02* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Revenue Support Grant[1] | [2]66.389 | 155.634 | 158.924 | 150.930 | 166.866 |
| Income from national non-domestic rates[1] | [2]05.912 | 138.460 | 151.558 | 173.050 | 170.054 |
| Local government reorganisation supplementary credit approval | 1.812 | 0.765 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Transport supplementary grant | 1.738 | 1.238 | 1.861 | 0 | 0 |
| Transport annual capital guideline | 1.738 | 1.238 | 1.861 | 0 | 0 |
| Transport block supplementary credit approval | 2.560 | 1.214 | 2.842 | 10.281 | 20.703 |
| Rural bus challenge grant[3] | 0 | 0 | 0.640 | 0.300 | — |
| Rural bus subsidy grant | 0 | 1.409 | 1.409 | 1.409 | 1.799 |
| Capital challenge (supplementary credit and basic credit approvals) | 2.694 | 2.257 | 1.554 | 0 | 0 |

*Notes:*

[1] The amounts of revenue support grant and income from national non-domestic rates shown for 1997–98 and 1998–99 are the revised amounts allocated under "The Local Government Finance Report (England) 1997–98 Amending Report 1999" and "The Local Government Finance Report (England) 1998–99 Amending Report 2000" respectively.

[2] 1997–98 HIP allocation inherited from the previous Government's spending plans. Present Government introduced CRI from 1997–98.

[3] Single housing pot introduced from 2000–01 resulting in CRI being merged with HIP.
[4] Resource accounting has resulted in a change to the way capital resources are allocated for 2001–02, with the introduction of a new major repairs allowance (MRA) to cover the cost of maintaining local authority housing in a sound condition. East Devon's MRA allocation for 2001–02 is £2.274 million and, for comparison purposes, is included in the 2001–02 HIP allocation. Mid Devon's MRA allocation for 2001–02 is £1.712 million.
[5] Provisional.
[6] Estimated.
[7] Devon was subject to a structural change order on 1 April 1998. The figures for revenue support grant and national non-domestic rates quoted for Devon county council for 1997–98 include an amount for the areas covered by the city of Plymouth and the borough of Torbay. The figures for 1998–99, 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02 exclude the amount for the areas covered by the city of Plymouth and the borough of Torbay.
[8] Rural bus challenge figures represent awards—actual spend profiles for schemes may cover more than one year.
[9] Where known
[10] Not known

## Departmental Policies (Ribble Valley)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on Ribble Valley of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157846]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The principal funding which this Department has provided to Lancashire county council and Ribble Valley district council in 1997–98 to 2000–01 is shown in the table. This includes grants and borrowings approvals for revenue and capital expenditure.

It is not possible to determine how much money has been spent on the Ribble Valley. It is for the local authorities to decide where within their boundaries these resources are applied.

*£ million*

| *Nature of funding* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *2001–02* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Revenue Support Grant[1] | 0.5 | 0.7 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.6 |
| Income from National Non-Domestic Rates[1] | 1.6 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 2.0 | 2.0 |
| Housing Investment Programme[2] | 1.8 | 2.0 | 2.3 | 3.9 | 4.3 |
| Capital Receipts Initiative[2] | n/a | 1.0 | 1.1 | n/a | n/a |
| Challenge Fund[3] | 0.6 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 1.1 | 1.4 |
| ERDF Funding[4] | 0.01 | 0.04 | 1.0 | — | — |
| Transport Supplementary Grant | 3.7 | 1.7 | 2.9 | 0 | 0 |
| Transport Annual Capital Guideline | 2.1 | 1.6 | 1.5 | 0 | 0 |
| Transport Block Supplementary Credit Approval[5] | 4.9 | 3.1 | 5.2 | 11.0 | 28.0 |

[1] These figures are for Ribble Valley district council. They have not been adjusted to make year on year comparisons possible.
[2] Figures for Lancashire county council
[3] There are two SRB initiatives in the Lancashire area, both of which could impact on the Ribble Valley:
*Raising Achievement of Young People in Lancashire—Round 2*
A seven year thematic scheme covering the whole of Lancashire targeted at raising the achievement and enhancing the employability of young people who are disenchanted with the system. The aim is to reduce long-term benefit dependency, alienation and anti-social behaviour while enhancing the chances of individual prosperity and quality of life.
Challenge Fund Total: £3.4 million—Scheme Total: £11.6 million
*Lancashire Tourism Partnership—Round 3*
A seven year scheme to improve the competitiveness of the Lancashire tourism industry and develop Lancashire as a major tourism destination. The schemes primary objectives are economic development aimed at generating income, employment opportunities and investment in the County.
Challenge Fund Total: £7.5 million—Scheme Total: £36.8 million
[4] East Lancashire are eligible to bid for Objective 3 European Social Funding resources of around £240 million for the North West. A second bidding round is now under way, launched on 2 April 2001 with bids to be submitted by 25 May.
[5] 2000–01—This figure is from Lancashire county council's provisional Local Transport Plan settlement.

## Railtrack

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what conditions attach to the most recent tranche of public finance made over to Railtrack; and if he will make a statement. [158302]

**Mr. Hill:** The agreement in principle to the re-phasing of grants to Railtrack announced on 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 8–9W, was subject to a number of conditions. The main points were enshrined in an agreed general Statement of Principles, copies of which have been placed in the House Library.

In addition to delivering long-term savings to the taxpayer, this agreement provides the basis for a new relationship between the company and Government, including a commitment from Railtrack in consultation with Government to appoint a non-executive director to its main Board with a remit to provide a powerful public and consumer voice. The Statement of Principles also sets out a new competitive framework for procuring large enhancement projects. This will allow third party finance and project delivery skills to be deployed through public private partnerships to deliver enhancement projects, enabling the company to give more attention to the management of the core rail network.

### Appointments (Age Limit)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158110]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The Government are committed to equality of opportunity and to increasing the diversity of those appointed to public bodies. For this reason, the DETR places no upper or lower age limit on appointments to its public bodies and all appointments are made on merit.

### Rural Pubs

**Mr. Cotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate the number of rural pubs that will receive 50 per cent. mandatory rate relief under the new Non-domestic Rating (Public Houses and Petrol Filling Stations) Order 2001. [158905]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** These figures are not held centrally. Under the Order, 50 per cent. rate relief is available to the sole pub with a rateable value of less than £9,000 in a designated rural settlement with a population of fewer than 3,000. We estimate that there are about 8,000 public houses with a rateable value of less than £9,000 situated in local authorities whose areas are predominantly rural. However, this figure includes public houses that are located in market towns and in settlements with more than one pub, neither of which would qualify for relief under the Order.

### Disability Discrimination Act (Railways)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he has taken to ensure that the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1994 will be met by the railway industry by the 2004 deadline. [158834]

**Mr. Hill:** The provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA) will require that, from 2004, service providers take reasonable steps to remove physical barriers to access. The Act does not set prescriptive accessibility requirements but the Disability Rights Commission will be publishing a revised Code of Practice which will give guidance on the new duties.

In addition, my Department is producing a guidance document "Inclusive Mobility: A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure", which will be available shortly. It is intended to give guidance to transport operators and local authorities on current best practice to help them in preparing to meet the requirements of the DDA.

When assessing bids for replacement franchises, the Strategic Rail Authority will consider better access to the network, particularly for disabled people. All proposals will be tested for compliance with the SRA's Code of Practice (which was transferred from the Office of the Rail Regulator and is currently being revised).

More generally, our Ten Year Transport Plan "Transport 2010", published in July 2000, demonstrates the Government's continued commitment to improving accessibility. The rate and level of new investment will ensure that improvements in the accessibility of transport are brought forward more quickly. The Plan is also clear that building in accessibility for disabled people in all investment is a condition of public money being spent.

### Crime Prevention

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the implementation of the commitment in the 1998 White Paper on the future of transport relating to the adoption by public transport operators of crime prevention strategies contained in Guidance on Public Transport-Guidelines for Operators; how many public transport operators have formally adopted this guidance; and if he will instruct the Strategic Rail Authority to make it a condition of future franchise contracts that operators must formally adopt these guidelines. [158835]

**Mr. Hill:** These Guidelines have been widely distributed to transport operators, local authorities and other interested parties. As the Guidelines are not required to be implemented by the transport operators, we do not keep records on how many operators have adopted the Guidelines; nor do we have plans to make implementation mandatory. However, Local Transport Plans are required to address personal security issues in all modes and across the whole journey, and we will be undertaking a review of Local Transport Plans to see how local authorities have improved personal security.

On rail, there are no plans to include the Guidelines in replacement franchise contracts, although we would expect operators to be aware of them.

### Gender Audits

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many public transport operators have undertaken gender audits in line with the Department's document, Women and Public Transport: the Checklist; what plans he has to ensure that more operators undertake gender audits; and if he will instruct the Strategic Rail Authority to ensure that gender audits are a requirement of future franchise contracts. [158826]

**Mr. Hill:** The Checklist has been widely distributed to transport operators, local authorities and interested parties. As the Checklist is not required to be implemented by transport operators, we do not keep records on how many operators have undertaken gender audits; nor do we have plans to make implementation mandatory. However, the Checklist is highlighted in 'Guidance on Full Local Transport Plans' as a useful tool to promote social inclusion, and we will be undertaking a review of Local Transport Plans to see how many local authorities have used the Checklist (and other departmental guidance) in their work to promote social inclusion.

On rail, there are no plans to include the Checklist in replacement franchise contracts, although we would expect operators to be aware of it.

### Secure Stations

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many stations have received secure station accreditations; and if he will instruct the Strategic Rail Authority to make it a

condition of future franchise contracts that all appropriate stations should be brought up to secure station accreditation standard within a given timescale. [158832]

**Mr. Hill:** There are currently 97 stations accredited under the Secure Stations Scheme. The Secure Stations Scheme, which was launched in April 1998, is designed to improve and standardise good security practices at all overground and underground stations. To become an accredited Secure Station, each station operator needs to work with their local British Transport Police Crime Reduction Officer to ensure that their station meets the national standards on design and management to cut down crime. The standards relate to such measures as staff training, Help Points, CCTV, lighting and information. Operators also have to conduct an independent passenger survey to see whether passengers feel safe at the station and provide evidence that crime rates are low.

We are aware that a number of stations are currently working towards accreditation and we will continue to work with the rail industry to encourage further accreditations. The Strategic Rail Authority is seeking to include Secure Stations and Secured Car Park accreditation at all appropriate locations as part of the franchise replacement process.

## Town and Parish Councils

**Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many town and parish councils were abolished in each year between 1990 and 1997. [158799]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The Local Government Act 1972 contains no provision for the abolition of parish councils. However, this legislation provides for the dissolution of parish councils where the population of a parish falls below 150. Dissolution in such circumstances is carried out by order of the district council. We have no record of any dissolution orders.

The Local Government Act 1992 made provision for the abolition of parishes by the Secretary of State following a recommendation by the Local Government Commission. No parishes were abolished as a consequence of the structural review of local Government during 1992–97.

**Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many town and parish councils have been created by his Department in each of the last 10 years. [158798]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The following table shows the number of new parishes that have been created in each of the last 10 years:

| *Year* | *Number of parishes created* |
|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 10 |
| 1992–93 | 6 |
| 1993–94 | 10 |
| 1994–95 | 4 |
| 1995–96 | 18 |
| 1996–97 | 9 |
| 1997–98 | 1 |
| 1998–99 | 20 |
| 1999–2000 | 42 |
| 2000–01 | 16 |

## Domestic Violence

**Ms Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list measures he has taken to tackle domestic violence since 1 May 1997. [159420]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** Since May 1997 my Department has put in place the following initiatives/ measures to help women who are fleeing from domestic violence, and who in many cases are threatened with homelessness as a result.

*Supporting People*

This new programme, to be implemented from April 2003, provides housing-related support services for vulnerable people, including survivors of domestic violence. The framework document "policy into practice" (January 2001), sets out how services will be planned and delivered. We are appointing two specialist co-ordinators and publishing further guidance to help local Supporting People partnerships develop their strategies for addressing domestic violence within the Supporting People programme.

*The Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund (SCSHF)*

This provides £120 million of capital and £17 million of revenue funding over three years, to be administered by the Housing Corporation (match-funding to be provided by local authorities) for housing and support services for a range of people, including women and children fleeing domestic violence.

*Grant Aid to Women's Aid Federation of England*

Since 1997 we have continued to support Women's Aid Federation of England through the Department's special grants programme, to develop a range of projects addressing the needs of survivors of domestic violence.

*Extending the Priority need categories of homeless people*

We will shortly be consulting on a proposal to extend the categories of people who have a priority need for accommodation under the homelessness legislation to include applicants who are vulnerable as a result of fleeing domestic violence or other violence.

*Interdepartmental initiatives*

My Department has contributed to the following interdepartmental initiatives and publications:

Break the Chain

Multi-agency guidance for addressing domestic violence

Relation ship Breakdown, a Guide for social landlords.

## Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what public funding has been paid to rural businesses under the schemes announced by the Minister to help them during the foot and mouth crisis, up to Friday 20 April. [159048]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The measures we have adopted in the last few weeks to help severely affected rural businesses respond to the impact of foot and mouth disease are expected to benefit business by around £230 million at the latest estimate, but clearly many depend on take up and application by affected businesses. It is not yet possible to estimate expenditure to date by all the agencies and local partners involved.

### Unadopted Roads

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what rebate is given to residents of unadopted roads within the council tax system; [159239]

(2) what assessment he has made of the value of local services given to residents of unadopted roads. [159192]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** There are no specific reductions for residents who live on unadopted roads in the same way that there are no reductions for people who do not have children at school. This is because the council tax is essentially a means of contributing towards the cost of providing a range of services throughout a local area rather than a charge for specific services used or enjoyed directly by individual households. However, when assigning a dwelling to a valuation band any factor which might affect the value of a dwelling, such as its being on an unadopted road, is taken into account.

### Heathrow

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has made to BAA over preparatory works in hand for Terminal 5. [159249]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** None. The enforcement of planning controls is a matter for the relevant planning authority.

### Bicycles

**Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will require all new bicycles to be sold with lights attached. [159545]

**Mr. Hill:** The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions carried out a public consultation exercise in 1998 and concluded that there was insufficient justification for amending current legislation to require all new bicycles to be sold with lights attached, as many pedal cycles are never used after dark.

Furthermore, there is already a requirement under the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 that front and rear position lamps, meeting a prescribed standard, must be fitted and must be lit on pedal cycles when ridden at night.

### Transport Information Provision

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library details of research commissioned by his Department into transport information provision and Transport Direct. [159230]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* Details of the travel information research commissioned by my Department were published in April in the "Roads and Local Transport Research Programme, Compendium of research projects 2000–2001", pages 101–111. A copy of the "Compendium" is available on my Department's website and has now been placed in the Libraries of the House.

### Partnership Investment Programme

**Dr. Whitehead:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement regarding European Commission approval of the five new land and property regeneration schemes designed to partially replace the partnership investment programme. [159861]

**Ms Armstrong:** The European Commission has now approved all of the five new schemes which have been designed to partially replace the Partnership Investment Programme, as follows:

a direct development scheme;

two gap funding schemes, one for developments for a known end-user, the other for developments for disposal on the open market;

a scheme for community regeneration, and

a scheme for environmental regeneration.

All the approved schemes are now in effect. As a result, Regional Development Agencies and English Partnerships will be able to support a wide range of land and property regeneration projects, including projects which can be taken forward in partnership with the private sector.

Direct development involves the public sector acquiring the land to be redeveloped, carrying out the works, and selling the reclaimed site at open market value.

Under gap funding, the public sector bridges the gap between development costs and the likely end value, allowing property developers to bring contaminated, derelict and disused sites back into full economic use. Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) will be eligible for assistance under this scheme anywhere in England. Where the developer is not an SME, the project must be located in an Assisted Area.

Under the Community Regeneration scheme, funding is made available to local organisations so that they can take forward small-scale regeneration projects. Funding is only available for projects which are put forward by non-profit making bodies working in the community or voluntary sectors.

The purpose of the environmental regeneration scheme is to improve the environment by reclaiming derelict or potentially derelict land and providing a cover of vegetation. Subsequent uses of the site may include public open spaces, nature conservation areas and playing fields.

We now intend to build on this success by continuing to press the Commission for a new regeneration framework, under which state aid would be permitted for the regeneration of derelict or disused land throughout England and the rest of the European Community.

### New Deal for Communities Programme

**Mr. Coleman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources he is prepared to make available to Round 2 partnerships under the New Deal for Communities Programme. [159928]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** I am delighted to announce that we have today offered the NDC Round 2 partnerships funding of over £1,100 million to implement their strategy for change. We have also made funding available to the remaining pathfinder partnership.

Following receipt of delivery plans in March, I am today allocating funding to the following 22 NDC partnerships:

£ million

| District | Neighbourhood | Funding award |
|---|---|---|
| Hartlepool | West Central Hartlepool | 53.79 |
| Sunderland | East End and Hendon | 53.89 |
| Oldham | Hathershaw and Fitton Hall | 53.53 |
| Rochdale | Old Heywood | 52.0 |
| Salford | Charlestown and Lower Kersal | 53.0 |
| Sheffield | Burngreave | 52.0 |
| Doncaster | Central Doncaster | 52.0 |
| Derby | Derwent | 38.0 |
| Coventry | Wood End, Henley Green and Manor Farm | 54.0 |
| Birmingham | Aston | 54.0 |
| Wolverhampton | All Saints and Blakenhall | 53.5 |
| Walsall | Blakenall | 52.0 |
| Luton | Marsh Farm | 48.835 |
| Plymouth | Devonport | 48.73 |
| Southampton | Thornhill | 48.7 |
| Brent | South Kilburn | 50.06 |
| Islington | Finsbury | 52.92 |
| Haringey | Seven Sisters | 50.12 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | North Fulham | 44.28 |
| Lambeth | Clapham Park | 56.0 |
| Lewisham | New Cross | 45.0 |
| Birmingham | Kings Norton | 50.0 |

The remaining Round 2 partnership, Knowsley, will take advantage of the additional three months they were given at the end of Phase 2 to work on community involvement and strategic linkages with key agencies. The partnership will submit a Delivery Plan in June 2001 with an announcement to follow shortly after.

This brings the total resources allocated to NDC partnerships to just under £2,000 million over the next 10 years.

### Designated Airport Status

**Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what work has been undertaken by the Government, as part of the developing aviation white paper process, on the possibility of extending designated airport status to other airports in the UK. [159528]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** In the integrated transport White Paper "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone" the Government announced their intention to prepare a UK airports policy looking 30 years ahead and bring forward new policies on civil aviation. The extent to which Government should rely on regulation to influence the environmental effects of aviation, and whether there should be greater reliance on economic instruments and voluntary agreements, is among the issues examined in the Government's recent consultation document on air transport policy—"The Future of Aviation". The closing date for responses to that consultation was 12 April 2001 and they are presently being studied.

### Transport Act (Contracts)

**Ms Kelly:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to extend the maximum length of a contract for a subsidised service as set out in Section 90(1) of the Transport Act 1985. [159280]

**Mr. Hill:** None at present, although we have undertaken in the Rural White Paper to look at the possibility of extending the maximum period from five years to 10.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Departmental Policies (Luton, South)

**Ms Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the Luton, South constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [156162]

**Mr. Wills:** Outlined are details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the Luton, South constituency and Luton local education authority.

*Beacon Schools*

There is one Beacon School in the Luton, South constituency: Hillborough Junior School.

*Schools with specialist status designated since 1997*

There is one Specialist School in the Luton, South constituency: Ashcroft High School, which has Technology College status.

*Education Maintenance Allowance*

Luton LEA is one of the new EMA pilot areas. Since September 2000 just over £260,000 has been paid out in EMAs to 569 students.

*School Achievement Awards*

15 Schools in the Luton, South constituency have been awarded a total of £121,250.00 under this scheme. The schools and awards are as follows:

| | £ |
|---|---|
| Beech Hill Community Primary School | 12,030 |
| Dallow Infant School | 7,500 |
| Dallow Junior School | 7,310 |
| Denbigh High School | 29,880 |
| Denbigh Infant School | 8,800 |
| Foxdell Junior School | 5,350 |
| Hillborough Junior School | 5,520 |
| Orchard Centre PRU (formally Charles Street Tuition Centre) | 2,820 |
| Putteridge Infant School | 5,460 |
| Sacred Heart RC Infants School | 3,990 |
| Slip End Lower School | 3,410 |
| Someries Junior School | 6,450 |
| St. Mary's RC Lower School | 6,020 |
| Tennyson Road Primary School | 4,840 |
| Wigmore Primary School | 11,870 |

*Class Sizes*

*Luton LEA*

£

| | Revenue | Capital |
|---|---|---|
| 1998–99 | 0 | 58,000 |
| 1999–2000 | 130,000 | 574,396 |
| 2000–01 | 618,615 | 79,500 |
| 2001–02 | 635,881 | 0 |

The September 2000 figures show that there are now only 380 (6.2 per cent.) pupils remaining in infant

classes of 31 or more. The figure in January 1997 was 2,427 (42 per cent.).

*Luton Performance Data*

*Key Stage 2, percentage of pupils achieving level 4*

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 | 1997 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *English* | | | | |
| LEA average | 72 | 68 | 61 | 58 |
| England average | 75 | 71 | 65 | 63 |
| *Maths* | | | | |
| LEA average | 65 | 62 | 51 | 54 |
| England average | 72 | 69 | 59 | 62 |
| *Science* | | | | |
| LEA average | 82 | 74 | 61 | 63 |
| England average | 85 | 78 | 69 | 69 |

*GCSE—percentage of pupils achieving*

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 | 1997 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *5+ A*—C* | | | | |
| LEA average | 39.7 | 35.8 | 35.0 | 34.3 |
| England average | 49.2 | 47.9 | 46.3 | 45.1 |
| *5+ A*—G* | | | | |
| LEA average | 91.4 | 92 | 92.4 | 89.9 |
| England average | 88.9 | 88.5 | 87.5 | 86.4 |

*GCSE—percentage of pupils achieving*

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 | 1997 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *No Passes* | | | | |
| LEA average | 3.2 | 3.2 | 2.1 | 4.3 |
| England average | 5.6 | 6.0 | 6.6 | 7.7 |
| *Average Point Score* | | | | |
| LEA average | 36.7 | 35.5 | 35.9 | n/a |
| England average | 38.9 | 38.1 | 37.0 | n/a |

*A/AS level and Advanced GNVQ*

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Average points for 2 or more A/AS levels* | | | |
| LEA average | 13.6 | 13.4 | 14.1 |
| England average | 18.5 | 18.2 | 17.8 |
| *A/AS average per entry* | | | |
| LEA average | 4.5 | 4.4 | 4.6 |
| England average | 5.5 | 5.5 | 5.4 |
| *Average point score GNVQs* | | | |
| LEA average | 8.1 | 9.0 | 9.5 |
| England average | 10.1 | 9.9 | 9.6 |

*Funding per pupil*

In Luton LEA, funding per pupil has increased by £520 in real terms between 1997–98 and 2001–02.

*Luton LEA capital funding*

£000

| | 2001–02 | 2000–01 | 1999–2000 | 1998–99 | 1997–98 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Credit approvals* | | | | | | |
| ACG | 1,356 | 2,918 | 556 | 201 | 171 | 5,202 |
| SCA | — | 217 | 1,033 | 240 | 40 | 1,530 |
| *Grants* | | | | | | |
| NDS Condition Funding | 392 | — | — | — | — | 392 |
| NDS | — | 2,275 | 691 | 322 | 288 | 3,576 |
| NGfL | 914 | 625 | 326 | 374 | — | 2,239 |
| VA grant | 127 | 239 | 98 | 73 | 102 | 639 |
| Schools devolved formula capital | — | 1,344 | — | — | — | 1,344 |
| Science labs | 134 | 134 | — | — | — | 268 |
| Energy | — | — | — | 51 | — | 51 |
| AMP support | — | — | 25 | — | — | 25 |
| Seed challenge | 161 | 146 | — | — | — | 307 |
| Infant class size | — | 110 | 545 | 57 | — | 712 |
| Security | 46 | 65 | 65 | 57 | 46 | 279 |
| SSLUs | 54 | 61 | — | — | — | 115 |
| Schools Access Initiative | 232 | 17 | — | — | — | 249 |
| NDS Devolved Formula | 1,109 | — | — | — | — | 1,109 |
| Outside Toilets | — | — | — | 6 | — | 6 |
| Nursery provision | — | 64 | — | — | — | 64 |
| Total | 4,525 | 8,215 | 3,339 | 1,381 | 647 | |

*Further Education*

Student numbers at all Further Education Funding Council funded institutions where home postcode is in the local authority district of Luton are given in the table.

*1996–97 to 1999–2000*

| | FEFC funded | | | | Non-FEFC funded | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 16–18 | | Adult | | 16–18 | | Adult | |
| | Full-time | Part-time | Full-time | Part-time | Full-time | Part-time | Full-time | Part-time |
| 1996–97 | 3,238 | 794 | 657 | 9,042 | 88 | 368 | 69 | 633 |
| 1997–98 | 2,995 | 1,130 | 769 | 10,810 | 81 | 307 | 69 | 604 |
| 1998–99 | 3,316 | 723 | 824 | 10,441 | 105 | 534 | 71 | 799 |
| 1999–2000 | 3,385 | 817 | 817 | 10,159 | 112 | 379 | 179 | 1,068 |

*Modern Apprenticeships*

Information on Modern Apprenticeships for all English constituencies will be placed in the Library by the end of March.

*New Deal for Young People*

In the Luton, South constituency, 966 young people had joined the New Deal to the end of December 2000. 386 have found jobs, 299 of which are sustained.

*Labour market statistics*

The working age employment rate in Luton in autumn 2000 was 71.9 per cent., below the UK rate of 74.7 per cent. The rate in autumn 1997 was 77.0 per cent., in autumn 1998 73.0 per cent., and in autumn 1999 74.9 per cent. These figures are volatile at this level, and our best interpretation of the trend in the employment rate for Luton since 1997 is that it has been broadly flat.

The claimant unemployment rate has fallen from 5.3 per cent. in February 1997 to 2.7 per cent. in February 2001 in the Luton, South constituency.

## Departmental Policies (Great Grimsby)

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the Great Grimsby constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [156248]

**Mr. Wills:** Outlined are the details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the Great Grimsby constituency and North-East Lincolnshire LEA.

*Sure Start*

There are two Sure Start programmes in North-East Lincolnshire.

Nunsthorpe and Bradley Park: The programme was approved in January 2000. The level of grant approved was a maximum of £2,304,430 up until 31 March 2002 of which £785,000 for capital projects and £1,518,930 for revenue costs. The catchment area covers Nunsthorpe and Bradley Park, which is about two miles outside Grimsby and covers 550 0 to three-year-olds. Nunsthorpe and Bradley Park is a local authority led programme which offers services such as Story Sacks where parents work with an Adult Education Tutor to boost their involvement in their children's learning, a versatile information service which can be booked into various locations (schools, clinics etc.) and a Family Literacy Programme. The programme has close links with the Early Excellence Centre, which is adjacent to the main Sure Start Centre.

East Marsh: A round 4 programme, which covers 800 0 to three-year-olds and is in an early stage of development. The programme is currently working to draw up its outline plan, which is due in the Sure Start Unit on April 25. Deadline for full delivery of the plan is 18 July 2001.

*Beacon Schools*

There is one Beacon school in North-East Lincolnshire—Strand Infant School, which started in January 2001.

*Schools with specialist status designated since 1997*

There are three Specialist Schools in North-East Lincolnshire. Hereford School and Western School are jointly designated (Technology) and The Lindsey School (Arts).

*Education Action Zone*

North-East Lincolnshire has one EAZ. Grimsby EAZ is a first round zone, which was established in September 1998. It has been approved for extension from three to five years, taking it to August 2003. The zone consists of 11 primary, three secondary schools and a nursery school (details follow). The zone receives up to £1 million in additional public and private sector funding each year.

The zone's key activities are:

Open school TV programmes taking the classroom into the living room via local TV station.

Secondary schools as ICT Centres of excellence linking primary schools.

Virtual classroom via the Internet.

Daily sessions focusing on literacy, numeracy and IT for all pupils in the zone.

In-school units for years eight and nine to reduce permanent exclusions.

The zone has had some very encouraging results. Between 1998 and 2000 the proportions of zone children achieving level 2 in reading, writing and maths at key stage 1 have increased by 15 per cent., 15 per cent. and 16 per cent., compared with 4 per cent., 4 per cent. and 6 per cent. seen nationally. At key stage 4, the proportions of pupils gaining 5+ A*-C, 5+ A*-G and 1+ A*-G have increased by 4 per cent., 7 per cent. and 7 per cent., compared with national gains of 3 per cent., 1 per cent. and 1 per cent. respectively.

*Class sizes*

£

| | *Revenue* | *Capital* |
|---|---|---|
| 1998–99 | 0 | 518,483 |
| 1999–2000 | 377,000 | 171,532 |
| 2000–01 | 715,302 | 448,212 |
| 2001–02 | 646,908 | 0 |

The September 2000 figures show that there are now only 98 (1.8 per cent.) pupils remaining in infant classes of 31 or more. The figure in January 1997 was 2,393 (38 per cent.).

*North-East Lincolnshire Performance Data Key Stage 2, percentage of pupils achieving level 4*

| | *2000* | *1999* | *1998* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *English* | | | |
| LEA | 71 | 66 | 58 |
| England | 75 | 71 | 65 |
| *Maths* | | | |
| LEA | 68 | 66 | 53 |
| England | 72 | 69 | 59 |
| *Science* | | | |
| LEA | 80 | 73 | 62 |
| England | 85 | 78 | 69 |

*GCSE—percentage of pupils achieving*

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 |
|---|---|---|---|
| *5+A*-C* | | | |
| LEA | 35.8 | 35.5 | 33.3 |
| England Average | 49.2 | 47.9 | 46.3 |
| *5+ A*-G* | | | |
| LEA | 87.0 | 84.8 | 82.7 |
| England Average | 88.9 | 88.5 | 87.5 |
| *No passes* | | | |
| LEA | 6.7 | 7.8 | 10.1 |
| England Average | 5.6 | 6.0 | 6.6 |
| *Average point score* | | | |
| LEA | 33.5 | 32.3 | 30.8 |
| England Average | 38.9 | 38.1 | 37.0 |

*A/AS level and Advanced GNVQ*

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Average points for fewer than 2 A/AS levels* | | | |
| LEA | 2.6 | 2.8 | 3.1 |
| England Average | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 |
| *Average points for 2 or more A/AS levels* | | | |
| LEA | 16.2 | 15.9 | 14.1 |
| England Average | 18.5 | 18.2 | 17.8 |
| *Advanced GNVQs* | | | |
| LEA | 8.5 | 6.9 | 10.8 |
| England Average | 10.1 | 9.9 | 9.6 |

*Funding per pupil*

In North-East Lincolnshire LEA, funding per pupil has increased by £590 in real terms between 1997–98 and 2001–02.

*North-East Lincolnshire LEA capital funding*

£000

| | 2001–02 | 2000–01 | 1999–2000 | 1998–99 | 1997–98 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Annual Capital Guideline (ACG) | 191 | 601 | 957 | 1,075 | 474 |
| Supplementary Credit Approval (SCA) | — | 228 | 119 | 38 | 20 |
| New Deal for Schools (NDS) | — | 2,173 | 1,600 | 1,472 | 328 |
| Voluntary Aided (VA) grant | 38 | 53 | 203 | 199 | 36 |
| Seed Challenge Initiative | 151 | 138 | — | — | — |
| Public Private Partnerships (PPP) | — | — | — | — | — |
| Formula Capital (Including additional) | — | 259 | — | — | — |
| National Grid for Learning (NGfL) | 847 | 587 | 390 | 520 | — |
| Science labs | 133 | 133 | — | — | — |
| Early Excellence Centre grant | — | 153 | 67 | — | — |
| Assist Management Plan (AMP) Assistance | — | — | 24 | — | — |
| Access at 85 per cent. | 232 | — | 3 | 1 | — |
| Security | 41 | 60 | 60 | 59 | 47 |
| Outside toilets | — | — | — | — | — |
| Energy | — | — | — | 60 | — |
| Class Size Initiative | — | 492 | 91 | 518 | — |
| Nursery Provision | — | 60 | — | — | — |
| Secondary Learning Support Units | 43 | 49 | — | — | — |
| NDS Devolved Formula | 675 | — | — | — | — |
| Additional NDS Devolved Formula | 351 | — | — | — | — |
| NDS Condition Funding | 495 | — | — | — | — |

*Education Maintenance Allowance*

In September 2000 we extended the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme to 41 additional pilot areas, one of which is the North-East Lincolnshire LEA area. This is one of five pilots designed to identify the extent to which transport costs are a barrier to learning. There are currently over 700 young people in receipt of an allowance. Recent published evaluation reports show that EMAs are making a positive difference to young people's lives. On average, an additional 5 per cent. of eligible 16 and 17-year-olds are staying in education in the pilot areas because of EMAs.

*Further Education*

Student numbers at all Further Education Funding Council funded institutions where home postcode is in the local authority district of Great Grimsby are given in the table.

*1996–97 to 1999–2000*

| | FEFC funded | | | | Non-FEFC funded | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 16–18 | | Adult | | 16–18 | | Adult | |
| | Full-time | Part-time | Full-time | Part-time | Full-time | Part-time | Full-time | Part-time |
| 1996–97 | 1,081 | 368 | 416 | 5,715 | 58 | 314 | 55 | 771 |
| 1997–98 | 1,158 | 381 | 292 | 5,628 | 100 | 274 | 26 | 855 |
| 1998–99 | 1,237 | 360 | 344 | 5,653 | 44 | 281 | 32 | 827 |
| 1999–2000 | 1,272 | 388 | 300 | 6,601 | 40 | 280 | 62 | 1,143 |

*Modern Apprenticeships*

Information on Modern Apprenticeships for all English constituencies will be placed in the Library by the end of March.

*New Deal for Young People*

In the Great Grimsby constituency, 1,974 young people have joined the New Deal to end December 2000. 991 have found jobs, 701 of which are sustained.

*Labour market statistics*

The working age employment rate in North-East Lincolnshire in autumn 2000 was 68.6 per cent., below the UK rate of 74.7 per cent. The rate in autumn 1997 was 66.6 per cent.

The claimant unemployment rate has fallen from 8.9 per cent. in February 1997 to 6.5 per cent. in February 2001 in the Great Grimsby constituency.

## Departmental Policies (Sandwell)

**Mr. Bailey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the borough, the effects of his Department's policies and actions on the metropolitan borough of Sandwell since 2 May 1997. [156378]

**Mr. Wills** *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* Outlined are details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the metropolitan borough of Sandwell.

*Sure Start*

Sandwell local education authority has one initiative made up of three residential areas which includes Brickhouse, Rowley and Springfield estates.

*Schools with specialist status designated since 1997*

Wood Green High School has specialist arts status.

*Failing Schools*

St. Mary's RC and Willingsworth Schools are both in Special Measures.

*Private Finance Initiative (PFI)*

This scheme is to rebuild five primary schools and that complements regeneration proposals in the authority. One of the 5 schools included, Great Bridge Primary, is in the West Bromwich, West.

*School Achievement Awards*

Thirteen schools within the West Bromwich, West constituency achieved the awards for improvement. This amounted to £95,510 for the constituency.

*Education Action Zone*

An EAZ began operation in January 2000. It involves 4 secondary and 11 primary schools in the Wednesbury area and concentrates on strategies to raise achievement in literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology by means of new teaching and learning methods. The majority of the schools involved in the EAZ fall within the West Bromwich, West constituency.

*Class Sizes*

Figures for September 2000 show that Sandwell had 1.0 per cent. of infant pupils (99) taught in large classes with more than 30 pupils. This compares with 1.9 per cent. nationally. Sandwell has received capital funding of £1.5 million to build 19 additional classrooms, and revenue support of £3.3 million for 158 extra teachers.

*Sandwell performance data key stage 2, percentage of pupils achieving level 4*

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 | 1997 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *English:* | | | | |
| LEA | 65 | 59 | 54 | 52 |
| England average | 75 | 71 | 65 | 63 |
| *Maths:* | | | | |
| LEA | 60 | 56 | 45 | 46 |
| England average | 72 | 69 | 59 | 62 |
| *Science:* | | | | |
| LEA | 77 | 66 | 54 | 51 |
| England average | 85 | 78 | 69 | 69 |

*GCSE—percentage of pupils achieving*

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 | 1997 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *5+ A*—C* | | | | |
| LEA Average | 31.7 | 29.7 | 28.7 | 26.9 |
| England Average[1] | 49.2 | 47.9 | 46.3 | 45.1 |
| *5+ A*—G* | | | | |
| LEA Average | 84.9 | 84.0 | 83.3 | 80.2 |
| England Average[1] | 88.9 | 88.5 | 87.5 | 86.4 |
| *No Passes* | — | — | — | — |
| LEA Average | 7.9 | 8.8 | 9.7 | 12.3 |
| England Average[1] | 5.6 | 6.0 | 6.6 | 7.7 |
| *Average Point Score* | | | | |
| LEA Average | 30.7 | 30.1 | 28.7 | n/a |
| England Average | 38.9 | 38.1 | 37.0 | n/a |

*A/AS level and advanced GNVQ*

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 | 1997 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Average Points for two or more A/AS levels* | | | | |
| LEA Average | 10.6 | 11.8 | 12.3 | 11.1 |
| England Average | 18.5 | 18.2 | 17.8 | 17.3 |
| *A/AS average per entry* | | | | |
| LEA Average | 3.2 | 3.7 | 3.8 | n/a |
| England Average | 5.5 | 5.5 | 5.4 | 5.3 |
| *Average point score GNVQs* | | | | |
| LEA Average | 9.5 | 10.6 | 8.6 | n/a |
| England Average | 10.1 | 9.9 | 9.6 | n/a |

*Funding per pupil*

In Sandwell LEA, funding per pupil has increased by £610 in real terms between 1997–98 and 2001–02.

*Sandwell LEA capital funding*

£000

| | 2001–02 | 2000–01 | 1999–2000 | 1998–99 | 1997–98 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Credit approvals:* | | | | | | |
| ACG | 494 | 1,251 | 1,006 | 673 | 2,481 | 5,905 |
| SCA | — | 202 | 148 | 282 | 1,586 | 2,218 |
| PFI credits | — | 12,200 | — | — | — | 12,200 |
| *Grants:* | | | | | | |
| NDS Condition | 788 | — | — | — | — | 788 |
| NDS | — | 4,687 | 2,527 | 464 | 808 | 8,486 |
| NGfL | 1,472 | 1,056 | 366 | 406 | — | 3,300 |

*Sandwell LEA capital funding*

*£000*

| | *2001–02* | *2000–01* | *1999–2000* | *1998–99* | *1997–98* | *Total* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| VA grant | 108 | 120 | 90 | 69 | 69 | 456 |
| Schools' formula capital | — | 2,211 | — | — | — | 2,211 |
| Science labs | 194 | 194 | — | — | — | 388 |
| Nursery provision | — | 69 | — | — | — | 69 |
| Energy | — | — | — | 90 | — | 90 |
| AMP support | — | — | 41 | — | — | 41 |
| SEED challenge | 234 | 208 | — | — | — | 442 |
| Infant class size | — | 5 | 5 | 96 | — | 1,531 |
| Security | 73 | 104 | 106 | 103 | 82 | 468 |
| SSLU's | 78 | 89 | — | — | — | 167 |
| Schools Access Initiative | 349 | 9 | 3 | — | — | 361 |
| NDS Devolved Formula[1] | 1,795 | — | — | — | — | 1,795 |
| Total | 5,091 | 8,752 | 4,563 | 1,228 | 959 | 20,593 |

[1] Formerly Schools' formula capital

*Further Education*

Student numbers at all FEFC funded institutions where home postcode is in the local authority district of Sandwell, are given in the table.

*1996–97 to 1999–2000*

| | *FEFC funded* | | | | *Non-FEFC funded* | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *16–18* | | *Adult* | | *16–18* | | *Adult* | |
| | *Full-time* | *Part-time* | *Full-time* | *Part-time* | *Full-time* | *Part-time* | *Full-time* | *Part-time* |
| 1996–97 | 3,002 | 1,405 | 2,256 | 15,604 | 200 | 206 | 171 | 365 |
| 1997–98 | 2,949 | 1,605 | 1,982 | 16,146 | 198 | 277 | 152 | 425 |
| 1998–99 | 3,030 | 1,531 | 1,771 | 15,270 | 185 | 418 | 256 | 706 |
| 1999–2000 | 3,175 | 1,560 | 1,828 | 16,212 | 180 | 509 | 295 | 776 |

*Modern Apprenticeships*

Information on Modern Apprenticeships for all English constituencies will be placed in the Library by the end of March.

*New Deal for Young People*

In the West Bromwich, West constituency, 1,565 young people had joined the New Deal to the end of December 2000. 742 have found jobs, 567 of which are sustained.

*Labour market statistics*

The working age employment rate in Sandwell in autumn 2000 was 66.1 per cent., below the UK rate of 74.7 per cent. The rate in autumn 1997 was 69.2 per cent., in autumn 1998 71.5 per cent., and in autumn 1999 66.6 per cent. These figures are volatile at this level, and our best interpretation of the trend in the employment rate for Sandwell since 1997 is that it has been broadly flat.

The claimant unemployment rate has fallen from 6.7 per cent. in February 1997 to 4.8 per cent. in February 2001 in the West Bromwich, West constituency.

## Child Care Workers

**Mr. Cann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the effectiveness of the campaign to recruit child care workers. [158109]

**Ms Hodge:** The response to the campaign has been very positive. By 16 April 2001, the media advertising had generated over 64,000 calls to the national recruitment orderline and over 70,000 booklets have been sent out to callers. The latest survey of callers to the orderline shows that over 70 per cent. of all respondents have taken or intend to take action to find work or training in the sector. A survey in January suggested that six months after contacting the orderline 16 per cent. of the sample had found work in the sector, 21 per cent. of an earlier, larger, sample of callers had attended a training course and that many others intended to do so.

## Primary Schools (Year 6)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much time is spent in primary schools in Year 6 on core subjects as a proportion of all teaching; and what the proportion was in May 1997. [158536]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** The average percentage of Year 6 teaching time currently spent on the core subjects is 60 per cent. (27 per cent. for English, 22 per cent. for mathematics and 11 per cent. for science). This compares with an average of 53 per cent. (22 per cent. for English, 19 per cent. for mathematics and 12 per cent. for science) in 1996–97.

We welcome the fact that primary schools are now spending more time teaching English and mathematics, where standards were unacceptably low in 1997. Since 1997, we have introduced the daily Literacy Hour and mathematics lesson, which have improved the quality of teaching and raised standards of achievement, not only in English and mathematics but also in science and the foundation subjects of the National Curriculum, which schools are required to teach.

### Truancy

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the average level of fine imposed on parents for allowing their child to truant. [158842]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Absence from school for no good reason is a serious matter. That is why we have introduced a range of measures designed to reduce the level of truancy. This includes a higher penalty for parents convicted of school attendance offences, which came into force on 1 March 2001.

Parents convicted of school attendance offences can, as before, face a fine of up to £1,000 per parent per child. However under the new higher penalty for persistent and aggravated truancy, they could be fined a maximum fine of £2,500 per parent per child.

While full details on the average level of fine imposed on parents convicted of school attendance offences are not collated centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost, we do know that fines were often as low as £20 under the previous fines regime. Under the new arrangements, however, magistrates will be able to impose a higher level of fine, typically £100-£200, that matches the seriousness of the offence. In addition, if prosecuted under the higher penalty, parents will have to turn up in court and face the consequences of their action. If they do not do so, they face arrest.

### Value Added Tables

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received with regard to the introduction of value added tables; and what plans he has to introduce value added tables. [158848]

**Jacqui Smith** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* We have received a number of representations about the use of value added measures in school performance tables. Their introduction is supported in principle by the head teacher associations and overwhelmingly by those who have responded to past consultation exercises.

We are committed to supplementing the information already published in school performance tables with value added measures showing how far schools help their pupils to progress between the stages of their education. We will do this as soon as we have the necessary information about individual pupil performance and have tested successfully the processes involved.

We intend to run a pilot this year on the calculation and presentation of value added measures from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3 and from Key Stage 3 to GCSE/GNVQ and to publish those measures for all schools in the secondary tables in 2002. We will then publish a value added measure for primary schools in 2003 after piloting in 2002. Following the introduction of "Qualifying for Success" reforms, introduction of value added in the 16–18 tables will necessarily have to wait at least until the first full set of results under the new framework has been awarded.

### Connexions

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many staff are employed by the Connexions Service National Unit; and what is its planned yearly running costs. [158997]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The Connexions National Unit now has responsibility for a number of different policy strands. As at 1 April 2001 95 (Full Time Equivalent) staff are employed, developing core activities and services for Connexions. A further 65 are included in the National Unit who are employed in the administration of programmes related to Connexions, for example Millennium Volunteers, the Neighbourhood Support Fund, New Start and the Learning Gateway. The National Unit's running cost budget for the year 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 is £6.4 million. This includes the running cost budget for the administration of the programmes referred to.

### Employment Zones

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the number of people who have found jobs through the Employment Zones. [159003]

**Ms Jowell** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The latest figures available show that from April 2000 to the end of March 2001 the contractors running the Employment Zones had claimed for 8,057 people into jobs. This is an under-representation of the actual number of jobs achieved as the figure does not include those jobs for which contractors have yet to provide the necessary evidence.

### East Ravendale School

**Shona McIsaac:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the outside toilets for children and staff at East Ravendale School, North-East Lincolnshire. [159354]

**Jacqui Smith:** I have asked officials within the Department to prepare a report on the particular problems faced by East Ravendale School for discussion when I meet my hon. Friend, the head teacher and Chair of Governors of the school and the Leader of North-East Lincolnshire Council, on Thursday 3 May.

### Correspondence

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 16 March on behalf of Mrs. Martin. [159687]

**Mr. Wills:** My right hon. Friend will reply to the right hon. Gentleman's letter of 16 March today.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

### Church Repairs

30. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what estimate he has made of the total cost of repairs to the Church of England's places of worship likely to take place in the 12 months from 1 April 2001. [158169]

**Mr. Stuart Bell:** The Churches Main Committee—an ecumenical body—recently commissioned a study of the cost of repairs and maintenance to the buildings of several of the main Christian denominations. This indicated that in 1999 the cost of repairs to the Church of England's 16,250 parish churches and cathedrals was in the region of £29 million, with maintenance adding a further £11 million.

### Tenant Farmers

34. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what his policy is for assisting farmers who are tenants of the Church Commissioners. [158173]

**Mr. Stuart Bell:** The Commissioners are acutely aware of the problems facing their farm tenants, including the severe effects of Foot and Mouth disease. Cases of hardship are considered individually and the Commissioners try to be as helpful as possible.

Circumstances vary, but rent review settlements have typically seen reductions of an average of some 12 per cent.

### Churches (Alternative Uses)

35. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what advice the Commission gives churches on their use for purposes other than worship. [158174]

**Mr. Stuart Bell:** The Church Commissioners' primary responsibility is the management of their assets to support the Church of England's nation-wide ministry. Advice is provided to parishes on the care, use and development of churches by the Council for the Care of Churches and at local level by the 43 Diocesan Advisory Committees for the Care of Churches.

### Unlisted Places of Worship

36. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will extend his commitment to help listed places of worship via the proposed grant scheme to unlisted places of worship. [158175]

**Mr. Stuart Bell:** My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has given priority to listed places of worship because of the specially costly burden borne by congregations who strive to care properly for their historic buildings.

But I shall continue to remind him of the concern, expressed by the Churches Main Committee among others, as to the burden of VAT on places of worship that are unlisted, in the hope that it may in time prove possible to extend relief to them also.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Creative Industries

10. **Mr. Fitzpatrick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what his assessment is of the contribution of creative industries to the cultural and economic performance of the UK. [158146]

**Janet Anderson:** The creative industries in the UK generate revenues of around £112.5 billion and employ some 1.3 million people. Exports contribute around £10.3 billion to the balance of trade, and the industries account for over 5 per cent. of GDP. In 1997–98, output grew by 16 per cent., compared with under 6 per cent. for the economy as a whole.

23. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement about his Department's support for the UK's creative industries. [158162]

**Janet Anderson:** We published in March a new Creative Industries Mapping Document which estimates the industries generate around £112.5 billion in revenue, contribute some £10.2 billion in export earnings, employ 1.3 million people, and account for over 5 per cent. of GDP.

My Department has sought to co-ordinate efforts across Government in support of the creative industries. Through the efforts of the Creative Industries Task Force, we have investigated generic issues which impact on the creative industries, and recommend changes in areas such as skills and training, finance for creative ventures, intellectual property rights and export promotion. These changes have resulted in better careers guidance on the creative industries; more efforts at regional level to provide appropriate finance for creative businesses; improved information services on intellectual property for creators, users and the general public; and a more streamlined and focused range of support for exporters.

### Sporting Events

11. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the Government's policy is towards the hosting of major sporting events in the UK. [158147]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** The Government are committed to attracting top international major sporting events to this country because they attract world wide audiences and can showcase the UK as well as helping to boost participation in sport. UK Sport's Major Events Strategy is aimed at ensuring that all bids are properly co-ordinated and based on sound financial planning. It is important to consider not just the sporting event itself but the wider opportunities presented for community regeneration and social cohesion.

### National Stadium (Wembley)

13. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he next plans to meet the chairman of the Football Association to discuss progress of building the new national stadium at Wembley. [158149]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** I meet Geoff Thompson, the Chairman of the Football Association, from time to time to discuss a range of issues. I last met with him last week, and we did indeed discuss the Wembley project when we met.

### Royal Parks

14. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received on the reopening of those royal parks which are closed because of the foot and mouth outbreak. [158150]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** I received representations both for and against the reopening of these parks. The parks were reopened on 11 April.

### Museum and Gallery Visits

15. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people have visited museums and galleries sponsored by his Department in the last two years. [158153]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** In 1999–2000 the number of visits to museums and galleries sponsored by my Department was 26.08 million. Based on recent data returns the figure for 2000–01 is 30.50 million.

The 2000–01 figure represents an increase of over 20 per cent. on 1998–99 the last year before DCMS began to extend free entry at its sponsored museums and galleries.

I believe that these figures represent a considerable success for my Department's access policies and reflect a great deal of hard work and commitment on behalf of the sponsored bodies involved.

### Arts Projects

16. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proposals he has to assist local authorities in promoting arts projects. [158154]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** Last year my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State published "Creating Opportunities". The preparation of a local cultural strategy in accordance with this guidance document will help local authorities to develop a coherent vision for cultural activities and projects.

### Television Licences

17. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will introduce measures to allow televisions in communal areas in homes where all residents are over 75 years old to have a free licence. [158156]

24. **Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will introduce measures to allow televisions in communal areas in homes where all residents are over 75 years old to have a free licence. [158163]

**Janet Anderson:** The Government have received a number of representations from hon. Members and members of the public on this subject. We are currently considering the matter.

22. **Liz Blackman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how people in sheltered housing have been affected by changes to the television licensing regime; and if he will make a statement. [158161]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** The only recent change relating specifically to sheltered housing has been an amendment to the regulations governing the £5 Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) concessionary licence scheme in April 2000. This brought the qualifying age for men and women into line at 60. Information is not available on the number of additional beneficiaries resulting from this change.

An estimated 500,000 people live in sheltered housing which qualifies for the ARC scheme. About 80 per cent. of these residents are aged 75 or over and therefore now qualify for the free licences introduced by the Government in November last year. The number of people living in sheltered housing which does not qualify for the ARC scheme is not known, but any residents who are 75 or over are also entitled to a free licence.

### Millennium Dome

19. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what his estimate is of the costs of care and maintenance of the Millennium Dome from the date of the disposal of the majority of its contents by auction to 7 June. [158158]

**Janet Anderson:** The auction of the majority of the Dome's contents was completed on 2 March 2001. The cost of care and maintenance of the Dome site and structures from that date to 7 June is forecast to be about £1.6 million to £2 million covering rates, utilities, site servicing, security, and insurance, and a proportion of the IT and staffing support relevant to the care and maintenance function.

**Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much the Millennium Commission has spent on the Millennium Dome; and if he will make a statement. [158151]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** The Millennium Commission has approved total grant to the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) of £628 million for the Millennium Experience at Greenwich and its associated national programme of events and activities.

### Culture Online

20. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will place the tender documents for Culture online in the public domain. [158159]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** My Department has not tendered for third parties to deliver materials and services for Culture online. This will be a matter for Culture online itself once it has been established as a statutory corporation. We ran a tendering exercise to appoint consultants to develop a business case for Culture online, between October 2000 and January 2001. Copies of this tender document have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The business case will be completed by summer 2001.

26. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what space for poetry will be made available in Culture online. [158165]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** The provision of online poetry is within Culture online's broad remit. However, it will be a matter for Culture online itself to decide the amount of space that will be provided for individual projects and themes, including poetry, once it has been formed as a statutory corporation.

### Foot and Mouth

21. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to his oral answer of 26 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 663, on tourism

and foot and mouth, what estimate he has made of the loss of tourism businesses as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak in the past four weeks. [158160]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** Our best estimate on the basis of the information so far obtained is that losses of revenue by the English tourism industry will be around £140 million per week averaged over the eight month tourist season. I do not have any estimate of the number of businesses which may be lost as a result of foot and mouth. It is precisely in order to prevent such losses that the Government have introduced a package of measures to help small and rural tourism businesses.

**Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement about financial compensation for tourist businesses adversely affected by foot and mouth. [158152]

**Janet Anderson:** A package of financial measures to help tourist businesses affected by foot and mouth was announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment and chairman of the Rural Task Force, on 20 March.

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received from the Youth Hostels Association in respect of the damage it has suffered as a not-for-profit organisation within the tourist industry during the course of the recent foot and mouth experience; if he will take special measures to assist not-for-profit organisations in these circumstances; and if he will make a statement. [159348]

**Janet Anderson:** The Department has received representations from the Youth Hostels Association on the effects of the foot and mouth disease outbreak on the Association.

A range of relief measures are now available in rural areas and we have provided additional funding for promotional work by the English Tourism Council and British Tourist Authority. However, we have no plans to introduce special measures for not-for-profit organisations at this time.

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received from *(a)* the English Tourism Council and *(b)* the British Tourist Authority on the cost of additional marketing campaigns to combat the economic impact of foot and mouth disease. [159386]

**Mr. Chris Smith** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The English Tourism Council(ETC) has made representations for additional funding in support of the Government's aim to reinforce the message that Britain is open for business and to enable them to assist with the recovery plan following the foot and mouth outbreak. On 6 April, my Department announced that £3.8 million in additional funding was being made available to the ETC for an advertising and promotion campaign to restore public confidence in visiting the countryside. The British Tourist Authority (BTA) has also made representations for additional funding in support of the Government's aim to reinforce the message overseas that Britain is open for business. On 6 April, my Department announced that £2.2 million in additional funding was being made available to the BTA for the promotion of tourism overseas.

On 25 April, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in the House that more money will be allocated to tourism promotion work. A further announcement will be made in the next few days.

### Tourism

25. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement about recent initiatives to encourage tourists to come to England. [158164]

**Janet Anderson:** The British Tourist Authority promotes England, along with the rest of Britain, as a tourist destination through its work in 27 markets overseas.

England accounts for some 85 per cent. of all overseas visitors to Britain (estimated at over 25 million in 2000) and around 90 per cent. of overseas visitors' spending (estimated at £12.75 billion in 2000).

Recent BTA initiatives aimed at attracting overseas visitors to England include promotions of film and TV locations, such as the locations used in the forthcoming 'Harry Potter' film, English gardens, and sporting venues and events.

**Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the work of the British Tourist Authority in promoting Wales abroad. [158148]

**Janet Anderson:** The British Tourist Authority (BTA) works with the Wales Tourist Board (WTB) as equal, strategic partners in promoting Wales abroad. The BTA has an Overseas Marketing Agreement with the WTB, which sets out their respective roles, responsibilities and working relationships in the overseas promotion of Britain and Wales. In addition, the Chairman of the WTB is a member of the BTA Board, representing Welsh interests and advising on strategic and policy matters whenever key decisions are taken.

**Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what arrangements he has made for his Department to monitor visitor numbers to major attractions and tourism destinations in rural areas. [159347]

**Janet Anderson:** The Department of Culture, Media and Sport, the English Tourism Council (ETC) and the Regional Tourist Boards are liaising regularly with a number of tourism-related bodies in order to monitor the impact of foot and mouth on tourism in both rural and urban areas. The ETC also conducts an annual survey of visits to visitor attractions, although this does not at present have a separate rural category.

**Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to restore a marketing function to the English Tourism Council. [159346]

**Janet Anderson:** The English Tourism Council (ETC) was set up following the publication of the Government's tourism strategy, "Tomorrow's Tourism", in 1999. The ETC was given the role as a strategic body for tourism in England—undertaking research, ensuring quality, promoting best practice and innovation, overseeing systems for data collection and promoting sustainable tourism in England and wise growth.

The ETC has neither been asked nor funded to carry out routine promotion campaigns—Ministers have taken the view that the marketing of English Tourism is best undertaken by the British Tourist Authority for marketing the country as a whole to overseas visitors and by the Regional Tourist Boards (RTBs) for their particular parts of England. These arrangements are reflected in the funding agreement between DCMS and the ETC. However the agreement has recently been amended to enable the ETC to carry out marketing for the recovery plan specifically prepared for the foot and mouth outbreak. The ETC has received an additional allocation of £3.8 million to help restore public confidence in visiting the countryside. To date, it has set up an English Visitor Hotline, launched a national advertising and promotional campaign and, working with the RTBs, it is providing public information leaflets.

### Arts (School Pupils)

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on encouraging more school pupils to participate in the arts. [158155]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** Ensuring everyone has access to high quality arts education, from pre-school through to lifelong learning, is a key priority for my Department. We are working closely with partners on a range of policies to deliver this, including the Department for Education and Employment's £270 million Music Standards Fund, the £30 million Lottery funded National Foundation for Youth Music, the £130 million Spaces for Sport and Arts initiative, which will create around 300 multi-purpose sports and arts facilities for primary schools in some of the most deprived areas of the country and the new Artsmark award scheme which has been available to schools since January. We are also establishing 16 Creative Partnerships, targeted on deprived areas, ensuring every school child in the Partnership area has access to an innovative programme of artistic and creative opportunities.

### Digital Television

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the decision by the Italian Government to legislate for analogue switchover in 2006; and what discussions officials from his Department have had with the Italian Government concerning their decision. [159599]

**Janet Anderson:** It is not for me to comment on a decision taken by the Italian Government about a matter of domestic policy. However, my officials have had informal discussions with their Italian colleagues, which emphasised the differences between the broadcasting markets of the two countries.

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the Government's criteria to be met before analogue switchover occurs will be applied on a regional basis. [159598]

**Janet Anderson:** The criteria we have set out for digital switchover are UK-wide. Whether it will be appropriate to proceed on a regional basis will depend on the speed of take-up across the country.

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he *(a)* is taking and *(b)* intends to take to promote digital television; and if he will make a statement on his target date for the switching off of the analogue transmitters. [159601]

**Janet Anderson:** Initiatives such as the digital television labelling scheme, the digital neighbourhood trials and plans to increase the power of digital signals on eight key transmitters have recently been announced. We will continue to work with broadcasters, manufacturers, and retailers on the promotion of digital television. The target timetable for switchover to digital television remains at 2006–10.

### Richmond Park

**Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he intends to open Robin Hood Gate into Richmond Park. [159692]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** Responsibility for the subject of this question has been delegated to the Royal Parks Agency under its Chief Executive, William Weston. I have asked him to arrange for a reply to be given.

*Letter from William Weston to Mr. Tony Colman, dated 30 April 2001:*

I have been asked by the Secretary of State to reply to your Parliamentary Question about reopening Robin Hood Gate in Richmond Park as this is an operational matter for which I am responsible.

We intend to reopen Robin Hood Gate on Wednesday 9th May. We have been refurbishing the gate as part of a planned programme of refurbishment and took the opportunity to carry out the work while the park was closed to traffic. Unfortunately we were unable to complete the work before the park reopened.

### Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on how many occasions between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158557]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** During the period 31 March 2000 to 31 March 2001, special advisers in this Department travelled overseas on official business on four occasion; to Venice (Italy), Berlin (Germany) and Apeldoorn and Haarlem (Netherlands).

### Appointments (Age Limit)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158112]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** In appointing people to the boards of public bodies sponsored by my Department, we are committed to equality of opportunity and to increasing the diversity of those appointed. This includes the principle of selection based on merit which matches the abilities, experience and qualities of individuals to the needs of the public appointment in question. There is no age limit.

### Ealing Studios

**Mr. Peter Ainsworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has received regarding the future of Ealing Studios; and if he will make a statement. [159400]

**Mr. Chris Smith** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* I have received 226 letters about Ealing Studios; 224 of which have asked me to consider adding some of the buildings on the site to the statutory list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. The buildings are, in fact, already under consideration for listing and I hope to announce my decision soon.

### Analogue Licences

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if existing analogue licences will be automatically renewed by those applying for digital licences. [159275]

**Janet Anderson** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* Any national or local analogue independent radio service which has secured a place on a relevant digital multiplex may apply for its analogue licence to be renewed. The same system does not apply to television.

### Premier Christian Radio

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will grant automatic renewal to Premier Christian Radio's analogue licence. [159264]

**Janet Anderson** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The Radio Authority is required automatically to re-advertise, in an open competition, all analogue local licences in areas where the number of persons, aged 15 years or over, resident in the coverage area of that service exceeds 4.5 million. The only analogue services exempted from this requirement are those who broadcast, or are committed to broadcast, on a digital multiplex in the relevant area. As Premier Christian Radio is prohibited by current legislation from holding a digital licence, its analogue licence cannot be automatically renewed. The Government are committed to bring forward communications legislation which would remove this prohibition.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Curry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will publish a daily total of the numbers of animals, by species, awaiting slaughter under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme; [156904]

(2) how many animals broken down by species, have been accepted for slaughter under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme. [156908]

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals were removed from farms under the welfare disposal scheme from the beginning of the foot and mouth outbreak to 31 March. [156923]

**Mr. Livsey:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many animals were slaughtered in the animal welfare slaughter scheme as a consequence of the current foot and mouth outbreak in the period to 20 April; and how many animals remain to be slaughtered. [158601]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answers 9 and 26 April 2001]:* As at close on 25 April 2001 the cumulative totals of animals by species which have been registered under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme, slaughtered or withdrawn are as given in the table:

| *Species* | *Animals registered* | *Registered animals withdrawn* | *Animals slaughtered* | *Total backlog* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sheep | 893,068 | 57,746 | 310,781 | 524,541 |
| Pigs | 340,501 | 29,419 | 146,740 | 164,342 |
| Cattle | 96,007 | 2,894 | 17,867 | 75,246 |
| Deer/goats/llamas | 5,394 | 7 | 439 | 4,948 |
| Total | 1,334,970 | 90,066 | 475,827 | 769,077 |

A daily report of progress under this scheme is available in the Library of the House.

**Mr. Paice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if vaccinations for foot and mouth of *(a)* exotic animals and *(b)* rare breeds of domestic animals which are not intended for export would compromise disease-free status. [156652]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* The European Commission have agreed that each member state may resort to emergency vaccination of susceptible species in zoos with endangered species listed on the red list laid down by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature.

The vaccination of any susceptible animal, even where limited to special categories of animals not primarily concerned with trade, would usually affect an EU member state's foot and mouth status. This leaves unresolved the question of the UK regaining foot and mouth disease-free status if the Government decide to proceed with the vaccination of particular categories of animals. It is unlikely however such special cases would present a serious problem to the resumption of trade.

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to use trained hunt kennel men to augment slaughter teams. [156015]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* Hunt kennel men are already being used within slaughter teams, particularly in Cumbria. The Countryside Alliance is providing details of kennel men to the Ministry. This information is then disseminated to the slaughter teams.

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many doses of foot and mouth vaccine are in stock. [156009]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* The International Foot and Mouth Vaccine Bank at Pirbright holds stocks of an emergency vaccine which would protect against the O-type virus which is causing the present outbreak in the UK. 500,000 doses are ready to use in case they are needed. The acquisition of stocks of additional vaccine strains is considered annually, based on the perceived threat to International Vaccine Bank member countries.

The European Vaccine Bank holds 5 million doses of a suitable vaccine. Effective vaccines are also available commercially.

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what action will be taken to identify sheep that have recovered from foot and mouth infection. [156014]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* Serological examination for antibodies to foot and mouth disease can identify when sheep have been exposed to infection. Serosurveillance is currently being used for diagnostic and epidemiological purposes, and as part of the process of relaxing infected area status. Over the longer term serology will underpin the strategy to resume disease-free status.

**Mr. Collins:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he is issuing in relation to the foot and mouth epidemic to farmers disinfecting their vehicles when entering and leaving farm land. [157020]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* All farmers are advised to spray the wheels of all vehicles entering or leaving their premises with an approved disinfectant, and it is recommended that only essential visits or deliveries to farms are made.

The MAFF website www.maff.gov.uk contains a list of approved disinfectants for use against foot and mouth disease, a list of suppliers of these disinfectants and guidance for proper use of disinfectants.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what impact the drainage system at Throckmorton airfield *(a)* has had and *(b)* will have on (i) excavating trenches for carcase disposal, (ii) discharges into local watercourses and (iii) the amenity lakes on the south side of the airfield. [157781]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* A Soil and Water Engineer is on site working closely with consulting engineers to ensure that any impacts are minimal. A senior hydrologist from the Environment Agency was also consulted prior to burial. A number of conditions were imposed upon the operation, which have been met.

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the pigs at the farm of Keith Mallaber, Grove Farm, Whittington Hurst, Staffordshire, will be removed under the welfare disposal scheme. [156924]

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a decision will be reached on the application by Mr. Tim Dunkley of Greenfield Farm, Upton Warren, Bromsgrove, for disposal of his stock under the welfare disposal scheme; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in making this decision. [157013]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answers 5 and 9 April 2001]:* It is not possible to comment on the position of individual applications made under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme. Major efforts are under way to provide appropriate help to applicants under the scheme. Details of work on welfare issues have been sent to all hon. Members by my noble Friend Baroness Hayman.

**Sir Peter Emery:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what support he is giving to the agricultural supply industry during the foot and mouth outbreak. [156281]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* We are aware that the outbreak of foot and mouth disease is having serious consequences for many businesses. The Task Force chaired by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment announced measures on 20 March to assist businesses affected by the outbreak, such as agricultural suppliers, and alleviate the effects of foot and mouth disease. The Task Force is continuing to consider the economic impact of the disease and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions is collecting information relating to this from all parts of the country.

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will discuss with Department for Education and Employment the issuing of temporary work permits to Australian veterinary surgeons on holiday in the United Kingdom. [156012]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* Responsibility for the issue of work permits lies with Works Permits (UK), part of the Department for Education and Employment and with the Home Office. The Ministry has been in discussion with both these Departments regarding the issue of work permits to vets from abroad who want to work with the Ministry during the current outbreak.

The Home Office has no objections to those qualified vets who are currently in the UK under the Working Holidaymaker Scheme taking up full employment on behalf of MAFF for the duration of the crisis without the need to obtain an additional work permit.

A qualified vet currently in the UK as a visitor may make an application for leave to remain for the purposes of providing veterinary services to MAFF during the crisis. In those circumstances, consideration will be given to the granting of a period of six months leave to remain for the purpose of permit free employment with MAFF.

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to offer financial support for day-to-day living costs to farmers who have confirmed outbreaks of foot and mouth disease and who wish to save the compensation received for slaughtered stock for purposes of restocking when their farms are declared clear. [157061]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* Compensation is paid for the full market value of all animals slaughtered as a result of foot and mouth disease. However, in addition to this MAFF is paying £156 million in optional agrimonetary compensation to livestock farmers. We have also ensured that, where animals slaughtered are the subject of a current subsidy claim, subsidy entitlement will be preserved as a result of the application of EU rules on force majeure. Overall, we have committed over half a billion pounds to farmers so far in the course of this outbreak.

The Government's priority at present remains the eradication of the disease. However, the possibility of taking further action in order to assist the recovery of the agriculture industry is being given consideration.

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the Bruhn Newtech EOD Frontline hazard prediction system with regard to the airborne dissemination of foot and mouth virus. [156919]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* The Ministry is aware of the system referred to and expert advice is that it would not deliver any additional capability over the models currently being used to predict airborne spread of foot and mouth disease.

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many RSPCA inspectors who are qualified slaughtermen are being employed in the foot and mouth cull. [156901]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* There are no RSPCA inspectors currently dedicated to full-time foot and mouth slaughter duties. However, RSPCA inspectors (328 inspectors as of 19 April) are working with the Intervention Board, local MAFF Divisional Offices and the Meat and Livestock Commission, to slaughter stock in extreme cases, where there are animal welfare difficulties.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what representations he has received on the protection of rare breeds during the foot and mouth crisis; and if he will introduce *(a)* blood tests to spare those in a firebreak situation and *(b)* the use of vaccination to protect irreplaceable breeds; [156277]

(2) what representations he has received on vaccinating rare breeds against foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [157019]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answers 2 and 9 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 346W.

**Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his policy is on *(a)* reducing to a smaller area and *(b)* lifting altogether the designated foot and mouth infected area around Stonesby, Leicestershire. [156466]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* The infected area around Stonesby in Leicestershire was lifted on 19 April by the Foot and Mouth Disease (Revocation) Declaratory Order 2001.

**Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects the post-slaughter clean-up to begin at Grange Farm, Little Chesterton, Oxfordshire. [155438]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 26 March 2001]:* The holding in question is split into two premises. Post-slaughter clean up began, with preliminary cleansing and disinfection of both premises, immediately after slaughter. The final cleansing and disinfection of Grange Farm, the home premises, was completed on 11 April and was completed on the second premises on March 27. Restocking can begin 21 days after the final cleansing and disinfection has been completed. Restrictions will be lifted only when it has been shown that none of the animals has developed any clinical signs of foot and mouth.

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if fat cattle farmers in restricted areas may be licensed to take 30-month-old cattle to a licensed abattoir in the same restricted area. [155333]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 23 March 2001]:* The over-30-month scheme is temporarily suspended. However all livestock, including cattle over thirty months of age, where they face serious insurmountable welfare problems due to the foot and mouth disease control measures, may be entered by their owner into the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what guidance he issued to farmers, and when, on the requirements for applications for licences to move livestock with effect from 23 April; and if he will make a statement. [158874]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Due to foot and mouth disease movements of livestock are not allowed unless under licence to slaughter or for welfare reasons. From 23 April it has been possible to move animals that are in an infected area but outside a surveillance zone to slaughter. Guidance on applying for a licence was made available prior to this date on the MAFF website and from local authorities who are responsible for issuing the licence.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence he has collated recently of vaccinated meat entering the UK from *(a)* France, *(b)* Holland, *(c)* other EU countries, *(d)* Argentina and *(e)* South Africa. [158961]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* None. Within the EU, the Netherlands is the only country vaccinating against foot and mouth disease. Vaccinated animals are being slaughtered and meat from them is not being placed on the market. The importation into the UK of fresh meat derived from foot and mouth susceptible animals originating in South Africa and Argentina is currently prohibited. Prior to the prohibitions meat from vaccinated animals could not be imported from South Africa. Meat from vaccinated animals could be imported from Argentina but it had to be deboned and fully matured so as to remove any risk of live foot and mouth virus being present.

**Mrs. Shephard:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he has calculated the effect on pigmeat exports of the introduction of a vaccination against foot and mouth disease. [158882]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* It is difficult to predict the effects of a vaccination programme on pigmeat exports. Given the scale of the outbreak we have suffered, we can expect that other countries will want to be satisfied that the disease has been fully stamped out. This will be the position whether we vaccinate or not.

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials were first alerted to (i) the possible presence and (ii) the confirmed presence of foot and mouth disease in Britain. [153364]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the document available in the Libraries of the House entitled "Discovery and Confirmation of Foot and Mouth Disease in Great Britain: 19–24 February 2001".

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the vaccine manufacturers, stockists and distributors *(a)* currently supplying (i) advice, (ii) services and (iii) materials and *(b)* working (A) for and (B) on behalf of (x) his Department and (y) agents of Government in relation to the foot and mouth epidemic who were contacted (I) by his Department and (II) on his Department's behalf before 19 February. [156410]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* We are not aware of any contacts with any manufacturers, stockists and distributors prior to 19 February. However, the UK is a member of the Foot and Mouth Disease International Vaccine Bank (IVB). The UK together with other stakeholders of the IVB and the Commission of the European Communities hold annual meetings to discuss Foot and Mouth Disease vaccine availability.

**Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his policy is on the use of vaccination *(a)* as an alternative to and *(b)* as a supplement to the policy of mass slaughter as a method of combating the foot and mouth epidemic. [156212]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 30 March 2001]:* Vaccination has always been and remains an option which we keep under constant review in the light of veterinary and epidemiological advice. We have given serious consideration to vaccinating cattle in North Cumbria and, possibly, Devon as a supplement to our existing strategy. However, without the support of a substantial majority of the farming community, veterinarians, the wider food industry and consumers, such a programme would be very difficult to implement on the ground.

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to immunise those dairy cows which are destined for the over-30-month slaughter scheme against foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [156744]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 3 April 2001]:* The Government are currently considering using vaccination as part of the strategy for controlling foot and mouth disease. Scientific and veterinary advice is that a limited programme of vaccinating cattle in North Cumbria and, possibly, North Devon, is justified as a means of protecting animals.

Vaccination in other areas has not been ruled out. But the weight of infection and the ratio of cattle to sheep distinguish these two areas from any others.

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his oral statement of 9 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 705–07, what plans he has to vaccinate deer in deer parks which are neither wild animals nor kept for food production in order to protect them from foot and mouth. [158220]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* At present we have no plans to vaccinate deer. The risk of wild deer spreading foot and mouth disease is low and the risk to park deer of catching foot and mouth disease from the public is also low.

**Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what is the *(a)* minimum and *(b)* maximum period of time that he has decided should elapse before lifting a designated foot and mouth infected area; [157487]

(2) what his policy is on deciding when a foot and mouth infected zone can be lifted. [157488]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answers 9 April 2001]:* The procedure for lifting infected area restrictions involves a process of checking that there are no infected animals in the area surrounding the infected premises. Periodic veterinary inspections are made of all susceptible animals on holdings within 3 kilometres of an infected premises. These inspections continue for at least 21 days following the slaughter of animals from, and satisfactory preliminary disinfections of, the infected premises. This is then followed by blood tests of a statistical sample of all sheep and goats, within the 3 km zone.

The infected area can be revoked 30 days after slaughter of animals and disinfection, provided all the samples are negative and there are no signs of clinical disease, or further confirmed or outstanding cases within the area. This period may be longer if surveillance suggests that disease may be present in the area. The effectiveness of this procedure will be kept under review.

There is no maximum period before an infected area can be lifted. If disease continues to be present in an area, restrictions cannot be lifted.

**Sir David Madel:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make arrangements for the release of foot and mouth vaccine to zoos that include endangered species that are susceptible to foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [157520]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The Standing Veterinary Committee of the European Commission recently authorised member states to vaccinate endangered species but only in very restricted circumstances. Any decision to vaccinate could be made only after the zoo had put in place a wide range of biosecurity measures including, if necessary, closure of the whole or part of the zoo.

We are currently considering whether to pursue this option.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what information *(a)* has been and *(b)* will be provided to parish councils in the vicinity of Throckmorton airfield about his Department's plans for carcase disposal; and if he will make this information available to all interested parties. [157782]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The parish councils have been kept informed of developments on the site and members of parish councils have carried out an accompanied visit to the site.

We will continue to liaise with parish councils particularly over any operational changes which may be necessary.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how many lorry loads of fuel he estimates will have to be transported to Throckmorton airfield on a daily basis, and over what period, to permit the burning of animal carcases; [157063]

(2) what assessment he has made of the implications for *(a)* local farms and *(b)* residential properties near Throckmorton airfield of burning animal carcases on the site; [156980]

(3) what assessment he has made of *(a)* wind strength and direction and *(b)* the presence of birds and rats attracted to Hill and Moor landfill site on the suitability of Throckmorton airfield site for the burning and burial of carcases; [157892]

(4) if the combustion materials being stored at Throckmorton airfield will be used to burn animals on that site; and if he will make a statement. [158187]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answers 5, 10 and 23 April 2001]:* There are currently no plans to burn animal carcases at Throckmorton airfield. The site provides a convenient and central storage facility for pyre materials.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the implications for livestock farms in the immediate vicinity of Throckmorton of the use of the airfield as a disposal site for culled animals. [156995]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* The disposal of carcases at Throckmorton Airfield is carried out under close supervision. The burial site is isolated on all sides from livestock farms.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what types of lorry will be used to transport animal carcases to Throckmorton for burial; and what safeguards will be employed to prevent the spread of the virus from these lorries. [156994]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* Carcases are transported in clean, disinfected, leak-proof and covered transport. The load is disinfected and enclosed in plastic sheeting. Sawdust is used as an absorbent material. The tailgate of the lorry is sealed and the lorry covered with a suitable tarpaulin.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he made of the geological conditions of Throckmorton airfield before deciding to dispose of culled animals there; and if he will make a statement. [157060]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* Prior to agreeing with MAFF the location of the disposal site at Throckmorton, the Environment Agency undertook a risk assessment of the geological, hydrogeological and hydrological conditions at the airfield. This included an assessment of risk to local groundwater and surface water potable supplies.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) at what time on Thursday 29 March his Department notified *(a)* the Ministry of Defence, *(b)* Wychavon district council and *(c)* Worcestershire county council of his decision to use Throckmorton airfield as a disposal site for culled animals; [156685]

(2) what consultation his Department had with representatives of the local community prior to the decision to use Throckmorton airfield as a disposal site for culled carcases; and if he will make a statement. [156684]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* The decision to use Throckmorton airfield as a disposal site for culled animals was not made until after 18:00 on Thursday 29 March. Discussions on the suitability of the site had taken place over the course of the previous days with Worcestershire county council, Wychavon district council and the Environment Agency. The Ministry of Defence was fully involved as the site is in its ownership.

At 12 noon on Friday 30 March, a press conference was held which local people, parish councillors, Worcester county council and Wychavon district council attended.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy that only animals from contiguous culls carried out to prevent the spread of foot and mouth disease will be buried at Throckmorton airfield. [157006]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* The intention is that Throckmorton airfield will be used only to bury animals slaughtered from dangerous contacts, neighbouring farms and the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what legal and planning processes must be completed to enable the burial of animal carcases *(a)* on the Ministry of Defence land and *(b)* at Throckmorton airfield. [156982]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* The regulations which govern the burial of animal carcases are the Animal By-Products Order 1999 and the Groundwater Regulations 1998. The requirements of these regulations must be satisfied before burial is carried out.

Development carried out by or on behalf of the Crown, on Crown land, is not subject to statutory planning control. A non-statutory procedure for the consideration of such development proposals is set out in DOE Circular 18/84. These procedures are currently the subject of challenge in the courts. Whether planning permission is required in any particular case is a matter for the local planning authority concerned in the first instance.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if his assessment of the suitability of the Throckmorton site for the disposal of culled animals included an assessment of odour. [157066]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* The Environment Agency did not assess the potential impact of odour within its risk assessment process, prior to authorising the site, as there is no requirement under the Groundwater Regulations to do so. However, an odour control system is installed on the site, and this is currently being updated.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the sites that were under consideration as possible locations for a mass burial site for animals slaughtered to control foot and mouth disease at the time of the Prime Minister's recent visit to Worcestershire. [156992]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* No specific sites were under consideration during the Prime Minister's visit to Worcester. The need to identify suitable sites was highlighted as a priority during the discussions.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if live animals will be taken to the site at Throckmorton, Worcestershire selected as a mass burial site for animals slaughtered to control foot and mouth disease for slaughter on site prior to burial. [156993]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* There are no current plans to transport live animals to Throckmorton for slaughter on site.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the total number of carcases to be buried at Throckmorton airfield; and for how long the burial operation will last. [156981]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* We will be guided by the Environment Agency and our consulting engineers regarding the site capacity. The duration of operations will be determined by site capacity and how the disease develops.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy not to burn animal carcases at Throckmorton airfield. [157247]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* There are currently no plans to burn animal carcases at Throckmorton airfield.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if carcases from *(a)* Wales and *(b)* English counties other than Worcestershire or Herefordshire, (i) have been sent and (ii) will be sent to the Throckmorton airfield disposal site; [157891]

(2) from what catchment area animal carcases will be sent to Throckmorton airfield for burial; what chemicals will be used during the burial of animal carcases; and what age and type of animals will be burned at this site. [156987]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answers 5 and 10 April 2001]:* The Throckmorton burial site will predominantly be accepting carcases from Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire and Shropshire. In exceptional circumstances, carcases may well be accepted from outside the area under the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme.

Chemicals used during the burial of animal carcases are disinfectants as listed in the Disease of Animals (Approved Disinfectants) (Amendment) Order 1999 and the Disease of Animals (Approved Disinfectants) (Amendment) (England) Order 2000. The main disinfectant used is citric acid BP.

There are currently no plans to burn animals at the site. Sheep, cattle (born after August 1996) and pigs will be buried at the site.

## Agriculture Council

**Mr. Hood:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the outcome was of the Agriculture Council held in Brussels on 24 to 25 April; what the Government's voting record was at the Council; and if he will make a statement. [159572]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** I represented the UK at the meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers in Luxembourg on 24 April. The Minister for Rural Development in the Scottish Executive, Ross Finnie, was also present.

As I reported to the House on 26 April, I brought the Agriculture Council up to date on our efforts to combat foot and mouth disease and the fact that our measures are bringing about a decline in the number of new cases. The Council also heard reports on FMD from the Commission and from the Dutch Agriculture Minister, and in response to a UK/Dutch initiative there was collective agreement to hold a conference later in the year to discuss the lessons to be learned from these outbreaks.

The Council also heard a report from the Commission on the results of the EU-wide testing programme for BSE, and in particular agreed conclusions inviting the Standing Veterinary Committee to extend the temporary ban on meat and bone meal beyond the end of June. With the support of several other member states, I secured agreement from the Commission that they would re-examine the use of fishmeal in ruminant feed in the light of their current evaluation of cross-contamination risks.

Turning to market-related measures, the Council considered a compromise text from the Presidency and Commission on reform of the EU sugar regime, extending the duration of the quota system for a further four years but with a review before end-2002. Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark and the UK were able to support this compromise, but others were strongly opposed. The issue will be re-examined in May.

The Council reached unanimous agreement on measures to reform the cotton regime, within strict budgetary limits. The Council also adopted by qualified majority a proposal to permit organic producers to grow fodder legumes on set aside land; only France abstained in the vote on this small but worthwhile measure.

The Council agreed conclusions on the integration of environmental concerns into the common agricultural policy; these will form part of a report on environmental sustainability going to EU Heads of Government in June. The Commission also reported to the Council progress with the setting up of the proposed European Food Authority.

## Organic Farming

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the use of slug pellets prevents the designation of a lettuce farm as organic. [159261]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* EU standards for organic production contained in Regulation (EEC) 2092/91 permit the use of slug pellets based on metaldehyde. But they may be used only in traps and the formulation must contain a repellent to prevent them from being taken by higher animal species. Subject to review, authorisation for the use of this material expires on 31 March 2002.

However, the private sector bodies that certify individual organic farmers may apply standards stricter than the EU standards if they wish and at least one does not permit the use of slug pellets.

## Flood Defence

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will review the benefit cost factors allowable in analyses of flood defence projects. [159361]

**Mr. Morley:** The Ministry keeps its guidance on the economic appraisal of flood and coastal defence projects under review, inter alia, in the light of developing methodology. Revised guidance was published in 1999. The Environment Agency's "Lessons Learned" Report on the 2000 floods raises questions about the process of making investment decisions. I have asked the Agency to provide me with supporting evidence by September 2001 and the Ministry will then consider with them, and the other operating authorities, whether changes are required.

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will assess the need for catchment flood planning; and if he will make a statement. [159352]

**Mr. Morley:** The MAFF Strategy for Flood and Coastal Defence, published in 1993, emphasised the importance of a strategic approach to the delivery of flood and coastal defences. At the time priority was given to coastal defences and, in partnership with operating authorities, MAFF developed guidance on the provision of Shoreline Management Plans.

The floods of autumn 2000 re-emphasised the need for a strategic approach to inland floods and as a result the Government initiated catchment area studies leading to Catchment Flood Management Plans. These plans will provide a large scale strategic planning framework for the integrated management of flood risks. The Government have made provision for the payment of £2 million in both this year and the next to the Environment Agency on this initiative. Initially five pilot studies are being undertaken.

### Ministerial Visits

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he will list the Ministers in his Department who visited any of the constituencies which are in the Peterborough unitary authority area between 1 January 2000 and 14 February 2001, indicating in each case *(a)* the date of the visit, *(b)* the constituencies included in the visit and *(c)* if the local hon. Member met the Minister; [151020]

(2) when he will give a substantive reply to the question tabled by the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire for answer on 26 February. [154727]

**Mr. Nick Brown** *[holding answers 26 February and 20 March 2001]:* On 23 October 2000, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary visited the North-West Cambridgeshire constituency and did not meet the local hon. Member. On 23 January 2001, I visited the North-East Cambridgeshire constituency and did not meet the local hon. Member.

### Less Favoured Areas

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many producers within less favoured areas submitted integrated administration and control system (IACS) forms for the first time in 2000. [156111]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** This information could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

### Farm Aid Package

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will indicate for each component item of the farm aid package announced on 30 March 2000 whether the funding provided is ring-fenced on an annual basis. [147850]

**Mr. Nick Brown** *[holding answer 30 January 2001]:* Each component item of the £203.5 million farm aid package announced on 30 March 2000 was allocated for a particular purpose and time scale. The Regional Development Agencies have provision to carry over their share of this funding from one year to the next. It has also been agreed that the following underspends in 2000–01 can be carried over into 2001–02: £4.4 million on the Farm Business Advice Service, £3.9 million on the Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme, £0.6 million on the Agricultural Development Scheme and £0.3 million on the Rural Portal.

### Vets

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many vets were employed by the State Veterinary Service in each year since 1997. [153242]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** In the State Veterinary Service there are 304 currently employed Veterinary Surgeons, which comprises 286 full-time posts.

| *Year* | *Full-time equivalent posts* |
|---|---|
| 2000 | 284 |
| 1999 | 283 |
| 1998 | 302 |
| 1997 | 289 |

### Anne M. Veneman

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what *(a)* meetings and *(b)* telephone conversations he has had with Anne M. Veneman since her appointment as US Secretary of Agriculture. [153367]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** So far I have not had any meetings or conversations with Anne M. Veneman since her appointment as US Secretary of Agriculture. We had hoped to meet at the Agra Europe event on 29 March but unfortunately neither Ms Veneman nor I were able to attend. I hope that a meeting can be arranged at the earliest opportunity.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will provide a substantive answer to the question tabled for answer on 30 March (Ref. 156200). [159530]

**Ms Quin:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 349W.

### Land Use

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of land in England was *(a)* under cultivation for crops and *(b)* used for animal rearing purposes in (i) 1980, (ii) 1990 and (iii) the most recent year for which figures are available. [159595]

**Ms Quin:** The answer is in the table.

| | Total area of England (Hectares) | Crops (Percentage) | Animal rearing (Percentage) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1980 | 13,042,200 | 31.9 | 37.8 |
| 1990 | 13,042,200 | 32.7 | 35.4 |
| 2000 | 13,042,200 | 30.5 | 31.2 |

*Notes:*
1. Crops include all arable crops some of which are grown for stockfeeding.
2. Animal rearing is all grassland and rough grazing.
3. Common land has not been included in the figures for animal rearing. There are 427,889 hectares of common land in England.

*Sources:*
Crops and Animal Rearing—June Agricultural Census 1980, 1990 and 2000 (main holdings only).
Total Area of England—Office for National Statistics (2001 data).

## HEALTH

### Sefton Health Authority

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding was allocated to Sefton health authority in total and per head of population in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 2000–01 and *(d)* 2001–02. [158518]

**Mr. Denham:** The allocation and allocation per weighted head of population for Sefton health authority for the period 1996–97 to 2001–02 are given in the table:

| | Allocation (£ million) | Allocation per weighted head of population (£) |
|---|---|---|
| 1996–97[1] | 132.1 | 428 |
| 2000–01[2] | 211.8 | 709 |
| 2001–02 | 230.0 | 772 |

*Notes:*
[1] Allocations prior to 1996–97 were to regional health authorities.
[2] Figures for 1999–2000 onwards are for unified allocations covering hospital and community health services (HCHS) prescribing and discretionary general medical services. These figures are not comparable with earlier years, which are for HCHS only.

### Walk-in Centres

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS walk-in centres have been established in the north-west; and if he will list them. [158399]

**Mr. Denham:** There are currently eight walk-in centres in the north-west and these are based at:

Manchester Airport
Leigh
Bury
Rochdale
St. Helens
Wirral, Arrowe Park Hospital
Wirral, Victoria Central Hospital
Old Swan, Liverpool.

A further two walk-in centres will be operational by August 2001. These will be based in Blackpool and Liverpool city centre.

### Waiting Times

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to reduce inequities in waiting times between health authorities. [158925]

**Mr. Denham:** The National Health Service plan targets reduce the maximum waiting time to six months for inpatient treatment and three months for outpatient appointments by 2005. The Modernisation Agency and the Department's regional offices are working with the NHS to significantly improve access to care and to reduce variations in waiting times in the areas with the longest waits.

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which five health authorities have *(a)* the lowest and *(b)* the highest percentage of patients waiting for ordinary inpatient admission waiting more than one year; and what is the difference in unweighted net per capita funding for the two groups. [158924]

**Mr. Denham:** The information is shown in the tables. The use of unweighted populations takes no account of the relative needs of the population and comparisons should be treated with caution. Per capita figures on a weighted basis are also included.

*Inpatient data by health authority (HA) for December 2000—percentage of over 12 month waiters*

| Health authority | Percentage |
|---|---|
| *Lowest percentage* | |
| Dorset | 0.2 |
| Sunderland | 0.5 |
| Doncaster | 0.6 |
| Gateshead and South Tyneside | 1.1 |
| County Durham and Darlington | 1.1 |
| *Highest percentage* | |
| North Cheshire | 11.6 |
| West Surrey | 12.3 |
| West Sussex | 13.4 |
| Southampton and SW Hampshire | 14.2 |
| East Surrey | 14.7 |

*Note:*
Data relate to ordinary admissions only.
*Source:*
Monthly waiting times return.

*Per capita funding*

£

| Health authorities with over 12 month waiters | Unweighted | Weighted |
|---|---|---|
| Five HAs with lowest percentage | 797 | 745 |
| Five HAs with highest percentage | 703 | 743 |

### Waiting Lists

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people on *(a)* in-patient and *(b)* out-patient waiting lists were waiting more than 30 weeks in (i) health authorities and (ii) the NHS trusts that existed in March 1997. [159229]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer sent 27 April 2001]:* Data are not collected on the number of patients waiting over 30 weeks.

## Mental Health Services

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the third tranche of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services modernisation money for financial year 2001–02 will become available. [159157]

**Mr. Hutton:** In 2001–02 we shall be committing £35 million to the development of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) across health and local authorities. This includes the CAMHS Mental Health Grant to local authorities, which we have increased this year by £5 million to £15 million. The funds to the health service, £20 million, are now secure in health authority baseline allocations. I expect both health and local authorities to continue the good progress they have made over the last few years in developing services for this vulnerable group of children and young people.

We set out a three-year modernisation fund programme for CAMHS in 1999, which included a further £10 million in 2001–02. However, in the spending review last year we decided to place as much funding as possible in main health authority allocations, allowing local health authorities to determine themselves how to implement national priorities, of which CAMHS is one.

I am pleased to confirm that CAMHS will be part of the National Service Framework for Children's Services. This is a major development for CAMHS and will ensure that the quality of Child Mental Health Services will be at the top of the National Health Service agenda.

## Correspondence

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 20 February about the colour imaging test. [159218]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer sent 27 April 2001]:* A reply to the right hon. Member's letter of 20 February was sent on 26 April.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 21 March on behalf of his constituents Mr. and Mrs. Bolt. [159223]

**Ms Stuart** *[holding answer sent 27 April 2001]:* A reply to the right hon. Member's letter was sent on the 23 April 2001.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 15 February on behalf of his constituent Ms P. Rogers. [159216]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* A reply to the right hon. Member's letter of 15 February was sent on 26 April.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 12 February on behalf of his constituent Mrs. C. Dean. [159220]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* A reply to the right hon. Member's letter of 12 February was sent on 28 April.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 801W, when the right hon. Member's for North-West Cambridgshire will receive the promised reply to his letter on behalf of his constituent, Mr. Ball. [159228]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer sent 27 April 2001]:* A reply to the right hon. Member's letter was sent on 27 May. I regret that the answer to the right hon. Member's question given on 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 801W contained an error in that it referred to a letter about another of the right hon. Member's constituents.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 12 March on behalf of his constituent, Mr. D. T. Vickers. [159214]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* A reply to the right hon. Member's letter of 12 March was sent on 26 April.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 21 February on behalf of his constituent, Mr. J. T. Westgate. [159686]

**Mr. Denham:** A reply to the right hon. Member's letter of 21 February was sent on 26 April.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 21 February on behalf of his constituent Mrs. S. Cochrane. [159221]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* A reply to the right hon. Member's letter of 21 February was sent on 26 April.

## NHS Beds

**Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average number of beds is in NHS hospitals in England; [159448]

(2) what is the largest number of beds in an NHS hospital in England. [159449]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* Bed data are collected annually at National Health Service trust level, rather than by individual hospital site. NHS trusts provide healthcare but may provide it at more than one hospital site.

The average number of beds in NHS trusts in England in the financial year 1999–2000 was 548 (186,290 beds in 340 NHS trusts), the largest number being at Leeds Training Hospitals NHS trust with 2,709 beds.

## Patient Referrals (Non-medical Practitioners)

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department issues to non-medical practitioners when referring patients to hospital; and if he will make a statement. [146773]

**Mr. Denham:** The largest groups are general dental practitioners and ophthalmic opticians and the conditions under which they make referrals are specified in their respective terms of service:

" . . . a dentist who does not have the necessary facilities experience or expertise to provide the care and treatment the patient requires shall, if the patient agrees, refer him for the provision of that care and treatment by another dentist under the general dental services or by a hospital."

"Where a contractor (ophthalmic optician) is of the opinion that a patient whose sight he has tested shows on examination signs of injury and disease in an eye or its immediate vicinity, or any other abnormality of the eye or the rest of the visual system which may require medical treatment he shall, if appropriate, and with the consent of the patient, inform the patient's doctor of his opinion."

In emergencies and also under some locally agreed arrangements opticians refer patients direct to hospital ophthalmologists and notify the patient's general practitioner.

### Audiology

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals whose audiology department is equipped to use digital technology for patients with hearing loss; what plans he has to expand the use of this technology; and if he will make a statement. [159284]

**Mr. Hutton:** Twenty National Health Service trusts are participating in the Department's "modernising NHS hearing aid services" projects over the two years 2000–01 and 2001–02, which is evaluating digital hearing aid provision for NHS patients. The NHS trusts are listed as follows.

Addenbrookes NHS Trust
James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust (Royal National Throat, Nose and Ear Hospital)
Forest Healthcare NHS Trust
Bradford Hospitals NHS Trust
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust
Trafford Healthcare NHS Trust
Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust
East Berkshire Community Health NHS Trust
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust
Winchester and Eastleigh Healthcare NHS Trust
Queens Medical Centre Nottingham University NHS Trust
Sheffield Children's Hospital NHS Trust
University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust
Royal Shrewsbury and Princess Royal Hospitals NHS Trust
City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust
Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS Trust
United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust
Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust
The Kings Mill Centre for Healthcare Services NHS Trust.

The Department will study the results of the project to determine how changes to hearing aid services should be rolled out to the NHS.

Pending the outcome of the project, all NHS trusts, with the appropriate staff, training, equipment and experience have been informed through a newsletter that they are eligible to apply for access to the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency contract for digital hearing aids.

### Endoscopic Sinus Surgery

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the current waiting times for endoscopic sinus surgery in each NHS trust in Greater Manchester. [159286]

**Mr. Denham:** The waiting times for endoscopic sinus surgery are not collected centrally.

### NHS Performance Indicators

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to require the NHS Executive to collate and publish annually all relevant NHS performance indicators at the level of individual NHS trust, alongside those performance indicators appropriate to health authorities; and if he will make a statement. [159285]

**Mr. Denham:** The next set of National Health Service performance indicators, due to be published by the Department in the autumn, will include a full set of NHS trust indicators as well as health authority level indicators.

### Dermatological Research

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has had from Professor Jonathan Hadgraft of the Skin Forum Group on the availability of skin for dermatological research. [158884]

**Mr. Denham:** The Department has not had any recent representations from Professor Hadgraft on the availability of skin for dermatological research. However, Professor Hadgraft has written to the Department of Trade and Industry suggesting that the legislation for provision of human tissue for research should be examined.

### Quarry House

**Mr. Hammond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to dispose of Quarry House in Leeds. [159604]

**Mr. Denham:** None. Overall responsibility for Quarry House lies with the Department of Social Security. The building remains an essential part of the Department of Health's headquarters.

### Senior Posts (Women)

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by region, the percentage of senior managerial and clinical posts held by women. [158885]

**Mr. Denham:** The percentage of senior managerial staff and medical and dental consultants in National Health Service hospital and community health services (HCHS) held by women in each regional office area in England as at September 2000 is shown in the table.

| | *Female (percentage)* |
|---|---|
| *England* | |
| Consultants | 23 |
| Senior managers | 48 |
| *Eastern* | |
| Consultants | 22 |
| Senior managers | 48 |

| | Female (percentage) |
|---|---|
| *London* | |
| Consultants | 29 |
| Senior managers | 54 |
| *North West* | |
| Consultants | 20 |
| Senior managers | 49 |
| *Northern and Yorkshire* | |
| Consultants | 20 |
| Senior managers | 42 |
| *South East* | |
| Consultants | 23 |
| Senior managers | 53 |
| *South Western* | |
| Consultants | 20 |
| Senior managers | 47 |
| *Trent* | |
| Consultants | 19 |
| Senior managers | 48 |
| *West Midlands* | |
| Consultants | 19 |
| Senior managers | 45 |
| *Other* | |
| Consultants | 43 |
| Senior managers | 28 |

*Notes:*

1. Percentages were calculated from numbers of staff expressed as headcount.
2. "Other" includes staff employed by special health authorities, other statutory authorities and other centrally based services.

*Source:*

Department of Health workforce census.
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many chief executives of *(a)* NHS trusts and *(b)* health authorities are women; and what proportion of such posts these figures represent. [158886]

**Mr. Denham:** This information is not yet available. The Department has undertaken a survey of executive directors in the National Health Service and the results of the survey will be available shortly. The NHS is committed to employing a diverse workforce and this diversity should be reflected at all levels. The NHS has a target for representation of women at executive director level of 40 per cent. by 2004.

### Health Service Workers

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis mileage payments are set for health service workers who travel between hospitals during the working day. [159684]

**Mr. Denham:** Mileage allowances for National Health Service staff on national terms are determined by an agreement of the General Whitley Council. The current rates, effective from 1 July 2000, are set out in Advance Letter (GC) 2–2000, a copy of which is the Library.

### Cardiothoracic Hospital, Paddington Basin

**Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Health Authority has made a request for helicopter operating facilities at the site of its proposed new cardiothoracic hospital in Paddington Basin, West London, to *(a)* the Civil Aviation Authority and *(b)* the Greater London Authority. [158603]

**Mr. Denham:** Health authorities have no responsibility for any aspect of the planning application. While outline planning permission for these proposals has been sought by St. Mary's National Health Service Trust, the Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust and Imperial College from Westminster city council, the proposals are not sufficiently advanced to include more detailed planning requests.

### BSE-infected Carcases

**Mr. Harvey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many BSE-infected carcases are awaiting destruction; what studies have taken place to assess the risk represented by incineration and airborne prions; and if he will make a statement. [150429]

**Ms Quin:** I have been asked to reply.

The carcases of BSE suspect cattle are sent directly for incineration.

A formal risk assessment to gauge the risk from disposing of BSE-infected cattle in animal carcase incinerators was carried out for the Environment Agency by DNV consulting in 1997 as part of a general consideration of risks from BSE via environmental pathways. The risk calculation showed that the likelihood of the most exposed individual ingesting, in one year, sufficient material to cause infection as a result of burning cattle in specially designated incinerators is less than one in 1 billion. As in other cases, the real risk to the general public will be well below the level assigned to the most exposed person. The broad conclusion that the Agency has drawn from its assessments is that, for all of the disposal options considered, the risk of human infection by the BSE agent is extremely small. In all cases, the results show that in one year the most exposed individual would be unlikely to consume, from environmental sources, more than a minute fraction—significantly less than 1 millionth part—of the dose of BSE infectivity needed to cause infection in humans. More information is available on the Environment Agency's website.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for what reason the advertisements for part-time lay members of the Financial Services and Markets Tribunal restricted applications to persons aged between 35 and 62 years. [158739]

**Mr. Lock:** A normal lower age limit of 35 for applicants to part-time judicial posts is principally set to ensure that those appointed have the length of experience and maturity necessary to fulfil their judicial functions in a way that will both ensure public confidence, and that

they can meet the demanding burdens of judicial office. A normal upper age limit of 62 is principally set to take account of the retirement age for judicial offices, which for part-time judicial office holders is 65. In setting the upper age limit at 62 the Lord Chancellor has taken into account the expectation that office holders should be able to complete a reasonable period of service before reaching the compulsory retirement age.

In exceptional circumstances these age limits may be relaxed at the Lord Chancellor's discretion. The Lord Chancellor's discretion may be invoked, for example, where an otherwise well-qualified candidate has had a career break or started his or her career later than usual.

### Magistrates (Political Affiliation)

**Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many justices of the peace there are in *(a)* Barnsley and *(b)* Doncaster broken down by party political affiliation. [158797]

**Jane Kennedy:** There are currently 129 magistrates on the Barnsley bench and 168 magistrates on the Doncaster bench. The figures currently held on party political affiliation are out of date. The database of records held on all 26,000 magistrates for which my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor is responsible is being validated at present. As soon as figures for Barnsley and Doncaster are available I will write to my hon. Friend. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor intends to publish a breakdown of the lay magistracy in England and Wales by Commission Area for each balancing criterion (gender, ethnic origin, geographical spread, occupation and political affiliation) in his next Judicial Appointments Annual Report which is due in October this year. A copy of the report will be placed in the Library of the House.

## TREASURY

### Census

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about access to the census by disabled people; and what action he is taking in conjunction with ministerial colleagues to improve access. [159409]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Tim Boswell, dated 30 April 2001:*

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what representations have been received about access to the Census by disabled people; and what action is being taken in conjunction with ministerial colleagues to improve access (159409).

An important new initiative for the 2001 Census is the Community Liaison Programme, through which the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Census staff have consulted, and worked with community groups and national organisations specifically to assist those who would find the completion of the Census questionnaire difficult.

For example, the Census Office has worked with the RNIB over the past two years to produce a set of support materials for the visually impaired. These include Large Print, Braille and audiotape formats of the census questions and information. This support material is aimed at providing details about the questions on the Census form to help a visually impaired person to understand what is being requested and to facilitate supplying the information.

In addition text phone Helpline for the deaf has been operating since 1 April 2001.

Specialist training presented by an external expert in disability awareness has been given to Census Area Managers and this training has been cascaded down to all members of the field force. An effective communication guide for all field staff which includes disability awareness has also been produced. Help in completing the form will be provided by Census-takers, on a one-to-one basis if necessary.

Assistance with the completion of the form for anyone who has difficulty, for whatever reason, can be arranged by field staff, either when the Census-taker calls with the form, or via the Census Helpline (0845 301 2001).

I have made alternative arrangements under the Census Regulations to cover cases where, in exceptional circumstances, it would be impossible or unreasonably difficult for the information to be collected by conventional means. This facility is not intended to be used generally, but where it is not possible to provide the necessary assistance locally, information can be provided over the telephone.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what precautions have been taken to ensure that the delivery of census forms does not contribute to the spread of foot and mouth disease from farm to farm; [158955]

(2) what provision has been made for those who have not yet received a census form that they can be collected so deliveries on farms are avoided. [158956]

**Miss Melanie Johnson** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Miss Anne McIntosh, dated 30 April 2001:*

As Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent questions asking (1) what precautions have been taken to ensure that the delivery of census forms does not contribute to the spread of food and mouth disease and (2) what provision has been made for those who have not yet received a census form that they can be collected so that deliveries on farms are avoided. (158955, 158956)

On 2 April I released a statement announcing plans for conducting the Census in areas affected by foot and mouth disease. I attach a copy of this for your information.

This explains that census-takers working in the countryside have been instructed to respect all foot and mouth restrictions, and the wishes of the farming community. Specific guidance for census-takers has been drafted in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) and has been endorsed by the National Assembly for Wales, as well as by the National Farmer's Union.

Specifically, in infected areas and premises within exclusion zones, census-takers have been instructed:

not to attempt to gain access to any premises under MAFF restrictions;

not to visit any premises with susceptible livestock;

to obey any signs forbidding or restricting access to premises;

to stay on metalled/public roads; and

to try to make contact by telephone to find out how best to deliver the Census form.

Details of these procedures have been provided to all Census area managers, and have been incorporated into the training of enumerators.

New arrangements are in place so that Census forms can be delivered to farms and households by mail if necessary, or, where practical, collected from an agreed point such as a farm boundary. Completed forms will be returned by mail.

*The 2001 Census and Foot and Mouth*

National Statistician Len Cook today expressed confidence that the Census in England and Wales scheduled for 29 April can be conducted safely and efficiently despite the restrictions imposed to combat foot and mouth disease.

Census-takers working in the countryside have been instructed to respect all foot and mouth restrictions, and the wishes of the farming community. New arrangements are being put in place so that Census forms can be delivered to farms and households by mail, or, where practical, to an agreed point such as a farm boundary. Completed forms will be returned by mail.

The special instructions, drafted in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food, have been endorsed by the National Assembly for Wales, as well as by the National Farmers Union. Details of the procedures have been delivered to area and district managers, and are incorporated in the training of census-takers.

Mr. Cook said today "Senior Census officials last week visited teams in the regions worst affected by foot and mouth. They confirmed the practicality of the special arrangements for delivering Census forms in rural areas where there are restrictions.

"I am certain that, with these arrangements in place, the Census can be carried through without danger of contributing to the spread of the disease."

"I am very conscious of the distress and difficulty foot and mouth disease is causing, and we shall do nothing that might contribute to its spread."

Census Director Graham Jones, who on Tuesday visited the North of England and met field staff from Cumbria, Northumberland and Yorkshire, today said: "The people at the sharp end say the revised procedures are entirely practical, and can be applied sensibility and flexibly by census-takers in the countryside."

Alex Clark, Deputy Census Director, had meetings with field staff in Wales and Devon, and reported a similar positive reaction. In many places, area managers are liaising with local authorities to ensure compliance with local restrictions.

Forms are scheduled for delivery to households between 9 and 20 April. Delivery in areas where there are restrictions may be delayed by a few days, but forms will reach households in time for the Census on 29 April.

If necessary the deadline for returning forms will be extended.

"The information made available by the Census is essential to the planning activities of a whole range of private and public sector bodies," Mr. Cook said. "It will help determine resource allocation decisions on billions of pounds of public expenditure, which will be vitally important for the rural community and the rural economy. In these extremely difficult circumstances we are delighted by the co-operation we are receiving".

## Alcohol and Tobacco Seizures

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on Customs and Excise policy as regards the seizure of alcohol and tobacco from persons who have bought it for their personal use. [158894]

**Dawn Primarolo:** I announced in March 2000 the tackling tobacco smuggling strategy, which aims to put tobacco smuggling into decline in three years and has provided £209 million for extra Customs resources. Customs efforts in the tobacco sector are, therefore, exclusively concentrated on attempting to tackle those who smuggle tobacco.

Customs do not seize alcohol or tobacco from people entering the UK from elsewhere within the EU where those people are able to satisfy Customs that those goods are for their personal use.

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what right of redress persons have when alcohol and tobacco bought for personal use are seized by Customs and Excise. [158893]

**Dawn Primarolo:** Customs take complaints very seriously and Customs Notice 1000 explains how to seek redress through Customs' own internal complaints procedures and through the Adjudicator and the Parliamentary Ombudsman, both of whom are independent of Customs and Excise.

## Hearing Aid Dispensers

**Mr. William Ross:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to tax hearing aid dispensers as a single supply under the single supply taxation of optical dispensing services to be introduced from 1 June. [158580]

**Dawn Primarolo:** As a result of a House of Lords judgment in January this year, changes have to take place to the tax treatment of the ancillary services provided by some businesses. Each case that may be affected by the House of Lords judgment needs to be considered on its own merits.

## Electronic Commerce

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 5 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 242W, on electronic commerce, if he will make a statement on *(a)* the nature of VAT rules for e-commerce supplies and the changes proposed by the Commission, *(b)* the purpose of the proposed directive on distance marketing of financial services and *(c)* when the proposed directive and changes to the VAT rules will next be considered by the ECOFIN Council. [158579]

**Dawn Primarolo:** Article 9 of the EC Sixth VAT Directive includes rules covering the VAT treatment of e-commerce supplies. The European Commission have proposed a number of changes to these rules, and these are next due to be discussed at the June ECOFIN.

The proposed directive on distance marketing of financial services is intended to complement directive 97/7/EC, which established rules for the distance selling of goods and services other than financial services. The proposed directive includes principles for conduct of business and consumer protection for financial services sold at a distance across borders.

## Heat Insulation Standards

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will insist on a pipework heat insulation standard higher than BS5422 in Government private finance initiative and public-private partnership programmes. [158810]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** In the PFI, the public sector remains responsible for deciding, as the collective purchaser of public services, on the level of services required and the resources available to pay for them. It therefore focuses on specifying outputs rather than retaining detailed control over inputs.

### Scottish Bank Notes

**Mr. Randall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if Scottish banks will be able to produce Scottish bank notes if the UK introduces the euro. [159248]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 28 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 589W.

### Macroeconomic Policy

**Mr. Ian Stewart:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement about his macroeconomic policy in the face of global instability. [160112]

**Mr. Gordon Brown:** As a result of the actions taken by this Government to reform the macroeconomic policy framework, British economic policy is much better placed in the face of global instability than it has been in the past. Inflation is low and stable, the public finances are sound and the Government are on track to meet their firm fiscal rules. Copies of my statement of 29 April to the International Monetary and Financial Committee have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

In accordance with section 12 of the Bank of England Act 1998, I have written to the Governor restating the Monetary Policy Committee's remit which confirms, as stated in my Budget statement, that the inflation target remains 2.5 per cent. for the 12-month increase in the retail price index excluding mortgage interest rates (RPIX).

My letter to the Governor has been laid before Parliament and a copy has been sent to the Chairman of the Treasury Committee. Copies have also been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Disability Living Allowance

**Mr. Steen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security on what basis mileage payments are set for people in receipt of the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance for visits to hospitals. [159685]

**Mr. Bayley:** The mobility component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) is intended to contribute towards the extra mobility costs incurred by severely disabled people as a result of their disability. The Department makes no specific provision, through DLA or other benefits, for the reimbursement of travel costs for visits to hospital.

However, the hospital travel costs scheme, which is part of the NHS low income scheme, allows NHS trusts to reimburse patients on low incomes or in receipt of qualifying benefits for the costs, including private car mileage costs, of travel by the cheapest means of transport available to keep hospital appointments. Qualifying benefits for the schemes include income support and family credit, but not DLA. The schemes are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

### Private Pensions

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of pensioners whose company pension is reduced because they are also receiving a state retirement pension. [158887]

**Mr. Rooker:** Information is not available in respect of pensioners whose occupational pension is reduced to take account of the fact that they are also in receipt of the state retirement pension. Such schemes, which have operated since 1948, have lower contributions to take account of the state pension.

### Occupational Pension Schemes

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will review the costs and benefits to *(a)* employers and *(b)* employees of the legal framework governing the operation of occupational pension schemes. [159363]

**Mr. Rooker:** Occupational pension schemes in the UK are voluntary. As such, the legal framework that governs occupational pension schemes must achieve a balance between the necessary protection of scheme members, which will include employees as well as pensioner and deferred members, and the costs created for the employers who sponsor the schemes. We are always conscious of the need to maintain this balance and therefore keep the framework under continuous review.

Two examples of recent changes to be introduced as a result of this on-going review are the member nominated trustee provisions, to ensure that all scheme members can play a role in the running of their schemes, and the proposals to replace the minimum funding requirement for occupational schemes.

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what help he proposes to provide for those people who are in receipt of a final salary occupational pension plan. [158425]

**Mr. Rooker:** The pension credit will ensure that people of modest means are rewarded for building on the basic pension level through SERPS, a private or occupational pension, or other forms of income and savings.

### State Pension

**Mr. Nigel Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the cost of paying the state retirement pension from the day a claimant reaches pensionable age rather than from the Monday following that day. [158348]

**Mr. Rooker:** The current regulations, originally introduced in 1948, provide for the payment of retirement pension in whole weeks. These regulations also apply at the end of a claim as retirement pension is paid to the end of the week—regardless of the day in the week entitlement to the benefit ceases.

If payment were made for part-weeks and, as now, no attempt was made to recover benefit paid for the remainder of the week after entitlement ceases, we estimate the costs would be up to £20 million.

### Pension Credit

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if any pensioner will suffer a reduction in their income as a result of the abolition of the capital rules and the introduction of the new Pension Credit. [158692]

**Mr. Rooker:** As we set out in the pension credit consultation paper (Cm 4900, Chapter 4 paragraph 29), we will ensure that pensioners receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee will receive, at least, the same level of income with the introduction of the Pension Credit.

### Child Support Agency

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress has been made by the Child Support Agency on reducing the outstanding level of debt owing from full maintenance assessments in line with its performance target. [159169]

**Angela Eagle:** The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Mr. Doug Smith to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 27 April 2001:*

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency.

The outstanding level of Full Maintenance Assessment debt at March 2000 was £578,750,801. At March 2001 debt was £396,527,557.

Full Maintenance Assessment debt has been reduced by 31.5% in 00/01 against a target of 25%.

The reduction (£182.2 million) exceeds the reduction in 99/00 (£103.6 million) by £78.6 million.

The target for 2001/2002 is to reduce debt by a further 25%.

I hope this is helpful.

### Crime Fighting

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to achieve greater co-operation with police forces to assist in the fight against crime. [160067]

**Mr. Rooker:** Following consultation with the Home Office, the DSS and the Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland have signed a memorandum of understanding. A copy has been placed in the Library. The memorandum sets out the principles underpinning the disclosure of personal information by the DSS to individual police forces engaged in the apprehension or prosecution of offenders. A similar memorandum will be signed shortly with the Association of Chief Police Officers (Scotland). Requests for information will now be considered in respect of all criminal offences rather than just the most serious ones.

The revised DSS policy on disclosure is that all personal information held in social security records will continue to be regarded as confidential. Information will not normally be disclosed to third parties without the consent of the person concerned. However, information may be disclosed without consent to assist in the prevention or detection of crime or to aid the apprehension or prosecution of offenders; to meet statutory requirements; to comply with a court order or to prevent duplication of payments from public funds.

The new policy will come into effect today. Initial guidance to all DSS staff will be issued, followed by more detailed amendments to the protection of customer information guide, which is also in the House library, and is available to all DSS staff.

### Departmental Advertising

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much his Department spent on advertising campaigns in 2000–01. [160113]

**Mr. Rooker:** The Department has spent £21,150,000 on advertising campaigns for the financial year 2000–01. The figure includes advertising, supporting literature and other material, telephone response lines, research and some direct mail for the following campaigns: Minimum Income Guarantee; pensions education; inherited SERPS; Winter Fuel Payments; Bereavement Benefits; anti-fraud; and New Deal for Lone Parents. This is a very small amount (around 0.02 per cent.) of the amount paid out in benefits. As not all invoices have yet been cleared the final confirmed figure may vary, but the variation is expected to be minimal.

The figures given in recent parliamentary answers regarding advertising expenditure may vary, depending on whether advertising costs or advertising campaign costs have been requested. Inevitably the inclusion of helpline, literature, and other related costs will result in higher top-line figures than advertising costs alone. For example, the spend on advertising media and production alone for 2000–01 was £18,429,000.

I have become aware of an error in a recent answer on advertising expenditure to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 7 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 233W. The correct information is as follows. I have written separately to the hon. Member about this matter, and placed a copy of the letter in the Library.

*Advertising, media and production costs*

£

| *Year* | *Cost* |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 1,430,698 |
| 1998–99 | 4,671,862 |
| 1999–2000 | 2,788,062 |
| 2000–01 | 18,429,000 |
| Average Yearly Cost | 6,829,905 |

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Fire Cover

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the standards of fire cover were in percentage terms for the year April 1999 to March 2000 for each fire service in Wales and England. [159766]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The Home Office, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) and the Audit Commission have agreed three Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) to measure how well brigades are meeting the standards of fire cover. These are shown in tables 1–3.

*Table 1. Percentage of incidents at which the number of appliances mobilised met the standards of fire cover 1999–2000*

| | Total incidents | Successes | Percentage of successes |
|---|---|---|---|
| County Durham and Darlington | 11,814 | 11,814 | 100.0 |
| Derbyshire | 10,161 | 10,161 | 100.0 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 6,172 | 6,172 | 100.0 |
| Mid and West Wales | 6,200 | 6,200 | 100.0 |
| Northumberland | 3,528 | 3,528 | 100.0 |
| Oxfordshire | 7,024 | 7,024 | 100.0 |
| Royal Berkshire | 1,147 | 1,147 | 100.0 |
| Shropshire | 2,624 | 2,624 | 100.0 |
| Somerset | 3,862 | 3,862 | 100.0 |
| Warwickshire | 4,056 | 4,056 | 100.0 |
| West Sussex | 11,066 | 11,066 | 100.0 |
| West Yorkshire | 17,866 | 17,866 | 100.0 |
| South Wales | 6,073 | 6,069 | 99.9 |
| Cambridgeshire | 6,973 | 6,963 | 99.9 |
| West Midlands | 16,875 | 16,849 | 99.8 |
| Lincolnshire | 2,936 | 2,931 | 99.8 |
| Norfolk | 5,200 | 5,186 | 99.7 |
| Humberside | 7,206 | 7,186 | 99.7 |
| Buckinghamshire | 4,777 | 4,749 | 99.4 |
| Wiltshire | 5,606 | 5,569 | 99.3 |
| Dorset | 4,360 | 4,331 | 99.3 |
| Merseyside | 14,370 | 14,265 | 99.3 |
| Devon | 6,245 | 6,195 | 99.2 |
| Essex | 7,068 | 7,009 | 99.2 |
| Staffordshire | 8,869 | 8,787 | 99.1 |
| East Sussex | 8,044 | 7,956 | 98.9 |
| Leicestershire | 1,345 | 1,327 | 98.7 |
| Cheshire | 7,501 | 7,391 | 98.5 |
| Avon | 9,282 | 9,143 | 98.5 |
| Isle of Wight | 884 | 869 | 98.3 |
| South Yorkshire | 5,010 | 4,898 | 97.8 |
| Gloucestershire | 4,112 | 4,006 | 97.4 |
| Surrey | 9,773 | 9,510 | 97.3 |
| Bedfordshire and Luton | 2,530 | 2,452 | 96.9 |
| London | 52,784 | 51,098 | 96.8 |
| Northamptonshire | 7,789 | 7,455 | 95.7 |
| Cleveland | 2,418 | 2,301 | 95.2 |
| Kent | 10,722 | 10,154 | 94.7 |
| Cornwall | 2,764 | 2,589 | 93.7 |
| Cumbria | — | — | — |
| Greater Manchester | — | — | — |
| Hampshire | — | — | — |
| Hertfordshire | — | — | — |
| Lancashire | — | — | — |
| North Wales | — | — | — |
| North Yorkshire | — | — | — |
| Nottinghamshire | — | — | — |
| Suffolk | — | — | — |
| Tyne and Wear | — | — | — |
| Total | 307,036 | 302,758 | 98.6 |

*Table 2. Percentage of incidents at which the number of riders met the standards of fire cover 1999–2000*

| | Total incidents | Successes | Percentage of successes |
|---|---|---|---|
| West Midlands | 16,875 | 16,834 | 99.8 |
| Merseyside | 14,370 | 14,287 | 99.4 |
| Isle of Wight | 884 | 878 | 99.3 |
| Humberside | 7,206 | 7,155 | 99.3 |
| Norfolk | 5,200 | 5,135 | 98.8 |
| Lincolnshire | 2,936 | 2,857 | 97.3 |
| Northumberland | 3,528 | 3,430 | 97.2 |
| Mid and West Wales | 6,200 | 5,914 | 95.4 |
| Royal Berkshire | 1,147 | 1,089 | 94.9 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 6,172 | 5,676 | 92.0 |
| South Yorkshire | 5,010 | 4,580 | 91.4 |
| Somerset | 3,862 | 3,528 | 91.4 |

*Table 2. Percentage of incidents at which the number of riders met the standards of fire cover 1999–2000*

| | Total incidents | Successes | Percentage of successes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Cleveland | 2,418 | 2,207 | 91.3 |
| South Wales | 6,073 | 5,506 | 90.7 |
| Cambridgeshire | 6,973 | 6,285 | 90.1 |
| Dorset | 4,360 | 3,890 | 89.2 |
| Oxfordshire | 7,024 | 6,188 | 88.1 |
| Essex | 7,068 | 6,133 | 86.8 |
| Leicestershire | 1,345 | 1,166 | 86.7 |
| Avon | 9,282 | 8,045 | 86.7 |
| West Yorkshire | 17,866 | 15,459 | 86.5 |
| Devon | 6,245 | 5,399 | 86.5 |
| Staffordshire | 8,869 | 7,568 | 85.3 |
| Cornwall | 2,764 | 2,348 | 84.9 |
| Shropshire | 2,624 | 2,200 | 83.8 |
| Warwickshire | 4,056 | 3,392 | 83.6 |
| Wiltshire | 5,606 | 4,593 | 81.9 |
| Bedfordshire and Luton | 2,530 | 2,004 | 79.2 |
| Required by Standards of Fire Cover | — | — | 75.0 |
| Cheshire | 7,501 | 5,619 | 74.9 |
| Buckinghamshire | 4,777 | 3,526 | 73.8 |
| Gloucestershire | 4,112 | 2,997 | 72.9 |
| Hertfordshire | 7,453 | 5,382 | 72.2 |
| London | 52,613 | 36,265 | 68.9 |
| Kent | 10,722 | 6,653 | 62.0 |
| Northamptonshire | 7,789 | 4,222 | 54.2 |
| County Durham and Darlington | — | — | — |
| Cumbria | — | — | — |
| Derbyshire | — | — | — |
| East Sussex | — | — | — |
| Greater Manchester | — | — | — |
| Hampshire | — | — | — |
| Lancashire | — | — | — |
| North Wales | — | — | — |
| North Yorkshire | — | — | — |
| Nottinghamshire | — | — | — |
| Suffolk | — | — | — |
| Surrey | — | — | — |
| Tyne and Wear | — | — | — |
| West Sussex | — | — | — |
| Total | 263,460 | 218,410 | 82.9 |

*Table 3. Percentage of incidents at which the attendance times met the standards of fire cover 1999–2000*

| | Total incidents | Successes | Percentage of successes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Warwickshire | 4,056 | 4,044 | 99.7 |
| Mid and West Wales | 6,200 | 6,178 | 99.6 |
| Northumberland | 3,528 | 3,514 | 99.6 |
| Norfolk | 5,200 | 5,172 | 99.5 |
| Somerset | 3,862 | 3,841 | 99.5 |
| Oxfordshire | 7,024 | 6,970 | 99.2 |
| East Sussex | 8,044 | 7,956 | 98.9 |
| Leicestershire | 1,345 | 1,327 | 98.7 |
| West Sussex | 11,066 | 10,865 | 98.2 |
| Humberside | 7,206 | 7,058 | 97.9 |
| Wiltshire | 5,606 | 5,479 | 97.7 |
| Gloucestershire | 4,112 | 4,006 | 97.4 |
| Derbyshire | 10,161 | 9,892 | 97.4 |
| Staffordshire | 8,869 | 8,631 | 97.3 |
| Suffolk | 6,391 | 6,217 | 97.3 |
| Lincolnshire | 2,936 | 2,855 | 97.2 |
| South Wales | 6,073 | 5,899 | 97.1 |
| Cambridgeshire | 6,973 | 6,749 | 96.8 |
| Shropshire | 2,624 | 2,539 | 96.8 |
| Dorset | 4,360 | 4,199 | 96.3 |
| Average | — | — | 96.1 |
| West Yorkshire | 17,866 | 17,144 | 96.0 |
| Cheshire | 7,501 | 7,184 | 95.8 |

*Table 3. Percentage of incidents at which the attendance times met the standards of fire cover 1999–2000*

| | Total incidents | Successes | Percentage of successes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Hertfordshire | 7,453 | 7,138 | 95.8 |
| Northamptonshire | 7,789 | 7,455 | 95.7 |
| West Midlands | 16,875 | 16,080 | 95.3 |
| Isle of Wight | 884 | 842 | 95.2 |
| Kent | 10,722 | 10,210 | 95.2 |
| Essex | 7,068 | 6,711 | 94.9 |
| Merseyside | 14,370 | 13,596 | 94.6 |
| South Yorkshire | 5,010 | 4,702 | 93.9 |
| Royal Berkshire | 1,147 | 1,076 | 93.8 |
| Cornwall | 2,764 | 2,589 | 93.7 |
| Avon | 9,282 | 8,635 | 93.0 |
| Devon | 6,245 | 5,794 | 92.8 |
| Surrey | 9,773 | 9,031 | 92.4 |
| Buckinghamshire | 4,777 | 4,409 | 92.3 |
| Cleveland | 2,418 | 2,187 | 90.4 |
| Bedfordshire and Luton | 2,530 | 2,271 | 89.8 |
| County Durham and Darlington | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Cumbria | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Greater Manchester | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Hampshire | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Hereford and Worcester | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Lancashire | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| London | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| North Wales | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| North Yorkshire | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Nottinghamshire | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Tyne and Wear | [1]— | [1]— | [1]— |
| Total | 250,110 | 240,445 | 96.1 |

[1] Not available

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the standards of fire cover were in percentage terms in Merseyside in *(a)* January 1998 to January 1999 and *(b)* January 1999 to January 2000. [159765]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The Home Office, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Audit Commission have agreed three Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPI) to measure how well brigades are meeting the standards of fire cover. However the records held centrally are catalogued by fiscal year and cannot be converted to a calendar year basis. The records for Merseyside are shown in the table for fiscal years 1998–99 and 1999–2000.

*Standards of fire cover—Merseyside performance indicators*

| | Total incidents | | Successes | | Percentage of successes | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BVPI | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 | 1998–99 | 1999–2000 |
| Appliances mobilised | 14,073 | 14,370 | 14,056 | 14,265 | 99.9 | 99.3 |
| Number of riders | 14,073 | 14,370 | 14,064 | 14,287 | 99.9 | 99.4 |
| Attendance times | 14,073 | 14,370 | 13,321 | 13,596 | 94.7 | 94.6 |

## Fire Statistics

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of the total numbers of fires in the UK in *(a)* 1998–1999 and *(b)* 1999–2000 were in each fire authority area. [159769]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The response is shown in the table.

*Number of fires[1,2] in the UK and percentage of the total by fire authority area*

| | 1998–99[3] | | 1999–2000[3] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| United Kingdom | 405,174 | — | 487,425 | — |
| England and Wales | 40,632 | 84 | 415,563 | 85 |
| England | 315,489 | 78 | 384,233 | 79 |
| *England (Non Met Counties)* | 170,475 | 42 | 205,082 | 42 |
| Avon | 5,908 | 1 | 7,432 | 1 |
| Bedfordshire | 2,817 | 1 | 3,518 | 1 |
| Berkshire | 3,830 | 1 | 4,808 | 1 |
| Buckinghamshire | 3,895 | 1 | 4,920 | 1 |
| Cambridgeshire | 3,497 | 1 | 4,165 | 1 |
| Cheshire | 5,996 | 1 | 7,336 | 2 |
| Cleveland | 5,893 | 1 | 8,353 | 2 |
| Cornwall | 2,338 | 1 | 2,697 | 1 |
| Cumbria | 3,065 | 1 | 3,679 | 1 |
| Derbyshire | 4,562 | 1 | 5,448 | 1 |
| Devon | 5,771 | 1 | 6,532 | 1 |
| Dorset | 3,164 | 1 | 3,606 | 1 |
| Durham | 5,357 | 1 | 6,666 | 1 |
| East Sussex | 4,063 | 1 | 4,994 | 1 |
| Essex | 7,360 | 2 | 9,195 | 2 |
| Gloucestershire | 2,673 | 1 | 2,887 | 1 |
| Hampshire | 8,089 | 2 | 9,547 | 2 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 3,345 | 1 | 3,832 | 1 |
| Hertfordshire | 4,552 | 1 | 5,521 | 1 |

*Number of fires[1,2] in the UK and percentage of the total by fire authority area*

| | 1998–99[3] | | 1999–2000[3] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| Humberside | 7,762 | 2 | 9,006 | 2 |
| Isle of Wight | 659 | 0 | 678 | 0 |
| Kent | 8,825 | 2 | 10,762 | 2 |
| Lancashire | 10,807 | 3 | 12,958 | 3 |
| Leicestershire | 5,058 | 1 | 5,808 | 1 |
| Lincolnshire | 2,985 | 1 | 3,555 | 1 |
| Norfolk | 3,532 | 1 | 3,838 | 1 |
| North Yorkshire | 2,957 | 1 | 3,493 | 1 |
| Northamptonshire | 4,300 | 1 | 4,675 | 1 |
| Northumberland | 2,088 | 1 | 2,864 | 1 |
| Nottinghamshire | 6,665 | 2 | 9,231 | 2 |
| Oxfordshire | 2,946 | 1 | 3,141 | 1 |
| Shropshire | 2,599 | 1 | 3,141 | 1 |
| Somerset | 2,359 | 1 | 2,770 | 1 |
| Staffordshire | 6,165 | 2 | 7,390 | 2 |
| Suffolk | 2,537 | 1 | 2,843 | 1 |
| Surrey | 3,663 | 1 | 4,475 | 1 |
| Warwickshire | 2,599 | 1 | 3,107 | 1 |
| West Sussex | 3,470 | 1 | 3,974 | 1 |
| Wiltshire | 2,314 | 1 | 2,528 | 1 |
| Isles of Scilly | 10 | 0 | 7 | 0 |
| *England (Met Counties)* | 145,014 | 36 | 179,151 | 37 |
| Greater Manchester | 24,698 | 6 | 30,982 | 6 |
| Merseyside | 17,292 | 4 | 22,592 | 5 |
| South Yorkshire | 10,741 | 3 | 13,292 | 3 |
| Tyne and Wear | 13,005 | 3 | 16,304 | 3 |
| West Midlands | 20,923 | 5 | 25,822 | 5 |
| West Yorkshire | 17,533 | 4 | 20,763 | 4 |
| Greater London[4] | 40,822 | 10 | 49,396 | 6 |
| *Wales* | 25,143 | 6 | 31,331 | 6 |
| North Wales | 4,582 | 1 | 5,508 | 1 |
| Mid and West Wales | 6,715 | 2 | 8,513 | 2 |
| South Wales | 13,846 | 3 | 17,310 | 4 |

*Number of fires[1,2] in the UK and percentage of the total by fire authority area*

| | 1998–99[3] | | 1999–2000[3] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Number | % | Number | % |
| *Northern Ireland* | 18,007 | 4 | 18,552 | 4 |
| *Scotland* | 46,535 | 11 | 33,310 | 11 |
| Strathclyde | 24,146 | 6 | 27,219 | 6 |
| Highland and Islands | 2,345 | 1 | 2,284 | 0 |
| Grampian | 3,570 | 1 | 3,964 | 1 |
| Tayside | 3,669 | 1 | 4,334 | 1 |
| Lothian and Borders | 7,149 | 2 | 9,508 | 2 |
| Fife | 2,766 | 1 | 3,081 | 1 |
| Central | 1,945 | 0 | 2,015 | 0 |
| Dumfries | 945 | 0 | 904 | 0 |

[1] Fires include primary (mainly property), secondary (mainly outdoors) and chimney fires
[2] Includes 'late' calls and heat and smoke damage incidents
[3] Provisional
[4] Includes estimates for missing data—secondary and chimney fires (London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority Q1 2000)

## Merseyside Fire Authority

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Fire Inspectorate has received a response from Merseyside Fire Authority to the Principal Inspection report issued in the third quarter of 2000. [159767]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The Merseyside Fire Authority was last inspected by Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate in February 2000. The subsequent report of Her Majesty's Inspector Gordon Russel made 17 recommendations concerning the management of the brigade. The inspector indicated that the fire authority should prepare an action plan to address these recommendations and noted that the Inspectorate would measure the Authority's progress against the plan during subsequent inspections.

A copy of the Fire authority's action plan was received by the Inspectorate in February 2001.

Copies of the Action Plan and Her Majesty's Inspector's report have been placed in the Library.

## Fire Alarms

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in what percentage of cases where fire alarms were present in dwellings on fire in 1999, they *(a)* raised the alarm, *(b)* operated but failed to raise the alarm and *(c)* failed to operate altogether, in each fire authority area. [159770]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The information requested (shown in the table) relates to the percentage of fires in dwellings where a smoke alarm was present and where the fire was attended by the local authority fire service.

*Fires in dwellings by brigade and by presence and operation of smoke detectors, UK, 1999*

| | | | | Percentage of alarms present that | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Total number of fires in dwellings | Smoke alarm present | Smoke alarm absent | Operated and raised alarm | Operated, but did not raise alarm | Did not operate |
| United Kingdom | 72,126 | 26,890 | 45,235 | 63 | 10 | 27 |
| England and Wales | 60,725 | 21,296 | 39,429 | 66 | 9 | 25 |
| England | 57,403 | 19,800 | 37,603 | 66 | 9 | 25 |
| England—non-Met counties | 29,893 | 11,375 | 18,518 | 64 | 9 | 27 |
| Avon | 960 | 422 | 538 | 58 | 14 | 28 |
| Bedfordshire | 429 | 74 | 354 | 69 | 18 | 14 |
| Berkshire | 726 | 308 | 418 | 80 | 4 | 16 |
| Buckinghamshire | 679 | 254 | 425 | 69 | 9 | 22 |
| Cambridgeshire | 547 | 212 | 334 | 63 | 16 | 21 |
| Cheshire | 999 | 382 | 617 | 61 | 12 | 27 |
| Cleveland | 836 | 251 | 585 | 59 | 10 | 31 |
| Cornwall | 437 | 149 | 287 | 66 | 15 | 19 |
| Cumbria | 609 | 208 | 401 | 79 | 6 | 15 |
| Derbyshire | 783 | 203 | 580 | 75 | 4 | 20 |
| Devon | 1,225 | 555 | 670 | 77 | 8 | 15 |
| Dorset | 492 | 180 | 312 | 68 | 11 | 21 |
| Durham | 677 | 174 | 503 | 70 | 2 | 28 |
| East Sussex | 1,129 | 430 | 699 | 60 | 5 | 35 |
| Essex | 1,220 | 378 | 842 | 64 | 8 | 28 |
| Gloucestershire | 521 | 221 | 299 | 62 | 8 | 30 |
| Hampshire | 1,487 | 709 | 778 | 69 | 9 | 23 |
| Hereford and Worcester | 677 | 290 | 386 | 72 | 7 | 20 |
| Hertfordshire | 942 | 445 | 497 | 83 | 4 | 13 |
| Humberside | 1,104 | 466 | 638 | 38 | 15 | 47 |
| Isle of Wight | 165 | 75 | 89 | 81 | 12 | 7 |
| Kent | 1,269 | 369 | 900 | 63 | 6 | 31 |
| Lancashire | 2,274 | 898 | 1,375 | 59 | 10 | 31 |
| Leicestershire | 733 | 206 | 527 | 57 | 9 | 34 |
| Lincolnshire | 520 | 177 | 344 | 62 | 12 | 27 |
| Norfolk | 583 | 157 | 426 | 54 | 9 | 38 |
| North Yorkshire | 546 | 264 | 282 | 54 | 7 | 39 |
| Northamptonshire | 715 | 407 | 309 | 70 | 5 | 26 |
| Northumberland | 309 | 128 | 181 | 71 | 5 | 24 |
| Nottinghamshire | 1,102 | 183 | 919 | 68 | 4 | 28 |
| Oxfordshire | 474 | 244 | 230 | 56 | 4 | 40 |
| Shropshire | 434 | 102 | 332 | 53 | 7 | 40 |
| Somerset | 386 | 174 | 212 | 55 | 21 | 24 |
| Staffordshire | 1,179 | 662 | 517 | 73 | 10 | 17 |

*Fires in dwellings by brigade and by presence and operation of smoke detectors, UK, 1999*

| | *Total number of fires in dwellings* | *Smoke alarm present* | *Smoke alarm absent* | *Percentage of alarms present that* *Operated and raised alarm* | *Operated, but did not raise alarm* | *Did not operate* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Suffolk | 555 | 286 | 269 | 56 | 13 | 32 |
| Surrey | 627 | 224 | 402 | 58 | 13 | 29 |
| Warwickshire | 401 | 98 | 303 | 67 | 14 | 18 |
| West Sussex | 658 | 239 | 420 | 55 | 12 | 33 |
| Wiltshire | 483 | 166 | 317 | 54 | 11 | 36 |
| Isles of Scilly | 1 | 0 | 1 | — | — | — |
| England—Met Counties | 27,510 | 8,425 | 19,085 | 68 | 9 | 23 |
| Greater Manchester | 5,121 | 1,465 | 3,655 | 61 | 12 | 27 |
| Merseyside | 3,019 | 913 | 2,106 | 69 | 9 | 23 |
| South Yorkshire | 1,433 | 313 | 1,121 | 69 | 11 | 20 |
| Tyne and Wear | 2,241 | 913 | 1,328 | 87 | 2 | 12 |
| West Midlands | 4,429 | 2,015 | 2,414 | 70 | 7 | 23 |
| West Yorkshire | 2,504 | 986 | 1,518 | 54 | 12 | 34 |
| Greater London | 8,763 | 1,820 | 6,944 | 68 | 12 | 20 |
| Wales | 3,322 | 1,496 | 1,826 | 62 | 11 | 27 |
| North Wales | 827 | 395 | 432 | 69 | 9 | 22 |
| Mid and West Wales | 1,030 | 472 | 557 | 66 | 11 | 23 |
| South Wales | 1,465 | 628 | 837 | 54 | 12 | 34 |
| Northern Ireland | 1,990 | 833 | 1,157 | 54 | 18 | 28 |
| Scotland | 9,411 | 4,762 | 4,650 | 56 | 9 | 35 |
| Strathclyde | 4,724 | 2,225 | 2,500 | 64 | 7 | 29 |
| Highland and Islands | 288 | 200 | 88 | 35 | 19 | 46 |
| Grampian | 883 | 590 | 294 | 63 | 8 | 28 |
| Tayside | 794 | 390 | 403 | 49 | 13 | 38 |
| Lothian and Borders | 1,804 | 896 | 908 | 42 | 12 | 46 |
| Fife | 437 | 188 | 248 | 53 | 15 | 32 |
| Central | 327 | 197 | 130 | 52 | 10 | 39 |
| Dumfries | 154 | 76 | 78 | 33 | 14 | 53 |

*Notes:*
1999 data are provisional and based on a sample of all incidents.
Including late call and heat and smoke damage incidents (not recorded prior to 1994).
*Source:*
Home Office Fire statistics

### Smoke Alarms

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the Fire Research and Development Group, Part II-Review of Research 1999–2000, what were the conclusions and recommendations of the report on domestic smoke alarms (advice to the public). [159788]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** No formal report of the research carried out by the Institute of Child Health (ICH) referred to in the Fire Research and Development Group (FRDG) document Review of Research 1999–2000 has been published.

The objective of the research was to determine whether the door-to-door distribution of free smoke alarms to inner-city residents in London would be effective in reducing the risk of residential fires, fire related casualties, and serious fire-related injuries and deaths. The programme was being conducted in Camden and Islington, areas identified as being of substantial risk and deprivation. It commenced in July 1997. The researchers provided some 20,000 smoke alarms, potentially sufficient to increase smoke alarm ownership by 50 per cent. in their intervention areas. However a year after the programme, the level of installed working alarms was found to be not significantly higher than it was in the control group (39 per cent. as opposed to 38 per cent).

It is understood that the researchers feel the findings to date show the importance of not simply supplying smoke alarms, but of also having them installed professionally, if a 'give-away' initiative is to work.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of households owned smoke alarms in each fire authority area in *(a)* 1998 and *(b)* 1999. [159768]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The information requested is not available centrally.

Smoke alarm ownership data are collected on a national basis via surveys. The Home Office Fire Safety Attitudes and Awareness Monitor shows that *(a)* 82 per cent. of households owned a smoke alarm in 1998 and *(b)* 81 per cent. of households in 1999 owned a smoke alarm.

### Scientific Staff (Attacks)

**Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps the Government *(a)* have taken and *(b)* plan to take to protect scientific staff whose work involves animal testing from physical attacks and harassment directed at them because of their employment; and if he will make a statement. [158820]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The Government are totally committed to the protection of those working or otherwise connected with legitimate scientific research on animals.

Proposals aimed at preventing protests outside homes and strengthening the law on malicious communications and harassment have been included in the Criminal Justice and Police Bill currently before Parliament. In addition, the Government have published a consultation paper on the Government's strategy for tackling animal rights extremism, a copy of which is in the Library. We will continue to liaise closely with the police and other criminal justice agencies to ensure effective enforcement of the law in this area.

## ADT *v.* UK

**Dr. Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 16 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 750W, how many hours of work by departmentally employed staff were put in to pursue the Government's case in ADT *v.* UK; what the total sum of expenses claims put in by staff working on the Government's defence was; and how much was paid to legal staff not already employed by his Department for advice and work on the case. [158841]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Officials in the Home Office who worked on the Government's case in ADT *v.* UK did so as part of their wider duties of dealing with the law on sex offences. Records were not kept of the time taken in dealing with issues relating to this case. That was why I was unable to give the hon. Member an estimate of the total costs in defending the case in answer to the question he asked on 16 November.

We estimate that the total sum of expenses claims made by staff in the Home Office in connection with the case amounted to approximately £530. The cost of non-departmental legal advice amounted to £3,058.53.

## Government Funding (Walsall)

**Mr. Bruce George:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional funding has been allocated to *(a)* public and *(b)* private organisations in Walsall for (i) policing, (ii) crime reduction, (iii) community safety, (iv) regeneration and (v) drugs prevention and related matters for each year since 1996; and if he will identify the organisations and amounts allocated. [158922]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Details of funding for crime reduction, community safety and drugs prevention are in the table.

Regeneration is a matter for the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR).

West Midlands police received £2,791,185 in 2000–01 from the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) for the recruitment of police officers over and above previous plans. Estimated CFF provision for 2001–02 is £7,397,000 but the amount may vary according to the success of the force's recruitment efforts and the timing of recruitment. They also received £3.3 million from the Police Modernisation Fund in 2000–01 to target robbery specifically, of which £50,000 has been allocated to Walsall.

Grant supported funding from the Home Office and the DETR for the West Midlands police has been as follows: 1996–97 £344 million; 1997–98 £353.4 million; 1998–99 £371.9 million; 1999–2000 £380.6 million; 2000–01 £392.7 million; 2001–02 £409.7 million.

| *Funding allocation area* | *Initiative* | *Grant recipient* | *Public or private sector* | *Amount (£)* | *Financial year (where appropriate)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Crime reduction | CCTV Challenge | Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council | Public | 52,400 | 1996–97 |
| Crime reduction | CCTV Challenge | Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council | Public | 105,400 | 1997–98 |
| Crime reduction | Youth Justice Board Development Fund | Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council | Public | 71,725 | 1999–2000 to 2000–01 |
| Crime reduction | Youth Justice Board—Youth Inclusion Programme | NACRO Walsall | Private | 81,065 | 1999–2000 to 2000–01 |
| Crime reduction | Splash scheme | NACRO Walsall | Private | 39,000 | [1]2000–01 |
| Crime reduction | Drug Arrest Referrals | West Midlands Police Authority[2] | Public | 5,000<br>62,552 | 1999–2000<br>2000–01 |
| Crime reduction | Reducing Burglary | Walsall MBC | Public | 61,407 | 2000–01 |
| Crime reduction | CCTV | Walsall MBC | Public | 309,629 | 2000–01 |
| Crime Reduction | Neighbourhood Wardens | Walsall Housing Regeneration agency | Private | [3]41,003 | 2000–01 |
| Community safety | Connecting Communities Grant | Walsall Strategic Race Equality Grant | Private | 192,000 | 2000–01 |
| Community safety | Connecting Communities Grant | Walsall Ethnic Business Association | Private | 155,000 | 2000–01 |
| Drug prevention | DAT (Drug Action Team) Development Funding | Walsall DAT | Public | 117,711 | 1999–2000 to 2001–02 |
| Drug prevention | Drug Prevention Education | Walsall Health Education | Public | 191,705 | 1997–98 to 2001–02 |
| Drugs prevention | Youth Service | Walsall MBC (Training for youth workers) | Public | 96,097 | 1997–98 to 2001–02 |
| Drugs prevention | Youth Service | Youth Service (Walsall Walkways Project) | Public | 25,000 | 1996–97 to 1998–99 |
| Drugs prevention | Community Work | Activities funded through Health Action Zone programmes | Public | 146,000 | 1999–2000 to 2000–01 |
| Drug prevention | Treatment for drug users | Walsall Health Authority | Public | [4]1,617,959 | 1997–98 to 2001–02 |

[1] One scheme run under Summer Splash and one under Easter Splash. Funds to this initiative are also provided by the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.

[2] Grant is paid to Police Authority who then transfer it to Walsall Health Authority.

[3] Amount paid to date.

[4] Includes funds from the Department of Health.

### Firearms Compensation Scheme

**Mr. Hunter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for compensation under the Firearms Compensation Scheme remain unsettled. [158906]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** As at 25 April, of the initial 72,000 claims submitted, there were 623 claims made under the Firearms Compensation Scheme which have yet to be settled. Of these, payment of the compensation deemed appropriate under the Scheme has been made in 579 cases and we are currently awaiting return of final declarations of acceptance. Payment has been offered in the remaining 44 cases.

### Animal Welfare

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information, the effects of his Department's policies and actions in relation to animal welfare since 2 May 1997. [158903]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** We are continuing to work to ensure that the highest possible standards of welfare are applied to animals used in scientific procedures and that they are used only where it is fully justified—where the benefits outweigh the costs and where there are no suitable alternatives. To this end we are promoting the fullest application of the 3Rs—the replacement of procedures with others which do not use animals, the reduction of the number of animals used and the refinement of procedures to minimise pain and suffering.

In addition to our commitment to the 3Rs, the other main individual measures this Government have introduced since the election to ensure that animals are used only where fully justified are as follows. We have: secured a voluntary ban on testing cosmetic finished products on animals; increased the budget made available to the Animal Procedures Committee to sponsor research on alternatives by 45 per cent. to £265,000 for 2000–01; banned the use of animals to test alcohol and tobacco products; increased the size of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate from 18 to 21, and recruited seven new inspectors to fill these and other vacancies and recently announced plans to further increase numbers to 33 over the next three years; introduced a requirement that all establishments licensed under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 have local ethical review processes as a complement to the existing controls under the Act. We are now reviewing those processes to ensure dissemination of best practice; announced our intention never to allow the use of Great Apes (gorillas, chimpanzees, pygmy chimpanzees and orang-utans); announced that licenses for monoclonal antibody production by the ascites method will not be granted other than in exceptional circumstances; and ended the licensing of the LD50 test and of tests for skin corrosivity and phototoxic potential where valid alternatives exist.

The number of scientific procedures in Great Britain in 1999 was nearly 2.66 million—very slightly down on 1998. The number of animals used was 2.57 million, about 24,000 fewer than in 1998. With the exception of 1997 this is the lowest number since 1955.

The overall reduction in the use of animals reflects the Government's commitment to applying the principles of the 3Rs to all animal testing in the United Kingdom. However, it is very difficult to project the number of animals to be used in future years. Numbers depend on the type of project licence applications that will be made and progress on current project licences, as well as global trends in scientific endeavour.

Other support given to animal welfare includes: bringing forward a Government Bill to address the issue of hunting with dogs; backing a Private Member's Bill which became the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999, a measure aimed at tightening regulation of commercial dog breeding establishments, and issue to local authorities of related detailed guidance; preparation, with the Association of Circus Proprietors, of a code of practice on the care and welfare of animals in travelling circuses; making an Order that allows for an indefinite prohibition of the culling of seals on the east coast of England, which has assisted in the recovery of common seals to pre-1988 numbers when a virus decimated their population—by 1999 their number had risen to 3,600 just 400 down on 1988 numbers.

### 2 Marsham Street

**Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date it is planned to start demolishing the old Department of the Environment offices at 2 Marsham Street. [158838]

**Mr. Straw:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend, the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck), on 28 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 1167W. Contract negotiations for developing the Marsham Street site as a public private partnership project are currently in progress with Anne's Gate Property plc, the preferred bidder. The City of Westminster has resolved in February to grant detailed planning consent subject to completion of a planning agreement which is currently being negotiated. Provided final contract terms can be agreed between the Home Office and the preferred bidder, a start on demolishing the old Department of the Environment offices is planned later this year.

### Justice and Home Affairs Council

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Council Working Parties on Justice and Home Affairs, indicating *(a)* the number of meetings since 2000 and *(b)* the items on the agenda for each. [158757]

**Mrs. Roche:** The Treaty on European Union established the "Article 36 Committee", a co-ordinating committee of senior officials in the field of police co-operation and judicial co-operation in criminal matters. The Committee of Permanent Representatives has also approved, most recently in 1999, a list of working parties and committees in the Justice and Home Affairs sector. In addition, a number of the working parties established by the Permanent Representatives Committee in the General Affairs sector deal with issues with a justice and home affairs dimension.

Since the start of the Swedish Presidency on 1 January 2001, there have been 176 meetings of these working groups. To provide an itemised agenda for each meeting would involve disproportionate cost. However, the agendas can be obtained individually from the Swedish Presidency website at "www.eu2001.se".

List of Working Parties:

*Justice and Home Affairs*

Strategic Committee on Immigration, Frontiers and Asylum

Working Party on Migration and Expulsion Visas Working Party

Asylum Working Party

(a) Dublin Convention

(b) Eurodac

Centre for Information, Discussion and Exchange on Asylum (CIREA) Working Party

Centre for Information, Discussion and Exchange on the Crossing of Frontiers and Immigration (CIREFI) Working Party

Working Party on Frontiers (including false documents)

Committee on Civil Law Matters

Working Party on Information Systems and Data

Protection (excluding Schengen Information System)

Schengen Information System (SIS) Working Party

Schengen Information Technical (SIS-TECH) Working Party

(a) General

(b) Schengen Information System Network (SISNET)

Supplementary Information Request at National Entry (SIRENE) Working Party

Police Co-operation Working Party (including false documents)

(a) Telecommunications

(b) Investigative Techniques and Forensic Science

(c) Exchange of Police Intelligence

Europol Working Party

Working Party on Terrorism

Working Party on Drug Trafficking

Customs Co-operation Working Party

Working Party on Co-operation in Criminal Matters

Working Party on Substantive Criminal Law

Working Party on Collective Evaluation

Working Party on Schengen Evaluation

Working Party on the Schengen Acquis

Multidisciplinary Group on Organised Crime (including the Pre-accession Pact Experts Group (PAPEG))

Working Party on the European Judicial Network

Working Party on the Contact and Support Network

Working Party on Civil Protection

*General Affairs (Horizontal Issues)*

High Level Working Group on Asylum and Migration

Horizontal Working Party on Drugs

*General Affairs (External Relations)*

Committee for Civilian Aspects of Crisis Management.

## Departmental Policies (Battersea)

**Mr. Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the Battersea constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158761]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 2000–01, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. 'Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000' and 'Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000' can be found in the Library. The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by Basic Command Unit and Crime and Disorder partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are examples relating to the Battersea constituency or the immediate locality.

*Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI)*

The Metropolitan police in partnership with the London Borough of Wandsworth have been granted £7,000 for a project covering the over 60s in Wandsworth. The main interventions proposed include target hardening for repeat victims particularly among elderly households. Approximately £19,000 has been awarded to a project in Balham. The main interventions proposed are raising awareness, a crime prevention roadshow, target hardening and a property accreditation scheme for an area with large numbers of flats and houses in multiple occupation.

*Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)*

Wandsworth borough council was awarded £73,000 for a four-camera scheme to extend the current system covering two major car parks, public access points and Prince of Wales Drive in Battersea. The scheme aims to reduce overall crime by 10 per cent. in three years.

*Youth Offending*

Battersea is covered by the Wandsworth Youth Offending Team (YOT). It is currently receiving funding from the Youth Justice Board (YJB) for four Intervention Schemes and one Bail Support Scheme. The YOT consists of members of staff from five core agencies: Social Services, Police, Probation, Education and Health. During the past year the local health authority has increased its representation from a part-time psychologist to a full-time post. The YOT has an annual budget in excess of £1.5 million. Some key achievements in the last year include: staffing has provided to allow Balham Court House to open five days a week; a new database (YJB funded) has been installed to allow improved monitoring of the whole youth justice system; Persistent Young Offenders are being dealt with on average within 60 days; Restorative Justice Conferencing has been established with YJB funding, allowing the existing Family Group Meeting Service to be expanded to include young people and their families; an indirect reparation scheme is run on Saturdays in Battersea Park—young people are required to undertake basic maintenance tasks, for example sweeping leaves and cleaning Parks Police Cars. All young people in Wandsworth in receipt of a Final Warning are assessed for a programme of intervention and a Mentoring Scheme has been established, with 24 mentors already trained and over 10 matched with young people. Truancy Sweeps have been introduced using the YOT premises: 18 truants were picked up in the first sweep, some of those identified will be referred on to activities such as summer colleges. All YOT staff have participated in a full training programme including working with parents of offenders and cognitive ways of working.

The YJB have contributed £65,000 towards a project aimed at young people in receipt of Final Warning, Community Sentences and those young people made subject to a Detention and Training

Order. The Effective Supervision Project is particularly for persistent young offenders and includes individual programmes, group work and a cognitive behavioural offending programme. The Victim Offender Family Group Meeting Project provides a dedicated officer responsible for the recruitment and training of Victim Conferencing Co-ordinators and project development. This scheme has received a YJB grant of approximately £68,000. £99,000 has been contributed towards the Wandsworth Parenting Project. The main objective is to prevent offending by young people by the provision of appropriate and good quality parenting programmes that are credible to the courts, the parents concerned and the young offenders. Wandsworth YOT Mentoring Service will be a flexible scheme offering short-term task centred support or longer-term support helping to build a young person's self esteem. Almost £112,000 has been granted towards this scheme. The YJB are contributing approximately £157,000 towards a Bail Support Scheme, which aims to provide support and supervision for young people on remand to avoid them having to be removed from home because of their offending.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Battersea to a greater or lesser extent. For example: 376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established; racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998; the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 49,690 by the end of February 2001; and good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

### CCTV Challenge Fund

**Mr. Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much each London borough received in rounds one and two of the Home Office CCTV Challenge Fund allocations. [158784]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** We are now running a Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) Initiative, which replaced the earlier CCTV Challenge Fund. In round one of that initiative a total of £17.4 million was awarded to 52 schemes submitted by London boroughs. The shortlist of bids recently announced under round two of the CCTV Initiative includes 30 schemes from London boroughs, with a potential capital value of £19.1 million.

A list of these schemes in London boroughs awarded funding under round one of the CCTV Initiative, and those that have been invited to the final stage of round two of the CCTV Initiative, has been placed in the Library.

### Police Defence Equipment

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what trials are being undertaken of *(a)* the advanced taser M26, *(b)* the laser dazzler, *(c)* the bean bag and *(d)* pepper spray; what the specifications are for each test; what police forces or other bodies have been approached or agreed to conduct further trials; what his estimate is of the cost of each trial programme; and what social impact assessment he will commission for each weapon. [158789]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** A wide range of technologies which could be used by the police for self-protection and the maintenance of law and order is currently being considered by the Home Office Police Scientific Development Branch (PSDB), including the advanced air taser, laser dazzler and bean bag. This programme of work responds to an operational requirement set by the Association of Chief Police Officers. A preliminary review of the available equipment has recently been published by the Northern Ireland Office in relation to the Patten Report recommendations on seeking potentially less lethal alternatives to Plastic Baton Rounds. The fact that items are being studied does not of course mean that they will necessarily come into police use.

Pepper spray has been discounted for use in the United Kingdom, but Sussex police are trialling a synthetic version of the spray, PAVA, in one of their Divisions.

The total cost of the work being carried out for the Home Office at PSDB is £402,000. Formal social impact assessments are not carried out as part of this programme, but all relevant factors would be considered before any decision to recommend police use of any of the equipment in question.

### Circus Animals

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will list the *(a)* persons and *(b)* organisations his Department has consulted in preparing guidelines relating to the use of animals in circuses; [159592]

(2) what plans he has to issue official guidelines on the use of animals in circuses. [159602]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** The Association of Circus Proprietors has produced a Code of Practice on standards for the care and welfare of circus animals on tour. Copies of the Code of Practice will be made available to local authorities and circuses as well as other interested parties.

I understand the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the British Veterinary Zoological Society, the Zoological Society of London and the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare were all consulted on the content of the Code of Practice. Home Office officials provided some advice and assistance to the Association in the preparation of its Code but it remains the Code of the Association. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and other organisations will be meeting me shortly to discuss it.

### Human Rights Commission

**Ms Kelly:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to establish a human rights commission for England and Wales. [159279]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** We have no present plans to establish a Human Rights Commission for England and Wales. The Joint Parliamentary Commission on Human Rights is currently scoping a study into the possibility of a Human Rights Commission, and we will be interested to see its conclusions.

### Police (Cambridgeshire)

**Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers were in post per 1,000 head of population in the county of Cambridgeshire on 1 January in each year between 1996 and 2001. [159521]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The information is set out in the table. Police numbers are collected twice a year on 31 March and 30 September. The information in the table is therefore based on police numbers for 31 March of each year, except for 2001 where the special collection of police numbers for 31 January has been used.

*Cambridgeshire Constabulary*

| *Year* | *Police numbers* | *Population (mid June of preceding year)* | *Police officers per 1,000 population*[1] |
|---|---|---|---|
| 31 March 1996 | 1,238 | 693,871 | 1.78 |
| 31 March 1997 | 1,302 | 703,251 | 1.85 |
| 31 March 1998 | 1,291 | 712,240 | 1.81 |
| 31 March 1999 | 1,274 | 719,767 | 1.77 |
| 31 March 2000 | 1,237 | 724,897 | 1.71 |
| 31 January 2001 | 1,309 | [2]724,897 | [2]1.81 |

[1] Calculated on the basis of population figures, for June of the preceding year, provided by the Office for National Statistics.

[2] June 2000 population figures are not yet available. June 1999 population data have been used.

### Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total gross running cost to his Department was for travel, including fares, subsistence, accommodation and other expenses met from public funds for visits exclusively within the United Kingdom by *(a)* him and *(b)* Ministers, in the 12 months ending 30 April 1997. [157621]

**Mr. Straw:** Departmental records available for the 12 months to 30 April 1997 show the following costs:

*(a)* Visits by the Home Secretary—£16,866.65

*(b)* Visits by other Home Office Ministers—£38,035.75.

These figures include where relevant the costs of an accompanying Private Secretary.

### Departmental Entertaining

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total gross running costs to his Department were in the 12 months ending 30 April 1997 of entertaining by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials. [157619]

**Mr. Straw:** The total gross running cost to my Department in the 12 months ending 30 April 1997 of entertaining by Ministers was £14,793 and by officials was £27,036.

In my reply of 27 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 603W, I reported that the provisional gross running cost to my Department in the 12 months to 31 January 2001 of entertaining by officials was £160,095. It has since been found that a sum of £131,064 relating to the costs of conferences had been incorrectly classified in the accounting system as entertaining costs. Provisional expenditure on entertaining by officials in the 12 months to 31 January 2001 was £29,031.

### Crime Rates (Chichester)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what information is provided on the knowledge network on the level of *(a)* recorded crime, *(b)* violent crime and *(c)* police manpower in the Chichester constituency; and what comparable statistics are available for 1997. [159265]

**Mr. Charles Clarke** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* Details of crime and police manpower are not collected centrally at constituency level, and so are not available for inclusion on the knowledge network.

The most recent details of recorded crime in the Chichester Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership area, for selected offences, are available in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 1/01, "Recorded Crime: England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000", which is available in the Library. Equivalent figures for 1997 are not available centrally.

### Metropolitan Police

**Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* serving officers of and *(b)* recruits to the Metropolitan police in 2000–01 reside in Hertfordshire. [159535]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** I am told by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that this information is not held centrally.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Winnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Walsall, North will receive a reply to his letter of 7 March, regarding a constituent: Ref. 6492/1. [159233]

**Mrs. Roche:** I wrote to my hon. Friend on 30 April 2001.

### Disorder

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets he has set for the reduction of incidents of disorder. [159021]

**Mr. Charles Clarke** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 391W. The target is that there should be a reduction in disorder; we expect to have sufficient data to produce a baseline this autumn and work on quantifying the target will follow.

### Crime (Walsall)

**Mr. Bruce George:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money was given directly to *(a)* the local authority and voluntary organisations and *(b)* the police in Walsall by his Department to aid in crime reduction and crime prevention in each year since 1997. [158743]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Amounts paid as grant under various Home Office initiatives to support crime reduction are as follows.

| Initiative | Grant recipient | Local authority, voluntary sector or police | Financial year | Amount (£) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| CCTV Challenge | Walsall metropolitan borough council | Local authority | 1996–97 | 52,400 |
| CCTV Challenge | Walsall metropolitan borough council | Local authority | 1997–98 | 105,400 |
| Youth Justice Board Development Fund | Walsall metropolitan borough council | Local authority | 1999–2000 | 55,648 |
| Drug Arrest Referrals | West Midlands police authority[1] | Police | 1999–2000 | 5,000 |
| | | | 2000–01 | 62,552 |
| Youth Justice Board Development Fund | Walsall metropolitan borough council | Local authority | 2000–01 | 16,464 |
| Reducing Burglary | Walsall metropolitan borough council | Local authority | 2000–01 | 61,407 |
| CCTV | Walsall metropolitan borough council | Local authority | 2000–01 | 309,629 |
| Neighbourhood Wardens | Walsall Housing Regeneration Agency | Voluntary sector | 2000–01 | 41,003 |

[1] Grant is paid to police authority who then transfer it to Walsall health authority

## Special Advisers (Overseas Visits)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158559]

**Mr. Straw:** I have two departmental special advisers, one of whom made one official visit abroad between 31 March 2000 and 31 March 2001. The visit was a fact-finding programme to the United States of America to discuss law and order issues with policy advisers and practitioners. The visit was made in accordance with the Civil Service Management Code. My second special adviser was in the United States of America at the same time and attended parts of the programme but his visit was not supported by public funds.

## Police (West Sussex)

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers, patrol officers and community beat officers there were in West Sussex in 1997; and how many there are today. [158597]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The information in the table has been provided by the Chief Constable of the Sussex police. I understand that of the five divisions that police the county of West Sussex two of them also police parts of the County of East Sussex, the number of officers available to police West Sussex will therefore vary from week to week.

I am also told that because of changes to computer systems in December 1999 the force is unable to provide historical information about the distribution of officers between the divisions of the Sussex police. However, the force has been able to provide an estimate for 1997, which is based on the current distribution of police officers to divisions, and these are in the table.

*Number of police officers in West Sussex area of the Sussex police*

| | *31 March 1997* | *31 March 2001* |
|---|---|---|
| Total number of police officers | 916 | 883 |
| Response (patrol) officers | 456 | 442 |
| Community beat officers | 181 | 174 |

## Lord Birt

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much has been claimed to date by Lord Birt in out-of-pocket expenses in respect of his role as a Government adviser on crime; and if he will make a statement. [158227]

**Mr. Straw:** I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 17 November 2000, *Official Report,* column 801W. Lord Birt has not claimed out-of-pocket expenses since then.

## Benefit Fraud

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* average sentence for people imprisoned for Housing Benefit fraud and *(b)* average length of time served by people imprisoned for Housing Benefit fraud was in each of the last five years. [158674]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The information requested is not available centrally.

The offences of Housing Benefit fraud and Council Tax Benefit fraud are not separately identified on the Home Office's Court Proceedings Database.

## Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158108]

**Mr. Straw:** With the following exceptions, no age limits are placed on appointments to non-departmental public bodies sponsored by this Department.

*The Information Commissioner*

The Data Protection Act 1998 requires the Information Commissioner to vacate office on completing the year of service in which he/she attains the age of 65. This requirement is reflected in advertisements.

*Parole Board*

No mention is made of any age limit in the advertisement, but in the information pack sent to applicants (other than members of the judiciary) it states that candidates should be aged 70 or less on completion of the fixed term of three years.

*Criminal Cases Review Commission and Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel*

The information pack states that applicants are likely to be over 40 and should be under 70 at the time of appointment. However, these limits are applied flexibly and are not mentioned in the advertisement.

*Data Protection Tribunal*

In most circumstances, an age limit of 70 is applied to lay members in line with the designated retirement age of the chairman and deputy chairman, who are appointed by the Lord Chancellor. These posts are not advertised.

*Office of the Surveillance Commissioners*

The Chief Surveillance Commissioner and the Surveillance Commissioner are required to retire at 75 and must therefore be under 72 years on appointment for a fixed term of three years. These posts are not advertised. Assistant Surveillance Commissioners are required to retire at 72 and must therefore be under 69 years at the start of their three-year appointments. This limit is not mentioned in the advertisement. These limits are applied flexibly on an administrative basis.

*Misuse of Drugs Advisory Body and Appeals Tribunal*

The Chairmen of the Misuse of Drugs Advisory Body and Appeals Tribunal are appointed by the Lord Chancellor and are subject to a normal retirement age of 70, although this can be relaxed at the Lord Chancellor's discretion.

*Police Discipline Appeals Tribunal*

Chairmen are subject to a normal retirement age of 70, or 72 for those who were appointed prior to the Judicial Pensions and Retirement Act 1993. Members are appointed for five years from their retirement from the police service.

## Probation Orders (Breaches)

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the figures *(a)* nationally and *(b)* for each probation area for the number and proportion of cases under supervision by the Probation Service where breach action was taken in accordance with national standards in 2000–01. [158934]

**Mr. Boateng** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The figures for compliance with the national standard on breach are provided by the Association of Chief Officers of Probation audit of probation areas and are shown in the table. This gives the results of the most recent audit. The audit covers supervision of probation orders, community service orders (as community punishment orders and community rehabilitation orders were at the time) and licence cases only. The national totals show that breach action was taken in 65 per cent. of cases in accordance with national standards; in a further 5 per cent. of cases, management authorisation not to breach was given, also in line with national standards.

*Offenders breached*

| *Area* | *Number breached* | *Percentage* |
|---|---|---|
| Avon | 45 | 83.3 |
| Bedfordshire | 13 | 76.5 |
| Berkshire | 3 | 37.5 |
| Cambridgeshire | 18 | 64.3 |
| Cheshire | 27 | 69.2 |
| Cornwall | 4 | 100 |
| Cumbria | 25 | 80.6 |
| Derbyshire | 41 | 75.9 |
| Devon | 23 | 54.8 |
| Dorset | 19 | 86.4 |
| Durham | 22 | 95.7 |
| Dyfed | 3 | 100 |
| East Sussex | 21 | 75 |
| Essex | 19 | 79.2 |
| Gloucestershire | 18 | 62.1 |
| Greater Manchester | 67 | 68.4 |
| Gwent | 14 | 87.5 |
| Hampshire | 39 | 69.6 |
| Hereford and Worcestershire | 14 | 73.7 |
| Hertfordshire | 12 | 85.7 |
| Humberside | 46 | 65.7 |
| ILPS | 52 | 36.9 |
| Kent | 17 | 31.5 |
| Lancashire | 60 | 85.7 |
| Leicestershire | 38 | 80.1 |
| Lincolnshire | 24 | 96 |
| Merseyside | 68 | 79.1 |
| Mid Glamorgan | 12 | 66.7 |
| Middlesex | 33 | 45.8 |
| NELPS | 31 | 66.0 |
| Norfolk | 25 | 59.5 |
| North Wales | 15 | 62.5 |
| North Yorkshire | 5 | 23.8 |
| Northamptonshire | 25 | 75.8 |
| Northumbria | 46 | 68.7 |
| Nottinghamshire | 57 | 87.5 |
| Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire | 26 | 56.5 |
| Powys | 5 | 100 |
| SELPS | 18 | 64.3 |
| Shropshire | 11 | 68.8 |
| Somerset | 7 | 50 |
| South Glamorgan | 22 | 71.0 |
| South Yorkshire | 48 | 45.3 |
| Staffordshire | 13 | 38.2 |
| Suffolk | 15 | 88.2 |
| Surrey | 14 | 51.9 |
| SWLPS | 5 | 50 |
| Teeside | 45 | 78.0 |
| Warwickshire | 11 | 73.3 |
| West Glamorgan | 12 | 70.6 |
| West Midlands | 62 | 53.9 |
| West Sussex | 17 | 85 |
| West Yorkshire | 50 | 52.6 |
| Wiltshire | 20 | 100 |
| Total | 1,402 | 65 |

## Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Ennis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the estimated total cost of dealing with asylum seekers' cases was in each of the last seven years. [158800]

**Mrs. Roche:** The costs of dealing with asylum seekers' cases are not distinguished separately from the overall operational costs for Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND). The total cost of running IND operations over the past seven years is given in the table.

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1994–95 | 183 |
| 1995–96 | 199 |
| 1996–97 | 212 |

| | £ million |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 215 |
| 1998–99 | 209 |
| 1999–2000 | 260 |
| 2000–01[1] | 484 |

[1] Estimated

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what consultations were held by his Department with *(a)* North East Lincolnshire and *(b)* South Humberside before accommodation agents began to purchase property there for the dispersal of asylum seekers; and if he intends to hold such consultations in the future; [158912]

(2) what consultations he has held with *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* regional consortia, *(c)* regional development agencies, *(d)* health authorities and *(e)* education authorities before accommodation is purchased in their areas for the dispersal of refugees and asylum seekers; [158911]

(3) what assessment he makes of the ability of areas to cope with the numbers of asylum seekers he allocates for dispersal to each; and how local authorities and the Health Service are recompensed for additional pressure on their facilities. [158917]

**Mrs. Roche:** Those who have been granted refugee status are free to live where they choose. National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is responsible only for providing accommodation to asylum seekers who have requested that this be provided as part of a support package. The identification of suitable cluster areas for the dispersal of asylum seekers and their dependants is based on research conducted centrally by NASS. Information is obtained from local authorities and other organisations with an interest in asylum. The presence of asylum seekers already in the area will also be taken into consideration.

In common with the rest of the United Kingdom, before entering into a contract with an accommodation provider to provide housing in Humberside and North East Lincolnshire, NASS consulted the regional consortium to enable the relevant local authority to have an input into the decision making process. NASS has, and will continue to, provide information and advice to regional consortia on a regular basis.

Funding for local authorities and the health service in England is by way of grant based on standard spending assessments which take account of the size of the population.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many private sector accommodation providers are *(a)* seeking and *(b)* purchasing property in North-East Lincolnshire to which asylum seekers can be dispersed. [158910]

**Mrs. Roche:** There are four National Asylum Support Service private sector contractors and one registered social landlord who are currently seeking to purchase property in North-East Lincolnshire.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how private sector accommodation providers who are participating in his programme of dispersal of asylum seekers are chosen and vetted; what form of contract they enter into with his Department; what influence he has on the areas in which they acquire accommodation; and how it is inspected and vetted by his Department. [158921]

**Mrs. Roche:** Each of the private sector contracts was entered into following standard Government Procurement Procedures and a bespoke Government Contract has been used to define the rights and obligations of the contracting parties. All accommodation is acquired within defined Cluster Areas the extent and location of which is agreed between the local authorities concerned and National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

All property provided by the private sector will be inspected by NASS or its consultants within three months of the premises being available for use and in many cases before the bedspaces are occupied. The property is inspected by a combination of surveyors, contract managers and NASS inspectors.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the names and location of the head offices of the accommodation providers with whom he has entered into agreements to disperse asylum seekers and refugees since May 1997. [158908]

**Mrs. Roche:** The following private and public sector are under contract to National Asylum Support Service (NASS) to provide accommodation for asylum seekers dispersed by NASS.

| *Provider* | *Address* |
|---|---|
| Adelphi Hotels | 75 Church Road, Hove BN3 2BB |
| Angel Group Limited | Suite 4, Lion Court, 435 The Highway, London E1 9HT |
| Accommodata Limited | 44–48 Cromwell Road, London SW5 9QL |
| Capital Accommodation Limited | PO Box 3309, 16 Turnpike Lane, London N8 OPT |
| Clearsprings | 26 Brook Road, Brook Road Business Park, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 7XL |
| Glasgow City Council | Hamish Allen Centre, 180 Centre Street, Glasgow G5 |
| Roselodge Limited | Wembley Point, 1 Harrow Road, Wembley, Middlesex HA9 6DE |
| Safe Haven | Raines Business Centre, Raines House, Denby Dale Road, Wakefield WF1 1HL |
| The Landmark | Conway Street, Liverpool L5 3NH |
| YMCA Glasgow | 33 Petershill Drive, Glasgow G21 4QQ |

| *Provider* | *Address* |
|---|---|
| Leena Corporation | Premier House, 2nd Floor, 1 Canning Road, Harrow, Wealdstone, Middlesex HA3 7TS |
| North East Consortium | 2 Jesmond Road West, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4PQ |
| Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium | West Yorkshire/Humberside, Thorsby House, 2A Great George Street, Leeds LS2 8BB |
| Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium | West Yorkshire/Humberside, 4th Floor West, Merrion House, Leeds LS2 8BQ |
| Yorkshire and Humberside Consortium | South Yorkshire, 3rd Floor, 18–22 Union Street, Sheffield S1 2JR |
| North West Consortium East Region | Minehead Resource Centre, Minehead Avenue, Withington M20 1FW |
| West Midlands Consortium | Auchinleck House, 7th Floor, Five Ways, Birmingham B15 1DS |
| Northern Ireland Housing Executive | 32–33 Great Victoria Street, Belfast BT2 7BA |
| Cardiff Council | 3rd Floor, Marland House, Central Square, Cardiff CF10 1EP |
| East Midlands | The Belvoir Suite, Council Offices, Nottingham Road, Melton Mowbray, Leics LE13 |

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what control he has over where private sector accommodation providers purchasing property for the dispersal of asylum seekers out of the south-east decide to make such purchases; and how he ensures an even spread of purchases rather than a concentration on these parts of the country where house prices are lowest. [158915]

**Mrs. Roche:** In consultation with local authorities National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has established approximately 70 cluster areas around the United Kingdom. NASS manages the acquisition of property from both public and private sector providers across cluster areas. Providers are required to provide accommodation within these cluster areas. NASS considers each area upon its merits and bases its acquisition of property upon demand and local circumstances.

NASS is currently seeking to identify new cluster areas to ensure that asylum seekers continue to be dispersed on a fair and rational basis throughout the country.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what payments per capita are made to private sector accommodation agents for each asylum seeker dispersed from the south-east; and if these payments vary by region. [158913]

**Mrs. Roche:** I am afraid that I am unable to give this information since it is commercial in confidence.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consultations he holds with asylum seekers *(a)* individually and *(b)* collectively about dispersal out of the south-east by private sector accommodation providers and where they wish to be dispersed to; what information they are given about areas they are to be dispersed to; and what sanctions are imposed on those who migrate back to the south-east. [158918]

**Mrs. Roche:** Asylum seekers applying for accommodation as part of an application for support can ask to be located in a particular area. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) will take this information and other information relating to the individual circumstances of an applicant into account in deciding whether dispersal is appropriate and, if so, the most appropriate location. The asylum seekers will be given a written offer of the support package and before travel will be briefed by the voluntary sector about the arrangements for travel.

An asylum seeker can apply to NASS to change the support package from subsistence and accommodation to subsistence only. But if they do this they have to find and pay for their accommodation themselves.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the total cost to his Department of arrangements made with private sector accommodation providers to disperse asylum seekers and refugees in the last five years. [158909]

**Mrs. Roche:** The Home Office has been responsible for the support costs of asylum seeking adults and families since 1 April 1999. The Department is not responsible for the support of refugees.

Support for asylum seekers is currently provided either via social security benefits including Housing Benefit, or by local authorities under the interim scheme or since 3 April 2000 directly by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). The amounts paid to private sector providers on behalf of asylum seekers on social security benefits and by local authorities on behalf of asylum seekers supported under the interim scheme are not known.

The National Asylum Support Service began operation on the 3 April 2000 and the amount paid to private sector accommodation providers by the NASS in the period 3 April 2000 to the 31 March 2001 was £46 million.

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for asylum were received from *(a)* Ethiopia and *(b)* Eritrea; how many and what percentage of these were initially accepted; how many and what percentage of those rejected went to appeal; and how many and what percentage of those appeals were successful in each of the last five years. [159283]

**Mrs. Roche:** The available information is given in the tables. I regret the other information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

*Applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, and decisions for nationals of Ethiopia and Eritrea during 1996–2000*

| | | | *Granted of asylum or exceptional leave to remain (ELR)* | | *Granted ELR under backlog criteria*[1,2] | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Applications for asylum* | *Total initial decisions* | *Total* | *Percentage of initial decisions* | *Total* | *Percentage of initial decisions* |
| *Ethiopia* | | | | | | |
| 1996 | 205 | 325 | 65 | 20 | n/a | n/a |
| 1997 | 145 | 245 | 60 | 24 | n/a | n/a |
| 1998 | 345 | 110 | 50 | 44 | n/a | n/a |
| 1999[3, 4] | 455 | 260 | 25 | 10 | 190 | 73 |
| 2000[3, 4, 5, 6] | 390 | 475 | 65 | 13 | 180 | 38 |
| *Eritrea* | | | | | | |
| 1996 | 135 | 70 | 25 | 35 | n/a | n/a |
| 1997 | 125 | 120 | 30 | 27 | n/a | n/a |
| 1998 | 345 | 115 | 20 | 19 | n/a | n/a |
| 1999[3, 4] | 565 | 60 | 5 | 8 | 30 | 49 |
| 2000[3, 4, 5, 6] | 510 | 445 | 70 | 16 | 120 | 27 |

[1] Cases decided under pragmatic measures aimed at reducing the pre-1996 asylum application backlog.
[2] Includes cases where asylum or exception leave has been granted under the backlog criteria.
[3] May exclude some cases lodged at Local Enforcement Offices between January 1999 and March 2000
[4] Data for years 1999 and 2000 are provisional.
[5] Cases considered under normal procedures may include some cases decided under the backlog criteria.
[6] Decision figures, by nationality, only available for the period April to December 2000.

*Notes:*
1. Figures other than percentages are rounded to nearest five.
2. Decisions do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same period and exclude the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.

## Crime and Disorder Partnerships

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he will allocate the additional money being made available to Crime and Disorder Partnerships in England and Wales for the communities against drugs initiative; and how much each partnership will receive. [160066]

**Mr. Straw:** My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget Statement that an additional £220 million would be made available over the next three years to Crime and Disorder Partnerships as part of the Communities Against Drugs initiative. This money, which is to be spent in agreement with local police commanders and Drug Action Teams, will be used to disrupt local drugs markets, and tackle drug related crime. All partnerships will benefit from this funding, but those with the largest populations and most serious problems will benefit most.

I am now able to announce the allocation of the funding for 2001–02. It is important that partnerships know their allocation for this financial year quickly in order to plan its use. In order to let them know this important information in good time we have used a simple and straightforward allocation formula based on relevant and readily available information. The formula shares 20 per cent. of funds across all partnerships in England and in Wales, allocates 50 per cent. on the basis of certain recorded crimes which are often linked with drug abuse (burglary, robbery, theft and theft of and from a vehicle) and 30 per cent. on the basis of population levels. Each partnership will receive at least the same allocation of money in the following two years. The final allocations for 2002–03 and 2003–04 will be announced by the end of July.

A new Communities Against Drugs Toolkit is now available on the Crime Reduction website, www.crimereduction.gov.uk, and Crime and Disorder Partnerships will find this a valuable tool in helping them use this funding.

I will place a paper showing the detailed allocations to each partnership, and further information about the funding formula, in the Library, and the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) will write to hon. Members for constituencies in England and Wales with the same information.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Tuesday 1 May 2001*

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### European Commission (State Aid)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list, by country, for each of the past 10 years, the amount of state aid permitted by the European Commission to each EU country by sector. [158326]

**Mr. Hain:** The latest available information on expenditure of compatible state aid by member state can be found in the 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th Surveys on State Aid in the European Union on the European Commission website at www.europa.eu.int. Copies of all these surveys will be placed in the Library of the House.

### Social Chapter

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions he has had with EU colleagues on the Social Chapter. [158611]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** Since fulfilling our manifesto commitment to end the UK opt out to the Social Chapter, the Government have participated at EU Council and other meetings at which measures brought forward under the Social Chapter have been discussed. I last met with EU colleagues on 20 December at the Employment and Social Policy Council.

### Refrigerants

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what his Department's policy is regarding the purchase of *(a)* hydrocarbons and *(b)* other environmentally benign refrigerants to meet the refrigeration and other relevant energy needs of buildings and premises owned and leased by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [160014]

**Dr. Howells:** The Department's policy is to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gasses, and other substances detrimental to the environment, from its buildings.

When purchasing new or replacement equipment, the Department will therefore consider equipment using less environmentally damaging refrigerants where practicable.

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which London headquarters building or premises owned or leased by his Department use *(a)* chlorofluorocarbons and *(b)* hydrochlorofluorocarbons for refrigeration and other relevant energy needs. [160018]

**Dr. Howells:** The Department has one HQ building, Kingsgate House, where a small proportion of the refrigeration and other energy needs are met using chlorofluorocarbons.

Three HQ buildings (1 Victoria Street, 151 Buckingham Palace Road and Kingsgate House) have some of their refrigerant and other energy needs met by plant which requires the use of hydrochlorofluorocarbons.

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to what extent his Department's headquarters buildings use hydrofluorocarbons for *(a)* refrigeration and *(b)* air conditioning; what amounts of hydrofluorocarbons have been purchased in each year since 1995; and what plans he has to phase out the (i) purchase and (ii) use of hydrofluorocarbons. [160009]

**Dr. Howells:** One building (1 Victoria street) uses a small amount of hydrofluorocarbons for its refrigeration.

Between the period April 2000 and March 2001, 1 kg of hydrofluorocarbons was purchased. Data for previous years could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

When replacing plant which currently uses hydrofluorocarbons, the Department will consider plant using alternative refrigerants where practicable.

### Maternity Pay and Leave

**Ms Ryan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the current requirements for maternity pay and leave. [160153]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** The responses to the consultation on the Green Paper "Work and Parents—Competitiveness and Choice" have confirmed that the existing rules for maternity pay and leave are unnecessarily complex for employers and employees. This complexity is particularly a problem for small businesses.

Through the consultation process employers, their representatives, working parents and those representing unions and family groups have told us that they want to see simplification of these rules.

I have responded to these strong calls for simplification by today publishing a framework for a simplified maternity pay and leave system, including an assessment of the likely benefits and costs of any changes.

This new framework will deliver simplicity, certainty and improved planning time for both employers and employees. It sets out changes to the notification procedures and periods and unified and simpler qualification requirements.

An integral part of the new system is the Government's decision, following the consultation, to allow mothers the choice to take up to a year's maternity leave in total. This was strongly supported by parents and their representatives. This will be another important step in the process of helping parents balance their work and home lives. It builds on the steps announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Budget Statement and by me, in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Crawley (Laura Moffatt), on 25 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 280–81.

I welcome comments on the framework and have placed copies of the document in the Library of the House.

### Banana Trade Dispute

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the terms of the settlement reached between the European Community and the United States of America concerning the importation of bananas from associated states of the Community and non-associated producers of bananas, together with the consequential effects on traditional imports from current and former members of the Commonwealth, and the consequent financial and social effects. [158816]

**Ms Quin:** I have been asked to reply.

We have placed in the Library of the House copies of the "Understanding on Bananas", which sets out the basis of the agreement between the European Commission and the United States of America.

The new regime will enable Commonwealth banana-exporting countries in the Caribbean which have traditionally supplied the UK market to continue to do so. The precise quantities of bananas imported will depend on commercial decisions by banana traders. However, to the extent that contractions in the Caribbean banana sector which have been seen in recent years continue, it will remain essential that, in these countries, Community funds are used for viable development activities such as restructuring, diversification and safety net schemes to help cope with ongoing changes in the banana sector.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many special advisers worked in her Department from 1997 to date. [160026]

**Clare Short:** Since 1997 I have had two special advisers at any one time and five different individuals have occupied the posts.

## DEFENCE

### Nuclear Disarmament

**Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what successful steps the Government have taken since May 1997 to achieve multilateral nuclear disarmament. [158786]

**Mr. Hoon:** Since May 1997 the UK has:

ratified the Treaty of Raratonga (South Pacific Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone) in September 1997;

ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in April 1998, worked actively for its entry into force and for its verification arrangements to be established as soon as possible;

agreed strengthened international safeguards arrangements for the UK with the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) in September 1998, following international agreement of model strengthened international safeguards arrangements for non-nuclear weapon states in May 1998;

helped ensure a positive outcome to the 2000 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference, and played a key role in the success of the negotiation of a Final Document which both reviewed progress over the last five years and set out an agenda for the next five. Of particular significance in the Document was the "unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament to which all states are committed under Article VI of the NPT".

engaged in consultations among the Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) leading to the joint NWS announcement in May 2000 that "none of our nuclear weapons are targeted at any State";

agreed to contribute £70 million over the next 10 years as part of the G8 programme to help dispose of Russian weapons-grade plutonium announced at the Okinawa summit in July 2000.

ratified the Treaty of Pelindaba (African Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone) in February 2001.

The UK has also worked hard internationally to create the broader security environment necessary to enable further nuclear reductions without jeopardising our own security.

The practical measures on nuclear disarmament in the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) in July 1998 enabled the Government to show the commitment of the UK as a Nuclear Weapon State to make its own contribution to the goal of the global elimination of nuclear weapons. They included the reduction in the size of our deterrent and greater transparency about our nuclear and fissile material stockpiles. These SDR measures will help lay the ground for UK participation in multilateral negotiations when the conditions are right.

### Porton Down

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what inquiries *(a)* his officials and *(b)* the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down have conducted since 1 January 1997 into allegations that service personnel were duped into taking part in experiments at Porton Down when they believed that they were taking part in research to find a cure for the common cold; and when each inquiry was conducted. [160061]

**Dr. Moonie:** Some research has been carried out in response to inquiries from former volunteers, parliamentarians and the Wiltshire police.

Many of the details of the trials that were undertaken at Porton Down are in the public domain, and papers in the Public Record Office. The subject has been covered in numerous publications. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has done selective research of the public record and the Porton archive in support of the Wiltshire police inquiry and the Volunteers helpline. However, there has never been an opportunity for MOD to conduct a full and thorough search of all the sources, in particular the Porton archives, which contain unpublished technical papers, the original experimental books, and other contemporary material.

Against this background, we will conduct a comprehensive survey of the Volunteer programme. It will:

Be conducted by MOD officials and will be supervised by Professor Ian Kennedy, an external appointee from the School of Public Policy, University College, London.

Cover the period 1939 to 1989 because this is the period of most concern to surviving volunteers, and is the period of highest volunteer throughput.

Attempt to give a full description of the size and shape of the trials programme listing what exposures took place, and how many volunteers were exposed to particular substances, in what manner.

The survey will seek, record and analyse all original documentation available relating to the way in which volunteers were recruited; the terms in which the programme was described to them; protocols for informing volunteers of the individual experiments; evidence of how risks were assessed and communicated to participants; evidence of whether and how consent was obtained. The survey will also look at how the relevant internal and external supervision of the programme developed together with evidence of how the practices in the trials reflected contemporary international and national ethical guidelines.

The findings of the Survey will be published.

### Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the four UK defence contractors which are participating in the Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme. [159804]

**Mr. Hoon:** The four participating contractors are Matra BAe Dynamics (UK), Alenia Marconi Systems, BAE Systems and Hunting Engineering Ltd.

### Homosexuality and Lesbianism

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal advice he sought regarding the guidance on the compatibility of homosexuality and lesbianism with service in HM Armed Forces issued to potential recruits to the armed forces; when the leaflet containing this guidance was last reprinted; how many copies were printed; and if he will make a statement. [159542]

**Mr. Spellar:** There is no specific leaflet offering guidance to potential recruits on the compatibility of homosexuality and lesbianism with service in the armed forces. Such guidance pre-dated the change of policy announced in January 2000. The present version of the armed forces recruiting application form refers instead to standards of personal behaviour expected from all Service personnel. Such behaviour is governed by the Armed Forces Code of Social Conduct.

In introducing both the new policy towards sexual orientation and the Armed Forces Code of Social Conduct, the Department sought legal advice to ensure that the policies were within the law and respected the rights of the individual.

### RAF Board of Inquiry Reports

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those civilians, including retired Service personnel, who may have access to RAF Board of Inquiry reports held at the Inspectorate of Flight Safety. [159281]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* Civilians including retired Service personnel, and Service personnel re-employed as civilians by the Ministry of Defence, whose continuing responsibilities require it, may have access to RAF Board of Inquiry reports held at the RAF Inspectorate of Flight Safety.

Where a fatal accident has occurred, a declassified copy of the specific report, if requested, is provided to the next of kin of the deceased. Should they wish to disseminate the report further, this is a matter for them.

## ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

### Promotional Campaigns

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, answering on behalf of the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, how the Electoral Commission proposes to divide the sum of £1.5 million allowed in the Electoral Commission (Limit on Public Awareness Expenditure) Order 2001 between promoting public awareness of *(a)* electoral systems, *(b)* systems of Government and *(c)* the institutions of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [159974]

**Mr. Beith:** The provisions of section 13 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 do not come into force until 1 July 2001. I understand from the Chairman of the Electoral Commission that, to date, no decisions have been taken as to the division of the £1.5 million available for 2001–02 between the three purposes specified in section 13 of the Act. Information about the Commission's spending plans under section 13 will be published later in the year, and copies placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

## WALES

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions between 5 June 2000 and 31 March 2001 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity. [158553]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** Wales Office special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity on three occasions between 5 June 2000 and 31 March 2001. I have no non-departmental special advisers.

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the total cost was of employing special advisers in his Department and its predecessor from 1997 to date. [160051]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** Special advisers' salaries are negotiated individually within the three-band range announced to the House by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 16 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 354W. Individual salaries and pension contributions are confidential to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned, so it is not possible to give the combined costs of employing special advisers.

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many special advisers worked in his Department and its predecessor from 1997 to date. [160034]

**Mr. Paul Murphy:** Since 3 May 1997, no more than two special advisers have been in post at any one time in the former Welsh Office and the Wales Office.

## SOLICITOR-GENERAL

### Lord Birt

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Solicitor-General, pursuant to his answer to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald of 25 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 273W, on Lord Birt, what the emerging findings of Lord Birt's work were; if he will place in the Library a copy of the briefing setting them out; and if he will make a statement. [159977]

**The Solicitor-General:** I refer to the answer given by the Home Secretary, 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 594W.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### PFI Projects

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money has been paid by his Department to *(a)* accountancy and *(b)* legal firms in each year since 1 May 1997 in relation to PFI projects. [153263]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 12 March 2001]:* This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### GCSEs (Shropshire)

**Mr. Paul Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of school pupils in Shropshire achieved five or more GCSEs in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [157600]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** The percentage of pupils in Shropshire who gained five or more GCSEs (or GNVQ equivalents) at grades A*-C are shown in the table:

| | *Percentage* |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | — |
| 1997–98 | 53.3 |
| 1998–99 | 55.4 |
| 1999–2000 | 56.4 |

The figures show that there has been an increase of 3.1 percentage points since 1997–98 and that Shropshire has already achieved the national target of 50 per cent. by 2002.

### Medical Schools

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many student places there were in the medical schools of each university in *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01; and what the projected numbers are for (i) 2001–02, (ii) 2002–03 and (iii) 2003–04. [157903]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The number of medical places in each university, for each year from 1998 to 2001 and the predicted numbers for 2001 to 2004 are as follows:

*Medical school intake targets in England*

| *Institution* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *2001–02* | *2002–03* | *2003–04* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| University of Birmingham | 213 | 232 | 332 | 332 | 332 | 372 |
| Universities of Brighton and Sussex | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 128 |
| University of Bristol | 155 | 169 | 169 | 169 | 230 | 249 |
| University of Cambridge | 254 | 276 | 276 | 296 | 296 | 296 |
| University of East Anglia | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 110 | 100 |
| Universities of Hull and York | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 130 |
| Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine | 286 | 311 | 326 | 326 | 326 | 326 |
| King's College London | 343 | 360 | 360 | 370 | 380 | 390 |
| University of Leeds | 200 | 218 | 218 | 258 | 258 | 258 |
| Leicester Warwick Medical School | 175 | 190 | 239 | 303 | 303 | 403 |
| University of Liverpool | 200 | 218 | 218 | 268 | 268 | 308 |
| University College London | 330 | 330 | 330 | 330 | 330 | 330 |
| Universities of Manchester and Keele | 240 | 261 | 311 | 341 | 341 | 341 |
| Universities of Newcastle and Durham | 185 | 201 | 220 | 290 | 340 | 340 |
| University of Nottingham | 178 | 194 | 202 | 218 | 234 | 324 |
| University of Oxford | 104 | 113 | 113 | 160 | 170 | 180 |
| Peninsula Medical School | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 127 | 167 |
| Queen Mary and Westfield College | 222 | 241 | 241 | 253 | 253 | 305 |
| University of Sheffield | 200 | 218 | 223 | 238 | 238 | 238 |
| University of Southampton | 157 | 171 | 200 | 200 | 200 | 200 |
| St. George's Hospital Medical School | 172 | 187 | 222 | 222 | 257 | 257 |
| Total England | 3,614 | 3,890 | 4,200 | 4,574 | 4,993 | 5,652 |

### Learning Difficulties

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many people with severe learning difficulties are in work *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total number of people with severe learning difficulties; [158102]

(2) how many people with learning disabilities are unemployed. [158091]

**Ms Hodge:** The latest labour force statistics indicate that there are 47,000 people in Great Britain with severe or specific learning difficulties in employment; this accounts for 29 per cent. of the total number of people with severe or specific learning difficulties. The same

source indicates that in Great Britain 12,000 people with severe or specific learning difficulties are unemployed; this represents 7 per cent. of the total number. The remaining 64 per cent. of those with severe or specific learning difficulties are classed as economically inactive.

The White Paper "Valuing People—A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" which was published in March 2001 sets out the Government's commitment to improving the life changes of people with learning difficulties. It states our aim to increase the number of people with learning disabilities in employment and to work towards their achieving parity with other disabled people in the work force.

### Beacon Colleges

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the criteria used for the award of Beacon College status. [159000]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Taking into account the advice of Inspectorates, Ministers have awarded beacon status to colleges that are considered to be truly outstanding. Potential candidates were drawn from those colleges that have achieved excellent inspection reports, taking particular account of those serving areas of social deprivation.

The future of Beacon Colleges and the criteria used to assess them will be reviewed in light of recent changes in the post-16 sector, including the new inspection framework.

### Excellence Challenge

**Mrs. May:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list those areas which are currently participating in the Excellence Challenge; and what percentage of undergraduate entrants from those areas are from social categories III, IV and V. [159001]

**Mr. Wicks** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The percentage of young accepted undergraduate applicants from social categories III, IV and V from each of the areas participating in the Excellence Challenge is shown in the following table.

*UCAS home accepted applicants (aged 18 or 19): 2000 year of entry cycle by LEA of domicile (England) and social class*

*Sum of accepted applicant*

| | *Social class* | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *LEA* | *Professional* | *Intermediate* | *Skilled non-manual* | *Skilled manual* | *Partly skilled* | *Unskilled* | *Total* |
| Barking | 23 | 76 | 39 | 70 | 30 | 9 | 247 |
| Barnsley[1] | 67 | 204 | 60 | 120 | 68 | 9 | 528 |
| Bedfordshire[1] | 290 | 754 | 150 | 202 | 122 | 24 | 1,542 |
| Birmingham | 415 | 1,174 | 323 | 686 | 336 | 177 | 3,111 |
| Blackburn with Darwen[1] | 52 | 186 | 70 | 118 | 59 | 26 | 511 |
| Bolton[1] | 111 | 422 | 95 | 173 | 93 | 25 | 919 |
| Bradford | 193 | 683 | 176 | 349 | 124 | 115 | 1,640 |
| Brent | 186 | 491 | 240 | 324 | 118 | 42 | 1,401 |
| Brighton and Hove[1] | 108 | 279 | 45 | 97 | 25 | 9 | 563 |
| Bristol | 215 | 435 | 118 | 131 | 83 | 9 | 991 |
| Bromley[1] | 244 | 613 | 192 | 160 | 56 | 9 | 1,274 |
| Calderdale[1] | 80 | 310 | 56 | 98 | 40 | 17 | 601 |
| Camden | 135 | 250 | 60 | 82 | 39 | 8 | 574 |
| Cheshire[1] | 653 | 1,567 | 280 | 382 | 232 | 22 | 3,136 |
| City of Derby[1] | 108 | 258 | 67 | 138 | 79 | 23 | 673 |
| Cornwall[1] | 250 | 821 | 183 | 304 | 152 | 33 | 1,743 |
| Coventry[1] | 137 | 380 | 84 | 219 | 148 | 31 | 999 |
| Croydon[1] | 247 | 655 | 248 | 203 | 81 | 12 | 1,446 |
| Cumbria[1] | 255 | 750 | 134 | 284 | 147 | 21 | 1,591 |
| Derbyshire[1] | 374 | 1,134 | 235 | 379 | 204 | 42 | 2,368 |
| Dudley[1] | 104 | 423 | 113 | 199 | 82 | 32 | 953 |
| Durham[1] | 215 | 652 | 163 | 228 | 140 | 40 | 1,438 |
| Ealing | 209 | 547 | 218 | 299 | 162 | 49 | 1,484 |
| East Riding[1] | 182 | 551 | 127 | 196 | 85 | 13 | 1,154 |
| East Sussex[1] | 312 | 863 | 170 | 246 | 89 | 17 | 1,697 |
| Essex[1] | 750 | 2,240 | 492 | 646 | 255 | 40 | 4,423 |
| Gateshead | 56 | 220 | 81 | 138 | 56 | 4 | 555 |
| Gloucestershire[1] | 445 | 1,081 | 307 | 287 | 184 | 25 | 2,359 |
| Greenwich | 77 | 232 | 74 | 96 | 35 | 10 | 524 |
| Hackney | 43 | 139 | 61 | 90 | 62 | 24 | 419 |
| Halton | 27 | 132 | 37 | 86 | 48 | 7 | 337 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 61 | 208 | 54 | 67 | 32 | 4 | 425 |
| Hampshire[1] | 970 | 2,289 | 557 | 614 | 264 | 36 | 4,730 |
| Haringey | 138 | 298 | 83 | 124 | 64 | 23 | 730 |
| Hartlepool | 26 | 91 | 28 | 72 | 29 | 10 | 256 |
| Herefordshire[1] | 113 | 380 | 72 | 88 | 42 | 12 | 707 |
| Islington | 88 | 174 | 59 | 78 | 38 | 10 | 447 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 102 | 260 | 45 | 51 | 23 | 8 | 489 |
| Kent[1] | 845 | 2,389 | 634 | 653 | 311 | 71 | 4,903 |
| Kingston | 152 | 291 | 104 | 80 | 38 | 2 | 667 |

*UCAS home accepted applicants (aged 18 or 19): 2000 year of entry cycle by LEA of domicile (England) and social class*

*Sum of accepted applicant*

| | Social class | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *LEA* | *Professional* | *Intermediate* | *Skilled non-manual* | *Skilled manual* | *Partly skilled* | *Unskilled* | *Total* |
| Knowsley | 17 | 119 | 40 | 85 | 58 | 23 | 342 |
| Lambeth | 87 | 268 | 114 | 102 | 53 | 19 | 643 |
| Lancashire[1] | 675 | 1,968 | 497 | 728 | 360 | 92 | 4,320 |
| Leeds | 383 | 964 | 228 | 370 | 159 | 31 | 2,135 |
| Leicester | 127 | 298 | 131 | 220 | 249 | 64 | 1,089 |
| Lewisham | 186 | 273 | 111 | 83 | 49 | 10 | 632 |
| Liverpool | 143 | 491 | 166 | 256 | 101 | 33 | 1,190 |
| Manchester | 126 | 387 | 110 | 197 | 89 | 21 | 930 |
| Medway Towns[1] | 80 | 320 | 103 | 145 | 63 | 9 | 720 |
| Middlesbrough | 68 | 168 | 40 | 107 | 50 | 17 | 450 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 171 | 336 | 101 | 133 | 64 | 10 | 815 |
| Newham | 63 | 297 | 134 | 209 | 139 | 45 | 887 |
| Norfolk[1] | 387 | 1,021 | 246 | 356 | 155 | 28 | 2,193 |
| North East Lincolnshire[1] | 44 | 161 | 52 | 106 | 47 | 7 | 417 |
| North Somerset[1] | 154 | 333 | 96 | 80 | 33 | 1 | 697 |
| North Tyneside | 101 | 267 | 118 | 104 | 58 | 8 | 656 |
| Northamptonshire[1] | 304 | 1,049 | 237 | 342 | 180 | 41 | 2,153 |
| Northumberland[1] | 238 | 589 | 142 | 160 | 108 | 13 | 1,250 |
| Nottingham | 74 | 198 | 58 | 115 | 47 | 26 | 518 |
| Nottinghamshire[1] | 361 | 1,212 | 284 | 384 | 172 | 35 | 2,448 |
| Oxfordshire[1] | 592 | 1,184 | 227 | 293 | 125 | 22 | 2,443 |
| Plymouth[1] | 94 | 229 | 92 | 145 | 62 | 10 | 632 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 45 | 153 | 50 | 110 | 34 | 16 | 408 |
| Rochdale | 79 | 284 | 74 | 127 | 66 | 28 | 658 |
| Rotherham | 78 | 299 | 71 | 129 | 52 | 14 | 643 |
| Salford | 61 | 209 | 53 | 84 | 42 | 6 | 455 |
| Sandwell[1] | 44 | 178 | 80 | 207 | 103 | 70 | 682 |
| Sefton | 147 | 524 | 188 | 228 | 90 | 19 | 1,196 |
| Sheffield | 282 | 598 | 159 | 198 | 78 | 19 | 1,334 |
| Shropshire[1] | 192 | 613 | 103 | 157 | 78 | 15 | 1,158 |
| Slough[1] | 48 | 132 | 55 | 102 | 90 | 35 | 462 |
| Solihull[2] | 186 | 475 | 95 | 126 | 58 | 6 | 946 |
| Somerset[1] | 278 | 878 | 203 | 235 | 125 | 23 | 1,742 |
| South Tyneside | 39 | 155 | 57 | 96 | 46 | 7 | 400 |
| Southend on Sea[1] | 69 | 208 | 71 | 61 | 26 | 7 | 442 |
| Southwark | 102 | 208 | 91 | 71 | 42 | 14 | 528 |
| St. Helens[1] | 66 | 265 | 78 | 155 | 58 | 12 | 634 |
| Stockton on Tees | 105 | 301 | 84 | 135 | 60 | 7 | 692 |
| Stoke-on-Trent | 50 | 194 | 50 | 128 | 56 | 18 | 496 |
| Sunderland | 68 | 310 | 96 | 149 | 70 | 13 | 706 |
| Telford and the Wrekin[1] | 58 | 213 | 65 | 74 | 46 | 15 | 471 |
| Tower Hamlets | 18 | 94 | 40 | 168 | 74 | 40 | 434 |
| Trafford[1] | 168 | 423 | 106 | 130 | 66 | 13 | 906 |
| Wakefield[1] | 108 | 373 | 91 | 160 | 69 | 8 | 809 |
| Waltham Forest | 63 | 279 | 121 | 177 | 76 | 27 | 743 |
| Wandsworth | 142 | 345 | 133 | 90 | 39 | 5 | 754 |
| Westminster | 91 | 211 | 71 | 61 | 34 | 10 | 478 |
| Wigan[1] | 93 | 394 | 104 | 128 | 74 | 13 | 806 |
| Wirral | 240 | 569 | 125 | 239 | 105 | 26 | 1,304 |
| Wolverhampton[1] | 93 | 289 | 86 | 208 | 114 | 74 | 864 |

*Accepted applicant percentage*

| | Social class | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *LEA* | *Professional* | *Intermediate* | *Skilled non-manual* | *Skilled manual* | *Partly skilled* | *Unskilled* | *Total percentage* |
| Barking | 9.31 | 30.77 | 15.79 | 28.34 | 12.15 | 3.64 | 100 |
| Barnsley[1] | 12.69 | 38.64 | 11.36 | 22.73 | 12.88 | 1.70 | 100 |
| Bedfordshire[1] | 18.81 | 48.90 | 9.73 | 13.10 | 7.91 | 1.56 | 100 |
| Birmingham | 13.34 | 37.74 | 10.38 | 22.05 | 10.80 | 5.69 | 100 |
| Blackburn with Darwen[1] | 10.18 | 36.40 | 13.70 | 23.09 | 11.55 | 5.09 | 100 |
| Bolton[1] | 12.08 | 45.92 | 10.34 | 18.82 | 10.12 | 2.72 | 100 |
| Bradford | 11.77 | 41.65 | 10.73 | 21.28 | 7.56 | 7.01 | 100 |
| Brent | 13.28 | 35.05 | 17.13 | 23.13 | 8.42 | 3.00 | 100 |
| Brighton and Hove[1] | 19.18 | 49.56 | 7.99 | 17.23 | 4.44 | 1.60 | 100 |
| Bristol | 21.70 | 43.90 | 11.91 | 13.22 | 8.38 | 0.91 | 100 |
| Bromley[1] | 19.15 | 48.12 | 15.07 | 12.56 | 4.40 | 0.71 | 100 |

*Accepted applicant percentage*

| LEA | Social class: Professional | Intermediate | Skilled non-manual | Skilled manual | Partly skilled | Unskilled | Total percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Calderdale[1] | 13.31 | 51.58 | 9.32 | 16.31 | 6.66 | 2.83 | 100 |
| Camden | 23.52 | 43.55 | 10.45 | 14.29 | 6.79 | 1.39 | 100 |
| Cheshire[1] | 20.82 | 49.97 | 8.93 | 12.18 | 7.40 | 0.70 | 100 |
| City of Derby[1] | 16.05 | 38.34 | 9.96 | 20.51 | 11.74 | 3.42 | 100 |
| Cornwall[1] | 14.34 | 47.10 | 10.50 | 17.44 | 8.72 | 1.89 | 100 |
| Coventry[1] | 13.71 | 38.04 | 8.41 | 21.92 | 14.81 | 3.10 | 100 |
| Croydon[1] | 17.08 | 45.30 | 17.15 | 14.04 | 5.60 | 0.83 | 100 |
| Cumbria[1] | 16.03 | 47.14 | 8.42 | 17.85 | 9.24 | 1.32 | 100 |
| Derbyshire[1] | 15.79 | 47.89 | 9.92 | 16.01 | 8.61 | 1.77 | 100 |
| Dudley[1] | 10.91 | 44.39 | 11.86 | 20.88 | 8.60 | 3.36 | 100 |
| Durham[1] | 14.95 | 45.34 | 11.34 | 15.86 | 9.74 | 2.78 | 100 |
| Ealing | 14.08 | 36.86 | 14.69 | 20.15 | 10.92 | 3.30 | 100 |
| East Riding[1] | 15.77 | 47.75 | 11.01 | 16.98 | 7.37 | 1.13 | 100 |
| East Sussex[1] | 18.39 | 50.85 | 10.02 | 14.50 | 5.24 | 1.00 | 100 |
| Essex[1] | 16.96 | 50.64 | 11.12 | 14.61 | 5.77 | 0.90 | 100 |
| Gateshead | 10.09 | 39.64 | 14.59 | 24.86 | 10.09 | 0.72 | 100 |
| Gloucestershire[1] | 19.11 | 46.41 | 13.18 | 12.32 | 7.90 | 1.07 | 100 |
| Greenwich | 14.69 | 44.27 | 14.12 | 18.32 | 6.68 | 1.91 | 100 |
| Hackney | 10.26 | 33.17 | 14.56 | 21.48 | 14.79 | 5.73 | 100 |
| Halton | 8.01 | 39.17 | 10.98 | 25.52 | 14.24 | 2.08 | 100 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 14.32 | 48.83 | 12.68 | 15.73 | 7.51 | 0.94 | 100 |
| Hampshire[1] | 20.51 | 48.39 | 11.78 | 12.98 | 5.58 | 0.76 | 100 |
| Haringey | 18.90 | 40.82 | 11.37 | 16.99 | 8.77 | 3.15 | 100 |
| Hartlepool | 10.16 | 35.55 | 10.94 | 28.13 | 11.33 | 3.91 | 100 |
| Herefordshire[1] | 15.98 | 53.75 | 10.18 | 12.45 | 5.94 | 1.70 | 100 |
| Islington | 19.69 | 38.93 | 13.20 | 17.45 | 8.50 | 2.24 | 100 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 20.86 | 53.17 | 9.20 | 10.43 | 4.70 | 1.64 | 100 |
| Kent[1] | 17.23 | 48.73 | 12.93 | 13.32 | 6.34 | 1.45 | 100 |
| Kingston | 22.79 | 43.63 | 15.59 | 11.99 | 5.70 | 0.30 | 100 |
| Knowsley | 4.97 | 34.80 | 11.70 | 24.85 | 16.96 | 6.73 | 100 |
| Lambeth | 13.53 | 41.68 | 17.73 | 15.86 | 8.24 | 2.95 | 100 |
| Lancashire[1] | 15.63 | 45.56 | 11.50 | 16.85 | 8.33 | 2.13 | 100 |
| Leeds | 17.94 | 45.15 | 10.68 | 17.33 | 7.45 | 1.45 | 100 |
| Leicester | 11.66 | 27.36 | 12.03 | 20.20 | 22.87 | 5.88 | 100 |
| Lewisham | 16.77 | 43.20 | 17.56 | 13.13 | 7.75 | 1.58 | 100 |
| Liverpool | 12.02 | 41.26 | 13.95 | 21.51 | 8.49 | 2.77 | 100 |
| Manchester | 13.55 | 41.61 | 11.83 | 21.18 | 9.57 | 2.26 | 100 |
| Medway Towns[1] | 11.11 | 44.44 | 14.31 | 20.14 | 8.75 | 1.25 | 100 |
| Middlesbrough | 15.11 | 37.33 | 8.89 | 23.78 | 11.11 | 3.78 | 100 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 20.98 | 41.23 | 12.39 | 16.32 | 7.85 | 1.23 | 100 |
| Newham | 7.10 | 33.48 | 15.11 | 23.56 | 15.67 | 5.07 | 100 |
| Norfolk[1] | 17.65 | 46.56 | 11.22 | 16.23 | 7.07 | 1.28 | 100 |
| North East Lincolnshire[1] | 10.55 | 38.61 | 12.47 | 25.42 | 11.27 | 1.68 | 100 |
| North Somerset[1] | 22.09 | 47.78 | 13.77 | 11.48 | 4.73 | 0.14 | 100 |
| North Tyneside | 15.40 | 40.70 | 17.99 | 15.85 | 8.84 | 1.22 | 100 |
| Northamptonshire[1] | 14.12 | 48.72 | 11.01 | 15.88 | 8.36 | 1.90 | 100 |
| Northumberland[1] | 19.04 | 47.12 | 11.36 | 12.80 | 8.64 | 1.04 | 100 |
| Nottingham | 14.29 | 38.22 | 11.20 | 22.20 | 9.07 | 5.02 | 100 |
| Nottinghamshire[1] | 14.75 | 49.51 | 11.60 | 15.69 | 7.03 | 1.43 | 100 |
| Oxfordshire[1] | 24.23 | 48.47 | 9.29 | 11.99 | 5.12 | 0.90 | 100 |
| Plymouth[1] | 14.87 | 36.23 | 14.56 | 22.94 | 9.81 | 1.58 | 100 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 11.03 | 37.50 | 12.25 | 26.96 | 8.33 | 3.92 | 100 |
| Rochdale | 12.01 | 43.16 | 11.25 | 19.30 | 10.03 | 4.26 | 100 |
| Rotherham | 12.13 | 46.50 | 11.04 | 20.06 | 8.09 | 2.18 | 100 |
| Salford | 13.41 | 45.93 | 11.65 | 18.46 | 9.23 | 1.32 | 100 |
| Sandwell[1] | 6.45 | 26.10 | 11.73 | 30.35 | 15.10 | 10.26 | 100 |
| Sefton | 12.29 | 43.81 | 15.72 | 19.06 | 7.53 | 1.59 | 100 |
| Sheffield | 21.14 | 44.83 | 11.92 | 14.84 | 5.85 | 1.42 | 100 |
| Shropshire[1] | 16.58 | 52.94 | 8.89 | 13.56 | 6.74 | 1.30 | 100 |
| Slough[1] | 10.39 | 28.57 | 11.90 | 22.08 | 19.48 | 7.58 | 100 |
| Solihull[2] | 19.66 | 50.21 | 10.04 | 13.32 | 6.13 | 0.63 | 100 |
| Somerset[1] | 15.96 | 50.40 | 11.65 | 13.49 | 7.18 | 1.32 | 100 |
| South Tyneside | 9.75 | 38.75 | 14.25 | 24.00 | 11.50 | 1.75 | 100 |
| Southend on Sea[1] | 15.61 | 47.06 | 16.06 | 13.80 | 5.88 | 1.58 | 100 |
| Southwark | 19.32 | 39.39 | 17.23 | 13.45 | 7.95 | 2.65 | 100 |
| St. Helens[1] | 10.41 | 41.80 | 12.30 | 24.45 | 9.15 | 1.89 | 100 |
| Stockton on Tees | 15.17 | 43.50 | 12.14 | 19.51 | 8.67 | 1.01 | 100 |
| Stoke-on-Trent | 10.08 | 39.11 | 10.08 | 25.81 | 11.29 | 3.63 | 100 |
| Sunderland | 9.63 | 43.91 | 13.60 | 21.10 | 9.92 | 1.84 | 100 |
| Telford and the Wrekin[1] | 12.31 | 45.22 | 13.80 | 15.71 | 9.77 | 3.18 | 100 |

*Accepted applicant percentage*

| LEA | Social class: Professional | Intermediate | Skilled non-manual | Skilled manual | Partly skilled | Unskilled | Total percentage |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tower Hamlets | 4.15 | 21.66 | 9.22 | 38.71 | 17.05 | 9.22 | 100 |
| Trafford[1] | 18.54 | 46.69 | 11.70 | 14.35 | 7.28 | 1.43 | 100 |
| Wakefield[1] | 13.35 | 46.11 | 11.25 | 19.78 | 8.53 | 0.99 | 100 |
| Waltham Forest | 8.48 | 37.55 | 16.29 | 23.82 | 10.23 | 3.63 | 100 |
| Wandsworth | 18.83 | 45.76 | 17.64 | 11.94 | 5.17 | 0.66 | 100 |
| Westminster | 19.04 | 44.14 | 14.85 | 12.76 | 7.11 | 2.09 | 100 |
| Wigan[1] | 11.54 | 48.88 | 12.90 | 15.88 | 9.18 | 1.61 | 100 |
| Wirral | 18.40 | 43.63 | 9.59 | 18.33 | 8.05 | 1.99 | 100 |
| Wolverhampton[1] | 10.76 | 33.45 | 9.95 | 24.07 | 13.19 | 8.56 | 100 |

[1] Denotes Education Action Zones. Only schools within LEAs who are part of the Education Action Zone are participating in the Excellence Challenge

[2] This Excellence in City Partnership consists of only three of the LEA's schools

### Teacher Training

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the initial teacher training providers that have not, in their admissions policy, accepted the equivalence to GCSE English and Maths of Curriculum 2000 Level Two Key Skills Qualifications in Communications and Application of Numbers. [159287]

**Ms Estelle Morris** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* This information is not held centrally. We do not require that initial teacher training (ITT) providers publish a list of those qualifications they accept as equivalent to GCSE English and maths. It is the responsibility of ITT providers to decide whether an applicant holds qualifications that meet the Secretary of State's entry requirements for courses of ITT, including those relating to the key skills of communication and the application of number. Qualifications must, however, be of the equivalent standard to a GCSE grade C, or above.

### New Teaching Posts

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how the 20,000 new teaching posts to be created by 2002 will be allocated between *(a)* key stage 1, *(b)* key stage 2 and *(c)* key stages 3 and 4; and if he will make a statement. [159439]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** I assume that the hon. Gentleman is referring to our target to increase by 20,000 the number of teaching assistant posts by 2002. Between 1999–2002 we are making available to local education authorities in England around £350 million to meet the cost of recruiting and training the equivalent of 20,000 new teaching assistants. We have met our target a year earlier than expected—there has been a rise of over 25,000 full-time equivalent teaching assistants between 1999 and 2001. The appointment, training and deployment of teaching assistants are matters for schools and local education authorities to consider in the light of local needs and circumstances.

### Student Loans

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) of 9 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 764W, on student loans, if he will estimate the nominal rate of interest required to hold the net present value of student loans at £590 million, if the threshold of student loans repayment were increased to £13,000. [159543]

**Mr. Wicks:** The net present value of the estimated £982 million income contingent loans issued in 1999–2000 to students domiciled in England and Wales is estimated to be £590 million. The nominal rate of interest required to maintain this net present value with a threshold for repayment of £13,000 per year is estimated to be around 3½ per cent. It should be noted that such calculations should be treated with caution, due to their dependence on the estimates of the resource cost of income-contingent loans. Any interest rate calculated will consequently be subject to some fluctuation.

### Vocational Programmes

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make it his policy to extend the funding available for vocational programmes to allow young people to develop craft and technical skills. [159673]

**Mr. Wicks:** From September 2002, there will be a significant expansion of vocational opportunities for young people at Key Stage 4, with additional developmental funding of £18 million in 2002–03 rising to £20 million in 2003–04 being made available.

### Vice-chancellors

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will take steps to require vice-chancellors to be subject to election by the university community. [159797]

**Mr. Wicks:** My right hon. Friend has no such plans. The appointment of a vice-chancellor is a matter for the governing body of an individual university to determine.

### Education Maintenance Allowances

**Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students in each English local education authority area are in receipt of educational maintenance allowances. [159812]

**Mr. Wicks:** In England, as of 16 March 2001, there were almost 70,000 students receiving EMAs in the 56 pilot local education authorities (LEAs). This number is constantly increasing as applications continue to be received by LEAs. Following is the information:

| Local education authority | Number of students in receipt of EMA[1] |
|---|---|
| Birmingham | 3,005 |
| Bolton[2] | 2,098 |
| Bradford | 1,938 |
| Brent | 435 |
| Camden | 367 |
| Cornwall[2] | 5,501 |
| Coventry | 868 |
| Doncaster[2] | 2,282 |
| Ealing | 281 |
| East Lancashire | 1,409 |
| Gateshead[2] | 1,774 |
| Greenwich[2] | 985 |
| Hackney | 577 |
| Halton | 444 |
| Haringey | 330 |
| Hartlepool | 351 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 264 |
| Islington | 359 |
| Kingston on Hull | 918 |
| Knowsley | 868 |
| Lambeth[2] | 779 |
| Leeds[2] | 3,074 |
| Leicester City | 1,304 |
| Lewisham[2] | 841 |
| Liverpool | 2,365 |
| Luton | 653 |
| Manchester | 1,988 |
| Middlesbrough[2] | 1,603 |
| North East Lincolnshire | 716 |
| Newham | 680 |
| North Tyneside | 794 |
| Northumberland | 1,231 |
| Nottingham[2] | 2,136 |
| Oldham[2] | 2,410 |
| Salford | 435 |
| Sandwell | 745 |
| Sheffield | 1,763 |
| South Tyneside | 750 |
| Southampton[2] | 1,434 |
| Southwark[2] | 792 |
| St. Helens | 643 |
| Stoke on Trent[2] | 2,328 |
| Suffolk | 1,249 |
| Sunderland | 923 |
| Tameside | 1,005 |
| Tower Hamlets | 1,159 |
| Wakefield | 1,068 |
| Walsall[2] | 2,192 |
| Waltham Forest | 626 |
| Wandsworth | 186 |
| Wigan | 1,277 |
| Wirral | 1,204 |
| Wolverhampton | 986 |
| Worcestershire | 1,570 |

[1] As at 16 March 2001
[2] First year pilots started in September 1999

### School Uniforms

**Mr. Whittingdale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the proportion of maintained *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools which require the wearing of school uniform. [159953]

**Jacqui Smith:** We do not collect information about schools' uniform policies. The Government believe that school uniforms can make a valuable contribution to the identity and discipline of schools. It is, however, for school governors to decide whether there should be a uniform, and we believe that this should remain the case.

### Trainee Teachers

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what financial help he plans to make available to postgraduate trainee teachers whose courses started too early for them to be eligible for training bursaries. [160151]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** On 30 March, my noble Friend the Minister for Education and Employment in the Lords made regulations allowing the Teacher Training Agency to make payments to any postgraduate currently in teacher training who did not qualify for a £6,000 training bursary and who, in the Agency's opinion, has suffered financial hardship as a result. However, the Agency has since informed my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that unforeseen difficulties in setting up the hardship scheme would lead to any payments under the Regulations being delayed significantly beyond the start of the summer 2001 term.

The Regulations were designed to allow help to be offered this term to postgraduate trainee teachers whose courses began during the 1999–2000 academic year and who remain in training now, but are not eligible for any training bursary payments. Hon. Members from all sides of the House have made representations to my right hon. Friend about the hardship that this group of trainees has suffered as a result of being ineligible for the training bursaries. In view of this evidence, my right hon. Friend believes that it would be wrong to allow financial assistance to be delayed to an extent that might cause further disadvantage. Accordingly, he has decided that the trainees in question should be made eligible to receive full £6,000 training bursaries with immediate effect, subject to the same conditions that apply to trainees whose courses began on or after 1 September 2000. My Department and the Teacher Training Agency are contacting training providers with details of these new arrangements.

## TREASURY

### Audio Visual Equipment

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what change there has been in the retail price of audio visual equipment in *(a)* the last year and *(b)* the last five years. [159964]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 1 May 2001:*

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on changes in the retail price of audio visual equipment in the last year and the last five years (159964).

The Retail Prices Index (RPI) measures the average change from month to month in the prices of goods and services purchased by most households in the UK. Audio visual equipment is one of the published components within the leisure goods group of the RPI. It includes representative items such as televisions, sound systems, PCs and accessories and electronic instruments. The latest published data refers to March 2001.

The following table gives the RPI index for audio visual equipment for March in each of the last six years, together with the percentage change over each of the 12-month periods:

*Retail Prices Index: Audio visual equipment*

| Year | Index (1987 = 100) | Annual percentage change |
|---|---|---|
| March 1996 | 70.6 | — |
| March 1997 | 65.9 | -6.7 |
| March 1998 | 59.8 | -9.3 |
| March 1999 | 49.4 | -17.4 |
| March 2000 | 42.5 | -14.0 |
| March 2001 | 36.4 | -14.4 |

Between March 1996 and March 2001, the audio visual index fell by 48.4%. This information is published every month in the Consumer price indices First Release and on the National Statistics website (www.statistics.gov.uk).

### Chester Street Insurance Holdings

**Mr. Clapham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will hold an inquiry into Chester Street Insurance Holdings and associated companies. [155894]

**Mr. Worthington:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will order an inquiry by his Department into the conduct of Chester Street Insurance Holdings and related companies prior to liquidation. [155895]

**Mr. Andrew Smith** *[holding answer 29 April 2001]:* In pursuing their duties to creditors of identifying, protecting and maximising assets, the Government would expect a provisional liquidator to report any suspicions of impropriety to the appropriate authorities.

The Companies Investigation Branch in the Department of Trade and Industry is responsible for receiving and acting on information relating to suspicions or evidence of company improprieties.

### Investors' Compensation

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what criteria are applied by the investors' compensation scheme to determine if a decision on an application for compensation can be referred to a panel of non-executive directors for review; [159758]

(2) if he will conduct a review of the effectiveness of the appeals mechanisms of the investors' compensation scheme; and whether an independent appeals procedure should be established. [159757]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** Complaints about maladministration may be addressed, successively: to the investors compensation scheme manager responsible or to a more senior member of staff; to the Chief Executive or to the board; to the scheme's Independent Investigator. The criteria for all stages in this review process are whether the claim has been handled properly and fairly. If deficiencies in the scheme's handling of a claim or in its conduct are found, these are assessed to check if the decision itself should be reviewed. The criteria for the review of a decision itself are whether the scheme's rules have been applied properly and fairly. A decision is reviewed by, successively: the manager responsible; a more senior manager; the Chief Executive. In addition, any investor may challenge the scheme's decision by judicial review.

There are no plans to review the effectiveness of these arrangements. They were introduced after the financial services compensation scheme assumed operational control of the investors compensation scheme on 1 February. The new scheme reviewed the complaints arrangements and removed the stage of the panel of non-executive directors before a complaint could reach the independent investigator.

### Capital Gains Tax

**Sir Nicholas Lyell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on *(a)* accountancy and *(b)* other professional charges incurred by taxpayers in calculating and submitting tax returns in respect of capital gains tax; and if he will make a statement. [159576]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Government receive a wide range of representations on a number of issues.

### IT-embedded Investments

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to introduce 100 per cent. first-year capital allowances for IT-embedded investments. [159671]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Government keep all taxes under review and decisions will be made as part of the normal Budget process. There are currently no plans to introduce 100 per cent. first-year allowances for IT-embedded investments.

### Tax Relief

**Mr. Edward Davey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to reform sections 589A and 589B of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988 with regard to *(a)* extension of the relief to an employee's spouse, *(b)* extension of the relief to part-time employees and *(c)* changing the minimum two year employment period for qualification. [159677]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Government keep all taxes under review and decisions will be made as part of the normal Budget process. There are currently no plans to reform sections 589A and 589B of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

### Export Control

**Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for export control offences in each of the years 1996 to 2000. [159252]

**Dawn Primarolo:** No one was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for export control offences during the years 1996 to 2000.

### Arms Control

**Mr. Gibb:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were convicted of arms control offences in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 2000; and what the average sentence was. [159251]

**Dawn Primarolo:** During the relevant periods the following people were convicted for arms export control offences: *(a)* 2, *(b)* 1, *(c)* 1, *(d)* nil, *(e)* nil. For those given a custodial sentence, the average was 30 months. The average fine was £15,000.

### PFI/PPP Projects

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the PFI and PPP totals envisaged for all projects, including London Underground, indicating how much in each case the proposed public spending content is. [159246]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The latest Budget statement contained a breakdown by Department of the estimated private sector investment resulting from signed contracts, and those expected to reach preferred bidder stage within the next three years. A more detailed breakdown of these investments can be found in table C16 and table C17 of the FSBR 2001.

In addition to these PFIs, there are two major public-private partnerships envisaged, London Underground (LU) and National Air Traffic Services. The financial requirements of London Underground under the public-private partnership will not finally be known until negotiations with preferred bidders have been completed. It is still too early to give the precise investment associated with NATS.

Table C18 of FSBR 2001 shows a forecast of estimates by the public sector flowing from private sector investment in signed projects over the next 25 years.

## HEALTH

### National School Fruit Scheme

**Joan Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to inform schools involved in the national school fruit scheme about the advice from the Chief Medical Officer, issued in 1997 and 1998, about pesticide residues and the peeling of fruit and vegetables. [147043]

**Yvette Cooper:** Fruit for the national school fruit scheme (NSFS) will be sourced from growers whose produce is grown according to the principles of integrated crop management, where pesticide inputs are minimised. In the case of United Kingdom fruit, only that from producers who meet the standards of the assured produce scheme will be used. Imported fruit used by the scheme will be required to meet similar standards.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) was established in April 2000 to protect public health from risks which may arise in connection with the consumption of food, including risks caused by the way in which it is produced or supplied, and otherwise to protect the interests of consumers in relation to food. We have consulted the FSA extensively on the detail of the NSFS including details on the preparation of the fruit. The FSA and Chief Medical Officer have approved the development of the NSFS, and in particular the FSA has advised that it would not agree to the use of any pesticide if fruit or vegetables treated with it have to be washed or peeled to make them safe to eat.

The Chief Medical Officer's original precautionary advice about washing and peeling fruit and vegetables was issued in 1997 in the light of research and surveillance on pesticide residues conducted at the time. The long-standing advice to wash fruit before consumption is to ensure that it is clean, and this still holds. However, the situation with pesticides has moved on and many of the pesticides of particular concern have been withdrawn or are undergoing review.

The FSA is currently considering up-to-date advice on washing and peeling fruit and vegetables, and will be consulting the Government's independent advisory committee on pesticides.

### Abattoirs

**Mr. Yeo:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recommendations in the Maclean report on abattoirs the Government have decided not to implement. [153240]

**Ms Stuart:** I am advised by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) that the revised meat inspection charging system that came into force on 2 April 2001 implements all the recommendations of the meat inspection charges task force (Maclean report) with one exception.

The exception was the recommendation that the FSA should carry out a full risk assessment of green offal inspection and veterinary involvement in ante-mortem inspection of young stock. The underlying intention was the removal of unnecessary burdens and costs (subject to amendment of the European Union Fresh Meat Directive) if the proposed assessment indicated that the procedures did not offer increased public health protection.

In its consultation package on the measures required to implement the recommendations of the Maclean task force, the FSA explained that the EU scientific steering committee is undertaking a risk assessment relating to all aspects of meat inspection in all member states. Any action that the European Commission proposes to take will depend on the committee's findings, and European legislation will be amended if required. In these circumstances the FSA considered that it would be unwise to act ahead of Europe on these issues. In addition, the FSA considered that the types of meat plants that would benefit from the removal of unnecessary inspections would, in any case, include those likely to benefit from the introduction of a revised inspection charging system based on headage payments.

The FSA's proposal in this respect did not attract any opposition from respondents to the consultation exercise.

**Mr. Gill:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has given abattoir operators regarding meat inspection charges post 1 April. [155114]

**Ms Stuart** *[holding answer 23 March 2001]:* I am advised by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) that a copy of their proposals for changes to the meat inspection charging system from 2 April 2001 in order to implement the recommendations of the meat inspection charges task force was sent to all licensed meat plant operators in Great Britain in January 2001 as part of the FSA's public consultation exercise.

Subsequently, the Meat Hygiene Service (MHS) wrote to all plant operators on 29 March 2001 to inform them of the outcome of the consultation exercise and to provide

details of the revised charging system to apply from 2 April. The letter also provided the contact details for MHS regional customer liaison officers should plant operators require further information.

The FSA also wrote to meat industry representative organisations on 2 April 2001 with a summary of the comments received during the consultation exercise, together with the FSA's response, and with details of the new charging system.

These letters are available on the FSA website, www.foodstandards.gov.uk, and I have also arranged for copies to be placed in the Library.

The revised meat inspection charging system came into effect as proposed, on 2 April 2001.

### Mastectomy

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of recent reports on the numbers of mastectomy operations in *(a)* London and *(b)* the north-east and north-west regions of England. [156236]

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the reason for the variation in the number of mastectomies carried out in different parts of the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [156252]

**Yvette Cooper:** We are aware that there are variations in access to treatment across England. These may affect the number of mastectomies undertaken. The NHS Plan and the NHS Cancer Plan make clear our targets to improve services to reduce variations. We have made available an additional £255 million in this financial year to support the appointment of new consultants and help implement the National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidance to end the postcode lottery of care. In addition new equipment for diagnosis and radiotherapy is being targeted to reduce geographic variations in levels of service provision. Information relating to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are matters for the devolved assemblies.

### NHS Walk-in Centres

**Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS walk-in centres have been established in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the city of Coventry. [157816]

**Yvette Cooper:** A total of 40 National Health Service walk-in centres have been established across England. With the exception of Southampton, which will open in autumn 2001, all are now open.

One NHS walk-in centre has been set up in Coventry. It opened on 11 December 2000 and is located at Stoney Stanton road, Coventry.

### BSE

**Sandra Gidley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money is being allocated per annum to research into human health aspects of BSE. [157965]

**Yvette Cooper:** Key areas for the health related Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy (TSE) research programme are epidemiology, diagnostics, therapeutics, the investigation of different strains of TSEs, potential risks from blood and blood products and the decontamination of surgical instruments. Our total funding on TSE research for 2000–01 was in excess of £30 million, of which £4.0 million was for the Department's projects. For 2001–02, £5.3 million has been allocated for the Department's funded research.

The research strategy is kept under review and is updated and amended in the light of emerging scientific findings. A detailed list of Government-funded projects into TSEs is available on the Medical Research Council website at http://www.mrc.ac.uk/tse—tb2c.htm.

### Cancer Referrals (Sefton)

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people presenting with symptoms of *(a)* breast cancer and *(b)* colo/rectal cancer were seen by a specialist within (i) two weeks and (ii) four weeks during (A) 2000–01 and (B) 1996–97 in Sefton health authority. [158514]

**Yvette Cooper:** In April 1999, we introduced the standard that patients with suspected breast cancer referred urgently by their general practitioners should be offered an appointment with a specialist within two weeks of requesting an appointment. Central monitoring of this information began in April 1999. The table gives the number of urgent breast cancer referrals seen in Sefton health authority between 1 April 2000 and 31 December 2000. Data for 1 January 2001 to 31 March 2001 will be available in June 2001.

Central monitoring on all other urgent suspected cancer referrals, including bowel cancer, began on 1 January 2001 and the first data will be available later this year.

*Sefton health authority: Waiting times for suspected breast cancer patients, 2000–01*

| | *Quarter 1* | *Quarter 2* | *Quarter 3* | *Quarter 4* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number seen during quarter by a specialist within 14 days of the decision to refer by their GP | 296 | 300 | 318 | [1]— |
| Number seen during quarter by a specialist within 28 days of the decision to refer by their GP | 310 | 300 | 321 | [1]— |
| Total number seen during quarter | 310 | 300 | 321 | [1]— |
| Percentage seen during quarter by a specialist within 14 days of the decision to refer by their GP | 95.5 | 100.0 | 99.1 | [1]— |
| Percentage seen during quarter by a specialist within 28 days of the decision to refer by their GP | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 | [1]— |

[1] Available June 2001

*Source:*

QMCW quarterly returns

## Meningitis C

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of the Meningitis Group C vaccination programme has been. [158531]

**Yvette Cooper:** The meningitis C immunisation programme, launched in November 1999, has offered vaccine routinely to babies and, in a catch-up programme, to everyone aged under 18. The total cost in England from the start of the programme to the end of the latest financial year (2000–01) is estimated at £290 million (total includes vaccine cost, moneys for general practitioners and nurses to administer the vaccines, publicity and information and changes to computer systems).

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of Meningitis C have been reported in the United Kingdom in each year since 1996. [158530]

**Yvette Cooper:** Figures for the number of laboratory confirmed cases of meningococcal group C disease provided by the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) meningococcal reference unit (MRU) (for England, Wales and Northern Ireland), Cardiff Public Health Laboratory (Wales) or the Scottish Pneumococcal and Meningococcal Reference Laboratory (Scotland) are shown in the table.

*Laboratory confirmed cases of meningococcal Group C disease*

| *Year* | *England* | *Wales* | *Scotland*[1] | *Northern Ireland* | *United Kingdom* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1996 | 556 | 49 | 48 | 13 | 666 |
| 1997 | 762 | 51 | 56 | 13 | 882 |
| 1998 | 766 | 45 | 63 | 16 | 890 |
| 1999 | 910 | 72 | 95 | 35 | 1,112 |
| 2000[2] | 676 | 40 | 65 | 41 | 822 |

[1] Scottish data include a small number of cases confirmed by serology only
[2] 2000 data provisional

About 50 per cent. of all cases of meningococcal disease are laboratory confirmed, the rest are clinically diagnosed on the basis of symptoms only by the doctors treating the patient. Clinically diagnosed cases must also be reported to the PHLS and other laboratories and this enhanced surveillance allows estimates to be made of the total burden of meningococcal disease caused by each group.

The best estimate of the burden of group C meningococcal disease just before the introduction of the meningitis C conjugate vaccine, adjusted for under-reporting and non-typing, was 1,530 cases and 150 deaths in England and Wales in 1998–99. The vaccine has had a huge impact on the disease. During the last six months of 2000, cases in all under 18 years of age were reduced by 71 per cent. with reductions of up to 90 per cent. in those age groups immunised first.

## Heart Disease

**Mr. Davidson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list in descending order the 10 parliamentary constituencies which had *(a)* the highest rate of heart disease and *(b)* the highest rates of death due to heart disease indicating the reasons for major discrepancies in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [158746]

**Yvette Cooper:** We recognise the importance of better information, not least to ensure that we are able to identify, treat and prevent heart disease. That is why one of the early priorities for the National Service Framework for coronary heart disease (CHD) is the systematic development and maintenance of practice-based CHD registers.

Data for the 25 health authorities with the highest rates of mortality from all circulatory disease, which includes all forms of heart disease, for men and women, for the latest available year are shown in the table. Information at parliamentary constituency level on rates of death from specific causes is not collected centrally.

*Standardised Mortality Ratio (SMR) for all circulatory disease (ICD9 390–459), 1997–99—25 health authorities with highest (worst) mortality rates*

| *Health authority* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| *Men* | |
| West Pennine | 130 |
| Manchester | 128 |
| Rotherham | 128 |
| Liverpool | 125 |
| Sandwell | 124 |
| Wigan and Bolton | 122 |
| St. Helens and Knowsley | 122 |
| East Lancashire | 121 |
| County Durham | 119 |
| Bury and Rochdale | 118 |
| Northumberland | 118 |
| Barnsley | 117 |
| Wolverhampton | 116 |
| Tees | 116 |
| Gateshead and South Tyneside | 114 |
| North Staffordshire | 114 |
| Doncaster | 113 |
| Salford and Trafford | 113 |
| Sunderland | 113 |
| Birmingham | 112 |
| East London and the City | 112 |
| Bradford | 111 |
| Coventry | 110 |
| Wakefield | 110 |
| North Cheshire | 110 |
| *Women* | |
| West Pennine | 128 |
| East Lancashire | 126 |
| Bury and Rochdale | 123 |
| County Durham | 123 |
| Northumberland | 122 |
| Doncaster | 121 |
| Wigan and Bolton | 120 |
| Rotherham | 119 |
| Manchester | 119 |
| North Cumbria | 119 |
| St. Helens and Knowsley | 116 |
| Gateshead and South Tyneside | 116 |
| North Cheshire | 116 |
| Tees | 114 |
| North Derbyshire | 113 |
| Sunderland | 113 |
| Sandwell | 112 |
| Barnsley | 112 |
| Morecambe Bay | 111 |
| Coventry | 111 |
| South Lancashire | 111 |
| North Staffordshire | 111 |
| South Staffordshire | 110 |
| Liverpool | 110 |
| Dudley | 110 |

*Source:*
Department of Health Compendium of Clinical and Health Indicators 2000.

### New Hospital (Worcester)

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy not to approve a name for the new hospital under construction in Worcester before conducting a local consultation on the issue; and if he will make a statement. [158482]

**Yvette Cooper:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has a duty to consult in regard to significant changes to services, and will take account of all representations made to him regarding any such issues. However, in most circumstances the naming of a hospital is not generally viewed as a significant change, and is therefore usually a matter for local management.

Where the proposed name of the hospital includes a royal name or title, including the title "Royal", sovereign approval must be received. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is responsible for offering advice to Her Majesty The Queen in this regard, taking account of views and information received from other appropriate Government Departments, as well as all other representations made to him.

### Mental Health Services

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the money allocated for mental health services for the years 1999–2000 to 2001–02 has been allocated for the pilot assessment projects for those with dangerous severe personality disorder. [159159]

**Mr. Hutton:** Money allocated to fund pilot assessment projects for those with dangerous severe personality disorder in the years 1999–2000 to 2001–02 is as follows:

| | £ |
|---|---|
| 1999–2000 | 0 |
| 2000–01 | 70,000 |
| 2001–02 | [1]5,350,000 |

[1] Allocation will take place during 2001–02

### Food Supplements

**Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the action being taken by the EU Commission to harmonise regulations on food supplements in member states. [159180]

**Ms Stuart:** The European Commission published an amended draft directive[1] on food supplements on 19 March which takes into account a number of amendments proposed by the European Parliament. The directive would establish a framework for harmonised legislation covering the composition (vitamins and minerals which can be used and levels of use) and labelling of food supplements sold under food law. It would have no effect on products classified as medicines.

Our view is that, in the interests of consumer choice, the market should be open to all food supplements which are safe and properly labelled. It also believes that the law should not prevent provision of true information unless it might mislead consumers. The Food Standards Agency, which is representing the Government in discussions on the proposal, is pressing this case in negotiations.

[1] Document 2000/0080(COD)—[COM(2001) 159 Final]

### Council of Europe Public Health Committee

**Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the proposed agenda for the meeting of the public health committee of the Council of Europe scheduled for 30 and 31 May on the subject of nutrition, food safety and consumer health; and if he will be represented at those meetings. [159178]

**Mr. Hutton:** The next meeting of the Council of Europe's committee of experts on nutrition, food safety and consumer health will take place on 30 and 31 May 2001. The agenda indicates that functional food, energy drinks, food supplements, nutrition in hospitals, stored product protection, new food processing technologies and food quality management are among the subjects that will be discussed. The representation from the United Kingdom will be decided once subject papers have been circulated and in the light of other priorities.

### Domestic Violence

**Ms Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the measures he has taken to tackle domestic violence since May 1997. [159419]

**Mr. Hutton:** We are committed to raising awareness of domestic violence and its impact on children, to tackling domestic violence on every front, and to ensuring that women and children are safeguarded and protected from abuse.

In March 2000 we launched the "Domestic violence: A resource manual for health care professionals", and we are providing funding (from 2000–01 to 2002–03) under the Section 64 Scheme to the Women's Aid Federation of England for their health and domestic violence awareness project to help implement the resource manual.

Our NHS Direct East Midlands domestic violence pilot project aims to produce protocols for good practice, and train staff to be able to deal with victims of domestic abuse sensitively and refer them to appropriate agencies.

We have also held preliminary discussions with representatives of the Royal Colleges to discuss a programme of education and training on aspects of domestic violence for health professionals.

Recent work by the Department in relation to child protection in the context of domestic violence includes the "Making an impact—children and domestic violence training pack" which we published in 1998 to raise awareness about the impact on children of domestic violence and to develop professional understanding of how best to offer help and support.

There is an undertaking in "Working together to safeguard children" our revised inter-agency guidance to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, published in 1999, to commission overview reports at least every two years, drawing out key findings of case reviews and their implications for policy and practice. The first overview report will have child protection in the context of domestic violence as its central theme. We have commissioned this report and it will be published later this year.

In addition, we have provided Section 64 funding to a number of voluntary organisations for a range of projects designed to assist survivors of domestic violence and children caught up in such violence.

### TB Vaccine

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the effect of shortages of the TB vaccine on the number of cases of TB; and if he will make a statement. [158972]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Our recommendation for the use of BCG vaccine is based on the advice of an independent expert advisory committee, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). They have advised that the degree of delay in children receiving their BCG would not be accompanied by significant public health risk.

The recent outbreak in Leicester is one such example. Nearly all the children involved in this outbreak had been immunised with BCG as babies or later. Unimmunised children in Years 10 and 11 had also been vaccinated in 1998 and 1999 before the national schools immunisation programme was interrupted. The temporary suspension of the schools BCG immunisation programme has not therefore been a factor.

### CFS/ME Working Group

**Mr. Lepper:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress made to date by the CFS/ME working group and its sub-groups. [159560]

**Yvette Cooper:** The chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalomyelitis working group, supported by a sub group looking at children's issues and a wider reference group is making good progress. The working group has completed its year long scoping exercise and work is currently under way on the drafting of the final report.

### Children's Rights Director

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health who the Children's Rights Director is; and what the terms of reference for the post are. [159562]

**Mr. Hutton:** Provision is made in Schedule 1 of the Care Standards Act 2000 for the functions of the Children's Rights Director to be prescribed by regulation. We plan to publish draft regulations covering the work, key tasks and responsibilities of the Children's Rights Director for consultation in the near future. The Children's Rights Director position has been advertised. An appointment will be made later this year.

### Hepatitis C

**Mr. O'Hara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health which Minister has responsibility for the policy issue of haemophilia patients infected by NHS products with hepatitis C. [159764]

**Ms Stuart** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Hunt of Kings Heath, has this responsibility.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Royal Family

**Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions in the past two years when he attended *(a)* official and *(b)* other meetings with members of the Royal Family. [159954]

**The Prime Minister:** With the exception of those occasions when Her Majesty has not been in London or I have been abroad or in Northern Ireland, I have been received in audience on the usual weekly basis since May 1997. I meet other members of the Royal Family on a regular basis.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Jack:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will hold a public inquiry into the foot and mouth outbreak once it is concluded; and if he will make a statement. [159844]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the right hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir J. Stanley) on 5 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 251W.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Prime Minister how many special advisers worked at 10 Downing Street from 1997 to date. [160038]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 1 April 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor), on 28 July 2000, *Official Report*, columns 971–74W. James Purnell, Geoff Mulgan and Phil Murphy are no longer employed as special advisers. Roz Preston, Pat McFadden, Tim Allan, Lance Price, and Dr. Iain Anderson left their appointments before 24 July 2000.

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Prime Minister what was the combined cost of employing special advisers at 10 Downing Street from 1997 to date. [160047]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet office today, *Official Report*, column 607W.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Kensington Palace

**Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 336W, how many bedrooms and living rooms make up the apartment at Kensington Palace occupied by Prince Michael of Kent; on what date he started making a contribution to the cost of maintenance; for what reason he was granted the apartment; and if he is allowed to conduct business from these premises. [159958]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** The apartment occupied by Prince Michael of Kent has seven bedrooms and nine reception rooms. He started making a contribution to the cost of maintenance with effect from 1 April 1994. No reasons are documented for the granting of the licence. No commercial business is conducted from the apartment.

(Prince Michael's commercial activities are conducted from offices in Oxfordshire.) Prince Michael does carry out charitable work at Kensington Palace and receives invitations and correspondence there as a member of the Royal Family.

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Israel

12. **Mr. Laxton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Israel and the occupied territories. [158619]

16. **Mrs. Ann Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Israel and the occupied territories. [158624]

18. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Israel and the occupied territories. [158627]

21. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Israel and the occupied territories. [158630]

28. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about peace initiatives in the middle east. [158637]

35. **Mr. Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on prospects for peace in the middle east. [158645]

**Mr. Wilson:** Despite continuing contacts in the region over the weekend, the situation remains grim. It is essential to restore a political process leading to an agreement based on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, the principle of "land for peace", security for Israel within recognised borders and an end to occupation. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I have been directly engaged with all the parties to encourage an end to violence and a return to the negotiating table.

### Sierra Leone

14. **Mr. Wells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of the United Nations peacekeeping force in Sierra Leone. [158621]

**Mr. Wilson:** The main objectives of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) are to assist the Government of Sierra Leone in their efforts to extend their authority and to restore law and order progressively throughout the entire country. UNAMSIL is also tasked with assisting the Sierra Leone Government in promoting a renewed democratic political process, which should lead, in due course, to the holding of free and fair elections.

We fully support UNAMSIL's efforts to help the people of Sierra Leone in their search for lasting peace and stability. This reflects our commitment both to Sierra Leone and to UN peacekeeping in general.

### China (Human Rights)

15. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to meet President Jiang Zemin to discuss the human rights situation in China. [158622]

**Mr. Battle:** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no current plans to meet President Jiang Zemin.

We seek to discuss our concerns about the human rights situation in China through the UK/China Human Rights Dialogue process and during ministerial level contacts with Chinese Ministers. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed human rights in depth with Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan when they met in New York on 12 September.

### Drugs

17. **Mr. Roy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of his Department in combating the international drugs trade. [158625]

**Mr. Battle:** This Government are at the forefront of international efforts to combat the drugs trade. Our aim, as stated in the 10-year drugs strategy, is to halve the availability on UK streets of those Class A drugs which cause the greatest harm, particularly heroin and cocaine, by 2008. The FCO continues co-ordinate the international elements of this strategy.

We are active in international drugs forums to strengthen the global policy framework for tackling the illegal drugs trade, including in the EU, UN and the G8. As members of the UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs, we continue to play a leading role in pressing for improved management of the UN International Drugs Control Programme. In June the FCO is organising an international conference on the Global Economy of Illegal Drugs—an initiative by the Prime Minister at the G8 Summit in Okinawa last year.

Our programme of counter-drugs assistance overseas is directed at key producer and transit countries. In the last financial year we provided bilateral assistance for law enforcement capacity building and anti-money laundering trading in Iran, UAE, Colombia, Bolivia, the Caribbean, Croatia and Slovenia. And, multilaterally through the UN, we helped to fund drugs crops surveys in Afghanistan and Bolivia, law enforcement co-operation in S.E. Europe and Iran, and demand reduction projects in Iran and Turkey.

### IGC (2004)

19. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with member states of the European Union on the agenda for the 2004 intergovernmental conference. [158628]

**Mr. Vaz:** The Declaration on the Future of the Union attached to the Treaty of Nice states that the 2004 Intergovernmental Conference will address, inter alia, the delimitation of powers between the European Union and member states, simplification of the Treaties, the status of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the role of national parliaments. It also calls for a deep and wide debate on the future of the EU involving the people of Europe. We welcome this.

## Cyprus

20. **Sir David Madel:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress in the proximity talks concerning the future of Cyprus. [158629]

**Mr. Vaz:** The UK continues to believe that the current UN settlement process, launched in December 1999 by the UN Secretary-General, offers the best chance of achieving both a just and lasting settlement in Cyprus and one which can take into account the vital concerns of both sides. We regret the current lack of progress in the talks but are confident that the UN will find a way to move the process forward. To that end we will continue to urge all those involved to be fully and positively engaged in the search for a solution.

30. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of Cyprus. [158639]

**Mr. Vaz:** Cyprus is an important partner for the UK. Our relationship is underpinned by common membership of the Commonwealth, Cyprus' EU candidacy, our close trading links, significant tourism and frequent contacts at ministerial and official level. My visit to the island in March allowed me to have valuable meetings with President Clerides, Foreign Minister Kasoulides and Chief EU Negotiator Vassiliou during which I reiterated UK support for the UN settlement process and Cyprus' EU accession.

## Kosovo

22. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his EU partners on the future status of Kosovo; and if he will make a statement. [158631]

**Mr. Vaz:** We have regular discussions with EU colleagues on matters relating to Kosovo. The agreed EU position on the future status is clear and remains unchanged. We believe that a Kosovo remaining within FRY represents the best option for stability in the region. But this is not an issue for today. The important thing now is to focus on the forthcoming elections, on establishing interim institutions and building Kosovo's capacity for self-government. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made our views clear during his visit to Kosovo on 24 April.

## Naira Nadia (Pakistan)

23. **Mr. Andy King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has received to the representations made by the Government to the Pakistani authorities on 22 March concerning the kidnap and rape of Naira Nadia. [158632]

**Mr. Wilson:** We understand that charges have now been brought against three men and a woman in the Lahore High court in relation to the Naira Nadia case. The first hearing was on 19 April. The hearing has been adjourned until 22 May to give the police more time to complete their investigations.

We will continue to monitor the court proceedings closely.

## Conflict Diamonds

24. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on developments in controlling the sale of conflict diamonds. [158633]

**Mr. Wilson:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today in the House to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Mr. White), *Official Report*, column 748.

## EU (Belgian Presidency)

25. **Mr. Ruffley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the agenda for the forthcoming Belgian presidency. [158634]

**Mr. Vaz:** The Belgian Government take over the presidency on 1 July 2001. They have not yet announced their programme. But the Belgian presidency have been mandated to take forward the wide public consultation on the future of Europe called for in the Nice Treaty and launched on 7 March. In the enlargement process, it is scheduled to tackle nine chapters of the "acquis communautaire", thereby sustaining the pace of the enlargement negations. It will carry forward the implementation of the Lisbon economic reform agenda to deliver more and better jobs. Discussion of external trade will focus on efforts to launch a new WTO trade round. The Belgian presidency will also take forward work on the European Security and Defence Policy, preparing a decision by Heads of State and Government for the EU to become operational in military crisis management, by the December Summit in Laeken at the latest. The Laeken Summit will also review progress on the Justice and Home Affairs work programme set at Tampere in October 1999. The Belgian presidency will also witness the final preparations to introduce euro notes and coins in January 2002.

## Syria

26. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relations with Syria. [158635]

32. **Dr. Vis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Her Majesty's Government's relations with Syria. [158642]

**Mr. Wilson:** The UK and Syria enjoy good and friendly bilateral relations, based on an active and broadening programme of co-operation in support of Syria's stated objective of modernisation. We also conduct a full and wide-ranging dialogue with Syria on regional issues, as part of our broader aim to promote regional stability and encourage the constructive engagement of all parties in pursuit of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace.

## EU Enlargement

27. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with colleagues from other member states of the European Union relating to enlargement of the EU. [158636]

**Mr. Vaz:** My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed enlargement with all of his EU colleagues at the General Affairs Council on 9 April and expects to do so again on 14 May. Since January, we have had separate discussions on enlargement with many of our colleagues in the EU and candidate countries, and will continue to do so.

### Turkey

29. **Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Turkish Government on allegations of rape and other human rights abuses by state agencies. [158638]

**Mr. Vaz:** On 23 March our Embassy in Ankara raised with the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs the case of nineteen people who made allegations about rape and torture in police custody, and have since been charged with insulting the security forces. We regularly raise specific human rights cases with the Turkish authorities.

34. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on relations between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of Turkey. [R] [158644]

**Mr. Vaz:** The UK enjoys good bilatrial relations with Turkey. Turkey is an important partner for Britain and the EU, a key NATO ally, a candidate for membership of the EU and a major market for UK exporters.

### Sweden

31. **Mr. Linton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the relations between Her Majesty's Government and the Government of Sweden. [158641]

**Mr. Vaz:** Relations remain close and substantial. Sweden is running an effective and impartial EU presidency. Our aim is to support the Swedish Government in this task. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, I and many other British Ministers meet or talk to our Swedish counterparts on a regular and frequent basis.

### Belize Telecommunications

33. **Mr. Peter Bradley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the dispute between the British high commission in Belmopan and Belize Telecommunications has been resolved. [158643]

**Mr. Battle:** No. I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 532W. The issue is now in the hands of the Belize Public Utilities Commission and the Belizean Government. We hope that it will be resolved soon.

### India

36. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on bilateral relations with India. [158646]

**Mr. Wilson:** We enjoy excellent relations with India. Ministers regularly discuss issues of mutual interest with their Indian counterparts and a number of successful visits have taken place over the last year. We are aware of the hon. Member's interest in the case of Peter Bleach, a British national in prison in Calcutta. We continue to raise this case at the highest level with the Indian authorities.

### EU (Accountability)

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to increase the democratic accountability of the European Union. [158614]

**Mr. Vaz:** European democracy is strongest in the Parliaments within the member states. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out in his Warsaw speech a new proposal for the institutional involvement of the national parliaments through delegations to a second chamber of the European parliament. We secured agreement at Nice that the role of national parliaments would be one of the agenda items for the next intergovernmental conference.

At Nice we were also successful in securing the first ever increase in the voting strength of the UK in the Council of Ministers and acceptance of the democratic principle that votes should more fairly reflect population size.

### Zimbabwe

**Mr. Wells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the areas funded by his Department in Zimbabwe. [159568]

**Mr. Wilson:** We are currently funding, from our Human Rights Project Fund, a project carried out by a Zimbabwean NGO which is designed to offer support to victims of torture. The same NGO is also working on the prevention of torture in Zimbabwe.

### West Timor

**Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what support his Department is providing to long-term relief efforts aimed at solving the refugee crisis in West Timor; and what steps are being taken to ensure a secure environment for refugees and humanitarian agencies in West Timor; [159925]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with the office of UNHCR on their decision to cease operations in West Timor at the end of the year. [159926]

**Mr. Battle:** We remain deeply concerned about the situation in the refugee camps. We maintain regular contact with UNHCR and I discussed West Timor with Mr. Lubbers, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, in Geneva on 22 March. Representatives from the British Embassy in Jakarta visited West Timor on 16–17 April to assess the situation there. Acquiring information in the field strengthens HMG's ability to influence the key players towards resolving the situation. We are also encouraging the UN to keep the situation in West Timor under review, so that UN agencies can resume operations in the camps as soon as possible.

The Indonesian Government have announced that from 21–24 May they will conduct a registration of the refugees remaining in West Timor with the aim of speeding up the

repatriation of those who wish to return. On 10 April, five international NGOs agreed to work in the camps in West Timor.

### Council of the European Union (Business)

**Mr. Hopkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for May and the major European Union events for the period between 31 May and October. [160152]

**Mr. Vaz:** The information is as follows:

*May 7—ECOFIN—Brussels*

1. Adoption of the provisional agenda
2. (poss.) Approval of the list of "A" items
3. Follow-up of the Stockholm European Council (23–24 March)
4. Commission Recommendation for the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines 2001

   Debate
5. Economic dialogue between EU and Russia

   Preparation
6. Preliminary draft EU Budget for 2002

   Presentation by the Commission and orientation debate
7. Pensions

   (poss.) Proposal for a Directive on the activities of institutions for occupational retirement provision
   Council conclusions
   (poss.) Communication on taxation of pensions
   Presentation by the Commission
8. E-commerce and financial services
9. A. O. B.

   p.m.
   EUROGROUP 7 May (morning)
   Macroeconomic dialogue at political level (late afternoon)
   Meeting between the ECOFIN Troika and a delegation of the Economic and Monetary Committee of the European Parliament (early morning)

*Other business*

*5–6—Nykoping—Gymnich*

*7—Brussels—Employment and Social Council (possible)*

*14–15—Brussels—General Affairs Council*

*14–15—Brussels—Industry and Energy Council*

*22–23—Brussels—Agriculture Council*

*28–29—Brussels—Justice and Home Affairs Council*

*28—Brussels—Education and Youth Council*

*31—Brussels—Development Council*

*31—Brussels—Internal Market Council*

No agendas for the above are available yet.

The following are the principal events in the EU between 1 June and October 2001 (certain relevant events are also included: the list is based on the information available at the date of issue).

| *Date* | *Venue* | *Event* |
|---|---|---|
| *June* | | |
| 5 | Luxembourg | Health Council |
| 5 | Luxembourg | ECOFIN Council |
| 7–8 | Luxembourg | Environment Council |
| 11–12 | Luxembourg | General Affairs Council |
| 11 | Luxembourg | Employment/Social Affairs Council |
| 15–16 | Gothenburg | European Council |
| 18 | Luxembourg | Fisheries Council (possible) |
| 19–20 | Luxembourg | Agriculture Council |
| 19 | Luxembourg | ECOFIN Council (possible) |
| 21 | Luxembourg | Culture Council |
| 25–26 | Luxembourg | General Affairs Council |
| 26 | Luxembourg | Research Council |
| 27–28 | Luxembourg | Transport/Telecommunications Council |
| *July* | | |
| 6–7 | Brussels | Informal Employment and Social Affairs Council |
| 10 | Brussels | ECOFIN Council |
| 13–14 | Brussels | Regional Territories Council (Informal)? |
| 16–17 | Brussels | General Affairs Council |
| 20 | Brussels | Budget Council |
| 23–24 | Brussels | Agriculture Council |
| *August* | | |
| There are no Councils scheduled for August | | |
| *September* | | |
| 8–9 | Brussels | Gymnich |
| 14–16 | Brussels | Environment and Transport Council |
| 16–18 | Brussels | Agriculture (Ministerial Informal) |
| 22–23 | Brussels | ECOFIN (Informal) |
| 24–25 | Brussels | Agriculture Council |
| 27–28 | Brussels | Justice and Home Affairs Council |
| *October* | | |
| 1 | Luxembourg | Research Council |
| 8 | Luxembourg | Employment and Social Affairs Council |
| 8–9 | Luxembourg | General Affairs Council |
| 11–12 | Luxembourg | Defence Council (Ministerial Informal) |
| 15–16 | Luxembourg | Transport and Telecommunications Council |
| 16 | Luxembourg | ECOFIN |
| 22–23 | Luxembourg | Agriculture Council |
| 25 | Luxembourg | Fisheries Council |
| 29–30 | Luxembourg | General Affairs Council |

### St. Helena

**Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of the Island of St. Helena. [158623]

**Mr. Battle:** Various events are being arranged in St. Helena throughout 2002 to celebrate the quincentenary of the discovery of the island. These include sports days, carnivals, a son et lumière and musical pageant, as well as the opening of the new museum to which we have made a financial contribution.

We are in touch with the Governor about other ways to celebrate this anniversary.

### Lockerbie Trial

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the report by Dr. Hans Van Koechler on the Lockerbie trial at Camp Zeist. [158626]

**Mr. Wilson:** The UN Secretary-General was tasked by the Security Council to appoint international observers to the Lockerbie trial. These observers, representing five organisations, were not UN observers and, as such, did not have the task of reporting to the Secretary-General.

One of these observers, Dr. Hans Van Koechler, has written a report in a private capacity.

We understand that Dr. Koechler has been complimentary about the professionalism shown in the way the trial was administered by the Scottish Court

Service, the Scottish Prison Service and the police. However, Dr. Koechler appears to have misunderstood a number of aspects of criminal procedure and processes in this case.

## ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

### Flooding (Shrewsbury)

**Mr. Paul Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when he will reply to the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham's letters dated 30 January, 12 February and 14 March and the letters from the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* dated 11 January, 15 March and 22 March concerning the "Bale Us Out" campaign about business rate relief for flooded premises; and if he will make a statement; [156584]

(2) for what reason queries about the "Bale Us Out" campaign by the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* have been referred to his private office; and if he will make a statement. [156579]

**Mr. Prescott** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* The Environment Agency is investigating options for reducing the risk of flooding in Shrewsbury by the construction of flood defences to protect the vulnerable areas of the town.

An earlier scheme which would have been eligible for MAFF funding was refused planning permission by the local authority.

The Agency is now fast-tracking this project and, subject to the usual consents, is aiming to start construction this autumn. The Agency is currently preparing an Environmental Statement and planning application.

With reference to business rate relief, as with all cases where business is disrupted, businesses can apply to the local valuation office to have their rateable value reduced while premises are affected.

**Mr. Paul Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his holding answer to the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham of 2 April, on the Shrewsbury Chronicle's "Bale Us Out Campaign", when he will give a substantive reply to the questions. [158430]

**Mr. Prescott:** I have replied to my hon. Friend's questions today.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with banks regarding the waiving of interest payments of debts accrued directly as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak; and if he will make a statement. [158723]

**Mr. Meacher:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) on 6 April 2001 *Official Report*, columns 319–20W. In addition to the sympathetic approach which the banks have announced, the Government announced on 6 April an extension to the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme to assist businesses suffering cash flow problems due to the effects of foot and mouth. When the Revenue agrees to deferral of tax or National Insurance Contributions because a business is in serious financial difficulty due to the effects of foot and mouth, neither interest nor surcharges will be payable on deferred tax and National Insurance Contributions over the period they are deferred.

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the Minister for the Environment's oral statement of 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 32, if he will initiate an immediate study into *(a)* the formation of dioxins due to combustion of chlorinated compounds in carcases burnt by napalm and *(b)* the formation of poly-aromatic hydrocarbons due to reactions involving naphtha compounds in napalm. [159231]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The chemical reactions from burning napalm are already well understood. Napalm is therefore not being used to burn carcases, as both forms of napalm available produce very toxic compounds when they burn.

### Station Franchises

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to improve the requirements for facilities at stations beyond those contained in existing franchise contracts. [158828]

**Mr. Hill:** One of the aims of franchise replacement is to secure improvements in facilities at stations. The Government have also made available £105 million which is distributed through the Rail Passengers Partnership scheme. The scheme is designed to encourage rail initiatives at a local level and station improvements would be eligible for consideration. In addition, there is a £225 million programme to enhance passenger facilities at stations over the next five years.

### Railways (Code of Practice)

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that the Strategic Rail Authority contributes to the Government's goal of tackling social exclusion. [158830]

**Mr. Hill:** The SRA's interim Directions and Guidance from the Secretary of State require it:

> "to take into account any Government policies which are relevant to the provision of passenger service in so far as they affect, or may be affected by, the fulfilment of your objectives".

A revised code of practice, "Meeting the needs of disabled passengers", will be issued in the summer; and the SRA is also promoting personal security for passengers, in particular women, through replacement franchise agreements.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the implementation of the commitment in the 1998 White Paper on the Future of Transport that rail operators will be asked to report on their success in meeting the objectives in the code of practice for rail operators; and he will place a copy of these reports in the Library. [158829]

**Mr. Hill:** I will write further to my hon. Friend about these reports. The Strategic Rail Authority is working with Sustrans and BikeRail to encourage best practice and will be taking over the sponsorship from Sustrans of the Cycle Mark award scheme.

### Heat Insulation

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consultations he has had about the suitability of BS 5422 as a heat insulation standard; and if he will assess the benefits of raising the level of heat insulation for pipework specified in BS 5422. [158809]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The current (1995) edition of Approved Document L indicates that if the relevant recommendations in BS 5422 (1990) for thermal insulation of heating and hot water pipes, ducts and vessels are adopted the requirements in the Building Regulations for this aspect of the conservation of fuel and power in buildings would be met. A consultation document on amendments to Approved Document L was published last summer and included references to the prospective new edition of BS 5422 (2001) for heating and hot water systems as before, and for air conditioning systems including their attendant chilled water and refrigerant services. These proposed amendments were accompanied by a regulatory impact assessment in which the beneficial effects of thermal insulation were taken into account, but BS 5422 was not explicitly identified. There was no adverse comment in the response to the consultation so the references to BS 5422 have been carried forward into the interim draft Approved Document L published on 9 April 2001.

The suitability of BS 5422 as a heat insulation standard for industrial processes is a matter for the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

### Railtrack

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what role the Strategic Rail Authority has in the publication of Railtrack's Annual Network Management Statement for Great Britain for 2001; and when he expects the document to be published. [159182]

**Mr. Hill:** Railtrack is required to consult the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) regarding the SRA's present and future proposals for the provision of railway services. The SRA will work with Railtrack to identify, prioritise, prepare and put out to tender the enhancement projects that will increase capacity and improve safety and performance on the network.

Railtrack expects to publish Part 1 of its Network Management Statement, on the core railway and its asset stewardship obligations, by the end of May 2001. Part 2 of the statement, to be published in the autumn, will identify enhancement projects and set out a procurement method agreed with the SRA.

### "Are You Doing Your Bit?" Campaign

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to change the funding arrangements of the campaign, "Are you doing your bit?", in 2001–02; and if he will make a statement; [159256]

(2) what funding he plans to allocate to the campaign, "Are you doing your bit?", in *(a)* 2002–03 and *(b)* 2003–04. [159257]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The "Are you doing your bit?" campaign, which promotes energy efficiency, transport, water conservation and waste reduction messages, was launched by the Deputy Prime Minister in 1998. Its budget provides for a range of activity, including an annual road show, in addition to the television and radio advertising campaign.

£5 million of the budget identified for the overall campaign in 2001–02 (approximately £8 million) has been redirected to comprise one element of the £15 million package of short-term practical help for rural businesses in the areas worst affected by foot and mouth disease. The package was announced on 11 April by the Minister for the Environment and Chairman of the Rural Taskforce.

Details of the advertising budget for DETR (Central) for 2002–03 and 2003–04 have not yet been decided. Allocation of advertising expenditure to particular campaigns, including "Are you doing your bit?", will be on the basis of a strategic assessment of policy priorities by Ministers.

### Bus Passes

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many pensioners are eligible to apply for the free bus pass which entitles the holder to half-price fares; how many have applied; and what estimate he has made of the likely cost of the scheme. [159372]

**Mr. Hill:** The relevant provisions are already in force in Greater London. From 1 June, all pensioners in England—an estimated 9 million—will be eligible, but application is to the relevant local authority; no central records are kept. The additional costs of guaranteeing half-fare reductions for pensioners on buses have been estimated at around £39 million a year, to be met from adjustments to Revenue Support Grant.

### Gait Burrows Nature Reserve

**Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps English Nature is taking *(a)* to ensure that Gait Burrows National Nature Reserve is not damaged by the Lunesdale Hunt and *(b)* to remedy damage done by hunting. [159496]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** Recent incidents at Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve have been brought to the attention of the Lancashire Constabulary. English Nature has written to the chairman of the Lunesdale Hunt requesting a full explanation of the incidents, and has withdrawn permission for the Hunt to enter Gait Barrows National Nature Reserve. This will be reconsidered only once English Nature has received and considered a response.

I understand the physical damage to the site is considered to be short term and the site will recover through natural processes.

## London Underground

**Mr. Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many tube trains were running in each year since 1994; and how many tube train drivers were employed by London Underground in each of the same years. [159276]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* This is an operational matter for London Underground (LUL) who have provided the following information on the total number of peak trains required for service as at July of each year.

| *Year* | *Total number of peak trains* |
|---|---|
| 1994 | — |
| 1995 | — |
| 1996 | 464 |
| 1997 | 476 |
| 1998 | 484 |
| 1999 | 489 |
| 2000 | 505 |

LUL inform me that figures are not available for the years 1994 and 1995.

In relation to the question on tube train drivers, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to an earlier question on 9 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 386W, which contains information on the number of train drivers employed by London Underground (LUL) from 1995 to present. LUL inform me that information on driver numbers prior to 1995 can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

## Nuclear Fuel Transport

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions took place with the German nuclear authorities in advance of permission being granted for the recent resumption of spent nuclear fuel transport from Germany to Sellafield. [159730]

**Mr. Hill:** Discussions have taken place between my officials and those of the competent authorities in Germany, and other European countries, to ensure there will be no repetition of the circumstances of excessive contamination which led to the suspension of spent fuel transports from Europe to Sellafield in mid 1998.

## Euratom

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 85W, on Euratom, if, he will place in the Library copies of the Euratom nuclear site verification visit reports. [159755]

**Mr. Meacher:** Copies of the verification visit reports for Dounreay (10–14 May 1993 and 15–18 March 1999) and Sellafield (6–10 December 1993) are held by the Libraries of the House. The report for Dungeness (6–10 November 2000) has not yet been issued by the European Commission. Copies will be placed in the Libraries when it is published.

## Waste Management

**Mr. Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list those applications where incinerator ash or waste lime or dust was ultimately released to land by *(a)* site location, *(b)* year, *(c)* tonnage, *(d)* source and *(e)* end-use between 1990 and 2001; and if he will provide associated test results produced by his Department; [159491]

(2) what regulations govern the use of incinerator ash, waste lime and dust, for chemical treatment; if he will list the *(a)* end destination, *(b)* usage of the residues and *(c)* end-product of such treatments and list sites where such material has been ultimately released to land, retail outlets or the food chain by (i) site location, (ii) year, (iii) tonnage, (iv) source and (v) end-use between 1990 and 2001; and if he will provide associated test results produced by his Department; [159489]

(3) if he will list by *(a)* location, *(b)* year, *(c)* tonnage, *(d)* source and *(e)* specific end-use the sites which received site-specific authorisation to use incinerator ash, lime and dust in unbound construction applications between 1990 and 2001; what the nature of the ash was; and if he will provide associated test results produced by his Department. [159490]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The deposit, recovery or disposal of waste from incinerators is subject to the waste management controls set out in Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994 and the Special Waste Regulations 1996.

No information is held on the use of incinerator ash, waste lime or dust for: chemical treatment; unbound construction applications; or any other applications, prior to the formation of the Environment Agency in 1996. The Environment Agency have advised that such information for the period 1996 to 2001 is not held centrally. No associated test results have been produced by my Department.

However, the Environment Agency have also advised that they are currently carrying out an investigation into the destination of waste from municipal waste incinerators. I will ensure that, on completion of this investigation, copies of its results are sent to the hon. Member and placed in the Library of the House.

## Road Incidents (Terminology)

**Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy when referring in official documents to road incidents to use the word crash instead of accident; and if he will make a statement. [159790]

**Mr. Hill:** No. It is well understood that many road accidents are due to the careless, if not reckless, action of some road users, but there is nothing to be gained from a change in terminology.

## Regional Development Agencies

**Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will place the register of interests of the board members of the Regional Development Agencies in the Library. [159526]

**Ms Beverley Hughes** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]*: The English Regional Development Agencies' (RDAs) registers of members interests are the responsibility of the RDAs themselves and are available to the public on request. As such, the Secretary of State is not in a position to place them in the Library of the House.

The Devolved Administrations are responsible for development agencies outside England (eg Scottish Enterprise, Welsh Development Agency).

### Local Government Act

**Mr. Don Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when regulations will be laid before the House to remove the inconsistencies in legislation as a result of the provisions of Part II of the Local Government Act 2000; and if he will set up an inquiry to investigate the reasons for the delay in discovering the problem and alerting local authorities to the situation. [159846]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Our intention is to lay all the necessary orders for councils to operate from June 2001 leader and cabinet constitutions. The first of these orders was laid before Parliament on 27 April 2001. As highlighted in the guidance issued on 26 October 2000 these orders have been included in our implementation plans from the outset. With the extended parliamentary consideration of some of the other secondary legislation made under Part II of the Local Government Act 2000 and with the postponement of the local elections it was not possible to make these orders as soon as we had originally planned and local authorities were informed of this as soon as the Elections Act 2001 received Royal Assent. No inquiry is necessary.

### Travel Retailing Policy

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place a copy of the full report entitled "Travel Information and Retailing Policy Review: Final Response" in the Library. [159946]

**Mr. Hill:** Cap Gemini Ernst and Young prepared a report entitled "Travel Information and Retailing Policy Review: Final Report" for my Department last July. The report was prepared to inform Transport 2010: 10 Year Plan and a summary was placed on my Department's website. The full report was not published at the time as aspects of it were considered to be commercially confidential. However, our concerns about commercial confidentiality have passed and I have today placed a copy in the Library. Further copies will be available from my Department.

### Road Signs

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to exchange imperial for metric measures for signs on public roads and for use in traffic laws. [159991]

**Mr. Hill:** Weight limit signs in metric tonnes were included in the Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1981, and signs using imperial tons ceased to be valid from 1 January 1990. The Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions 1994 specify that signs indicating restrictions on vehicle width, length and height may only show metric units in addition to, and not instead of, imperial units. We have no plans to change these Regulations to allow the use of metric distances on speed limit signs, distance plates placed with warning signs, or direction signs.

### East London Line

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Old Bishopsgate goods yard will be redeveloped as part of the East London line proposals. [159988]

**Mr. Hill:** The Strategic Rail Authority announced funding for the northern extension of the East London line on 2 April. It is intended that advance works for construction of the northern extension will be carried out by London Underground Ltd., and will start at the end of this year. The programme for the main works, which will include the Bishopsgate Goods Yard site, is under discussion between the SRA and LUL, and will be finalised later in the year.

### Ultra-low Sulphur Diesel

**Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the oral statement by the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson) of 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 217, if he will set out the basis of the calculations for the cost per tonne of carbon saved for *(a)* biodiesel and *(b)* road fuel gases compared with ultra-low sulphur petrol. [159992]

**Mr. Hill:** As my hon. Friend the Economic Secretary to the Treasury emphasised in her 24 April statement, the primary benefit of biodiesel is the carbon saved compared to fossil diesel, whereas that of road fuel gases is the improved air quality. Therefore, the Government do not seek to compare or base decisions on the two types of fuel on the basis of the relative carbon saving and their costs.

The carbon cost estimates for biodiesel from oilseed rape quoted by my hon. Friend are based on the estimated cost of production, and the estimated greenhouse gas emissions compared to fossil diesel emissions, including greenhouse gases emitted from the use of agricultural machinery, fertilisers and pesticides, and from the extraction, production and transportation of biodiesel.

### Private Hire Vehicles

**Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions following the case in the Queen's Bench Division between L. Benson and Copeland borough council, what plans he has to seek to restore the previous position whereby the spouse of a licence holder could use a private hire vehicle for any purpose other than for hire; when the case was heard; and if he will make a statement. [159863]

**Mr. Hill:** I refer the hon. Member to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Mr. Ennis) on 26 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 611W.

### Footpath Closures (Kent)

**Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he required

Kent county council to conduct a risk assessment before it took decisions to *(a)* close all footpaths and *(b)* keep them closed. [159990]

**Mr. Meacher:** My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) has made a series of amendments to The Foot and Mouth Disease Order 1983 since 27 February this year, which conferred on certain local authorities, including Kent county council, the power to close public rights of way in the interests of preventing the spread of foot and mouth disease. Those amendments did not require local authorities to undertake risk assessments before exercising the power. MAFF published a veterinary risk assessment on the risk of causing new outbreaks of foot and mouth disease if footpaths were open to the public on 22 March, which provided the basis of guidance to local authorities on reopening paths issued by MAFF on 28 March. This was supplemented with a framework, which my Department issued on 25 April, for assessing the risks associated with reopening rights of way, which is intended to help local authorities speed up the reopening process.

### Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what action the Government propose to take to reduce the numbers of homeless households being housed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [160120]

**Mr. Raynsford:** The reasons behind the increased use of Bed and Breakfast are complex. I am therefore setting up a specific Bed and Breakfast Unit to look at what more can be done to help get people, particularly families with children, out of Bed and Breakfast and into more appropriate accommodation.

We believe that people have a right to decent accommodation especially when at their most vulnerable. At the moment almost 10,000 homeless households are in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. I have told this House in the past that this figure is unacceptable. The Government have a clear policy on the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation for homeless families with children: it should be used only as a last resort. As well as the high financial costs of Bed and Breakfast, there are unquantifiable social costs in terms of health, education and lost employment opportunities.

Many authorities are successful in minimising their use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation. I appreciate and commend local authorities' efforts in these areas. However, the circumstances and the performance of local authorities vary and some are struggling to meet their statutory duties on housing homeless people.

The new Unit will look at developing solutions to help these authorities reduce their use of Bed and Breakfast. The Unit will be small and have a limited lifespan of two years to reflect the specific nature of its remit. It will be led by someone with hands-on experience and will work closely with existing bodies and practitioners from local authorities, RSLs and voluntary agencies. One of the Unit's key tasks will be to disseminate existing good practice to help authorities implement or pilot new ideas. It will help local authorities to set targets where appropriate, and to develop implementation programmes to meet those targets. As well as providing advice and support, the Unit will also influence wider debates and ensure that people working on regeneration and other related projects take into account the impact of their work on homelessness.

Housing families in Bed and Breakfast is good for no-one—it is expensive, it is inadequate and it has unacceptable long-term effects. I am convinced that by working together we can find ways of reducing this unhelpful dependence on Bed and Breakfast accommodation.

### Public Service Agreements

**Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress is being made in concluding local Public Service Agreements. [160198]

**Ms Armstrong:** We have today concluded a third group of local Public Service Agreements (PSAs). The agreements are with the following authorities: Camden, Coventry and Newham. The three signed today, taken together with recent signatories Milton Keynes, Newcastle and Surrey, mean that local PSAs have now been signed with all the 20 authorities that took part in the pilot scheme announced last summer.

Local PSAs will enable councils to deliver even greater improvements in services for local people. The targets set by councils have a direct impact on communities—from initiatives to tackle drug abuse among young people, dealing with abandoned vehicles, to strategies to reduce the number of deaths on the roads. We will be working with the pilot authorities and others to make them a success, and to roll out local PSAs to other upper-tier authorities over the next two years.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Expenditure and Caseloads

**Mr. Goggins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library information on social security expenditure and caseloads on a benefit by benefit basis. [160154]

**Mr. Rooker:** I have placed in the Library seven statistical tables showing breakdowns of historical and forecast benefit expenditure and caseloads for Great Britain. This information will be made available on the Department's internet site shortly.

The tables show that social security spending is now firmly under control; the total cost of benefits and tax credits together is growing at under 2 per cent. this Parliament compared to 4 per cent. in the last Parliament—the lowest rate of growth for any Parliament since the Second World War.

### Minimum Income Guarantee

**Mrs. Betty Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what assessment he has made of the time it takes citizens to make contact with an operator regarding the Minimum Income Guarantee when telephoning 0800 028 1111 from Wales. [158836]

**Mr. Rooker:** There is no difference in the level of service offered by operators of the Minimum Income Guarantee Teleclaim service when answering telephone calls from customers in Wales. On average, operators are taking around a minute and a half to answer calls and the duration of an incoming call is four minutes or 20 minutes where a customer opts to be taken through the electronic claim form process.

### SERPS

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what entitlement to inherited SERPS remains after someone who has contracted out of SERPS into an occupational scheme subsequently transfers to a personal pension plan; and what action his Department has taken to inform people that they could lose out by making such a change. [159701]

**Mr. Rooker:** Since 1997, there has been no link between contracted-out pension rights and SERPS. A transfer of rights accrued since that date would have no bearing on possible entitlement to inherited SERPS.

For the transfer of pension rights accrued before 1997 in a contracted-out salary related pension scheme, the situation will depend on an individual's circumstances.

We therefore recommend that a person should seek independent financial advice, before transferring pension rights from an occupational scheme to a personal pension.

### Pension Credit Consultation Paper

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library the responses to the pension credit consultation paper (Cm 4900). [159704]

**Mr. Rooker:** I refer the hon. Member to my written answer on 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 210W.

### Euro Programme

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what work has so far been undertaken by his Department's Euro Programme team; what range of costs has been estimated by the DSS Euro Programme team for the cost of converting the social security system into euros; and when a report on the DSS Euro Programme team's work will be published. [159700]

**Angela Eagle:** The Department is conducting work in accordance with the guidance given in the Outline National Changeover Plans and reported in the Fourth Report on Euro Preparations published on 6 November 2000. Should the UK decide to enter the single currency, costs to the Department will depend on the approach taken and this is not yet known. There are no plans to prepare a report on the DSS Euro Programme team's work.

### Fraud (Scotland)

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the recorded rate of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit fraud was in Scotland in each year since 1997. [159697]

**Mr. Rooker:** The information requested is not available. At the start of April this year we began the Housing Benefit Review which will, for the first time, deliver a continuous, comprehensive, national measurement of programme loss through fraud and error in Housing Benefit.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Incapacitated Patients

**Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many responses she has received to the consultation paper, "Who Decides? Making Decisions on Behalf of Mentally Incapacitated Adults" (Cm 3803); how many respondents were *(a)* in favour of and *(b)* against withholding food and fluids from incapacitated patients who are not dying; and if she will make a statement. [159181]

**Jane Kennedy:** Over 4,000 responses to the consultation paper were received. The question of whether respondents were in favour of or against withholding food and fluids from incapacitated patients who are not dying was not posed in the consultation paper. The consultation paper did ask whether the discontinuation of artificial nutrition and hydration should be lawful for defined patients if certain statutory criteria are met and whether

"patients who have no prospect of recovery who are either unconscious or in a permanent vegetative state"

is a suitable definition for this class of patients. There was a large and varied response to these questions.

### Domestic Violence

**Ms Moran:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list measures she has taken to tackle domestic violence since 1 May 1997. [159417]

**Jane Kennedy:** The Government implemented Part IV of the Family Law Act 1996, with the exception of section 60 of the Act, in October 1997. Part IV of the Act provides for a single set of civil remedies to deal with domestic violence and to regulate occupation of the family home, through two specific types of order: the occupation order and the non-molestation order. These remedies are available at all levels of court (magistrates, county, High) with jurisdiction in family matters. The remedies are available to both men and women. A much wider range of people are able to apply for orders under Part IV than under the previous law. In addition, police powers to deal with domestic violence have been strengthened. Consideration is currently being given to the implementation of Section 60, which provides for third parties to make applications under Part IV.

During 2000, the Children Act Sub-Committee of the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Board on Family Law proposed guidelines on child contact and domestic violence. These guidelines have recently been endorsed by the Government and have the support of the President of the Family Division. Although primary legislation is felt to be premature at this stage, the guidelines have been partially incorporated into law following the judgment in Re L, V, M. & H. The Government are promulgating the guidelines, with the help of the President of the Family Division, through the Judicial Studies Board and a variety

of other sources. The Government will also monitor the effectiveness of the guidelines and keep under review the possible need for legislation in the future.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Animal Transports (EU)

**Miss Kirkbride:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he next plans to meet the President of the European Commission to discuss transport of animals between EU states; and if he will make a statement. [158640]

**Mr. Morley:** There are no plans to meet the President of the European Commission at ministerial level. However, officials have been working closely with the Commission on expected proposals to strengthen the European Union Directive on the protection of animals during transport.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Paul Marsden:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will investigate the reasons why the chief executive of the Intervention Board has not replied to the letter dated 6 April from Shropshire county council's chief trading standards officer regarding concerns over the handling of the foot and mouth crisis. [159984]

**Ms Quin:** Johnston McNeill, chief executive of the Intervention Board, replied to the letter from Shropshire county council on 27 April. This was one day outside the target IB sets itself for replying within 10 working days, owing to the exceptionally high workload generated by the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) how long he estimates carcases buried at Throckmorton will take to decay fully; [157065]

(2) what estimates he has made of the length of time it will take for carcases buried at Throckmorton airfield to fully decompose. [157059]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* Different parts of mammalian corpses decay at different rates (for example, horn and hair are slowly degradable). It is estimated that 60 per cent. of the carcase is readily degradable, 15 per cent. is moderately degradable, 20 per cent. is slowly degradable, and 5 per cent. is effectively inert. With respect to leachate production, it is estimated that within approximately 10 years the contaminant load will be reduced to background levels.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what advice he is giving pig farmers with a build-up of stock during the foot and mouth outbreak about the disposal of slurry when they have no on-farm disposal facilities and their normal outlets refuse to take the slurry for use on agricultural land; and if he will make a statement. [157014]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* Advice for farmers on agricultural practices during the foot and mouth outbreak is included in MAFF's literature and website, and is also posted on the NFU website.

The Environment Agency has issued guidance on the management of organic wastes on farms. The Agency recognises that storage capacity for slurry storage may need to be increased as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak. Additional storage lagoons may be constructed provided they meet basic Agency requirements on siting, lining and construction in order to avoid any immediate risks to water. The Environment Agency should be contacted before proceeding with construction and use so that appropriate guidance can be given, and the location noted. The Agency can be contacted on 0845 933 3111 (9 am to 5 pm) or on their Emergency Hotline 0800 80 70 60.

**Ms Walley:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what specifications are required from rendering plants receiving foot and mouth carcases. [156857]

**Ms Quin:** Rendering plants must meet a list of specifications, drawn up by the Ministry, in order to be permitted to receive carcases. It is crucial that all rendering plants used for the disposal of animals slaughtered as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak have adequate biosecurity measures in place. The Ministry also takes various factors into account when considering the use of a rendering plant, including the proximity of the nearest livestock holding and road access to the plant.

Any effluence from, and air exhausted by, the rendering plant is treated to kill the foot and mouth virus, and strict procedures are in place to ensure thorough cleansing and disinfection of all people and vehicles coming into contact with carcases.

Carcases for disposal at a rendering plant must be transported in leak-proof lorries. Leaks are checked for by part filling the lorries with water and tilting them to 30 degrees. All carcases are individually disinfected after slaughter and the lorries are covered with plastic sheeting, which is weighed down with straw or sawdust which is also heavily disinfected. The lorry is then covered with a tight fitting tarpaulin. This procedure reduces any risk of spread of the infection during transportation to a very low level.

**Mr. Paterson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions he has had with the Chancellor of the Exchequer concerning VAT default surcharges enforced on VAT liabilities subject to time to pay arrangements introduced in response to the foot and mouth outbreak. [156814]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 3 April 2001]:* The Ministry has not raised this matter with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. However, the Rural Task Force under my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment will look at aspects of costs and burdens relating to the rural economy that arise as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak.

**Mr. Paice:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date the final decision on the slaughter of individual infected herds and flocks was devolved to inspecting vets without reference to *(a)* regional or divisional departmental offices and *(b)* the Department's offices in London. [156654]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* During an outbreak, foot and mouth disease may be diagnosed clinically by the vet on the ground when there are links apparent to other cases. This has been the case from the early stages of the current outbreak.

The normal practice is that the clinical diagnosis is phoned through to Head Office in London and authorisation to slaughter stock is then given during the same telephone call. However, my right hon. Friend the Minister and Chief Veterinary Officer advised on 27 March 2001 that the inspecting veterinary surgeon could authorise slaughter immediately to ensure the slaughter process was not delayed if any problem in communicating with Head Office occurred.

**Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) when he expects that pigs at Manor Farm, Bucknell will be able to be moved for slaughter; [155655]

(2) when he expects that cattle from *(a)* Marsh Farm, Fritwell and *(b)* Manor Farm, Chacombe, near Banbury, will be able to be moved for slaughter. [155656]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 27 March 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 256W.

**Mr. Pickles:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what temperature the pyre is required to reach in the burning of animal carcases; how long it takes to reach that temperature; and what assessment he has made of the risk of airborne travel of the virus in the intervening period. [153954]

**Ms Quin:** The Pirbright Institute of Animal Health has informed the Ministry that the virus is inactivated at temperatures above 55 degrees centigrade. It is not possible to set a definite time required to reach this temperature. There may be small termo-resistant factions in which the virus survives up to 70 degrees, but the expert opinion is that these factions are insignificant in the possible spread of infection from pyres.

Once rigor mortis sets in (approximately 24 hours after slaughter) lactic acid accumulates, destroying the virus in the muscles. Carcases are sprayed with an approved disinfectant before being burnt which destroys a large amount of the virus, greatly reducing the risk of spread of infection from the outside of the carcase. These procedures ensure that much of the virus is destroyed before the pyre is lit, and reduces the risk of transmission of the disease via plumes from the pyre.

**Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received from the RSPCA in respect of the cull of sheep and cattle following the outbreak of foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [157898]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* I have been in regular contact with the RSPCA who are also represented on the foot and mouth disease stakeholder group and the foot and mouth Animal Welfare Consultative Group. They also have staff at the Intervention Board at Newcastle. Along with local government officers and MAFF staff their assistance with identifying priorities for the Welfare Slaughter Scheme and help with feed distribution has made an invaluable contribution to protecting animal welfare.

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if the veterinary surgeon who visited the Heddon-on-the-Wall farm in February and found evidence of foot and mouth disease in the pigs was the same veterinary surgeon who visited on 25 January; and if some of the same pigs were inspected on both occasions; [158445]

(2) if he will identify *(a)* the veterinary surgeons and *(b)* other personnel (i) employed by and (ii) acting on behalf of his Department, who visited the farm at Heddon-on-the-Wall in Northumberland run by the Waughs (A) on and (B) near 25 January; and if he will list the movements of such persons in the previous four weeks. [158380]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answers 23 April 2001]:* These matters are under inquiry. It would therefore not be appropriate to comment at this stage.

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will take steps to ensure that no dead farm stock will be dumped at landfill sites adjacent to land on which sheep and livestock are kept. [157780]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* It may not always be possible to use only landfill sites without neighbouring livestock. We will, however, arrange to purchase stock on land adjacent to a disposal site, if there is a pressing need.

**Mr. Hoyle:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when animals will be allowed to be slaughtered for food. [157392]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* A licence to slaughter scheme was introduced on 2 March, with strict conditions to ensure that animals were moved directly to abattoirs approved by the Meat Hygiene Service on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Minister.

In addition, from 23 April animals from farms in the Infected Areas may be moved direct to slaughter to an abattoir within the same Infected Area. These movements are subject to a veterinary visit by a MAFF Local Veterinary Inspector who will carry out an inspection of the animals to check for clinical signs of foot and mouth disease.

**Mr. Webb:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will ensure that his Department's website is kept up to date with comprehensive and accurate information, with particular reference to the location of new outbreaks of foot and mouth disease. [157370]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* The website is updated a number of times every day. When new cases are confirmed, details of the infected premises are added to the site.

**Mr. Luff:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made in *(a)* digging trenches and *(b)* burying carcases at Throckmorton airfield; and if he will make a statement. [157248]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 6 April 2001]:* The army has made good progress in constructing the mass burial site at Throckmorton airfield. The burial process began on 3 April 2001. As of 25 April, the carcases of 102,722 animals had been disposed of on site. This includes 89,404 sheep, 9,071 cattle, 3,842 pigs, 400 deer, three goats and two longhorns.

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the average price for *(a)* a cow and *(b)* a sheep was at markets on 1 February; and what it is currently. [159175]

**Ms Quin:** On 1 February, the average price for clean lambs was 111.44p/kilogram liveweight. Liveweight sales are not currently taking place, but the average price reported by abattoirs slaughtering sheep for human consumption in the week ending 6 April (the latest week for which confirmed figures are available) was 193p/kilogram deadweight, equivalent to 91p/kilogram liveweight. Cows are not normally allowed to be slaughtered for human consumption and their market price is therefore determined by the rates of payment fixed under the over-30-months scheme. In February, the rate of payment was 50.936p/kilogram liveweight. The scheme is currently suspended but, were it operational, the rate for April would be 49.536p/kilogram liveweight. The change in rates results purely from movements in the euro/sterling exchange rate.

**Mr. Steinberg:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the market price was for a pig on 1 February; and what the current price is. [159349]

**Ms Quin:** The average weekly GB pig price on 1 February was 95.85p per kg dead weight. The equivalent current market price, as reported on 25 April, is 95.54p per kg.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what representations he has received about the application of the welfare disposal scheme to livestock from restricted areas. [159258]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* We are conscious that there have been concerns about the ability of some farmers to dispose of animals through the Livestock Welfare (Disposal) Scheme. The scheme applies in Infected Areas as it does in all other parts of the country. Where premises are subject to more stringent restrictions, on-farm slaughter under the LWDS remains an option, and we are assessing applications to ensure that the most pressing welfare cases receive priority. We are endeavouring to maximise other avenues of disposal for animals in these areas, both in the LWDS and through slaughter for the market.

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to review the compensation payments for cattle over-30-months old that could not be moved to slaughter because of foot and mouth restrictions; and if he will make a statement. [159423]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The rates of payment for cattle entered into the over-30-months scheme are set by EU regulations. As far as we are aware, the Commission has no plans to review these. The Government are keeping the position of producers affected in these ways under review. In the meantime, cattle of all ages may be entered into the Livestock Welfare Disposal Scheme if the circumstances are appropriate.

**Mr. Jon Owen Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what consideration he has given to the possible re-introduction of the disease in determining the 'stamp out' policy on foot and mouth disease: [157590]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effects of globalisation on the spread of disease to British livestock; [157592]

(3) what estimate he has made of the probability of foot and mouth disease being re-introduced into Britain during the *(a)* next five years, *(b)* next 10 years and *(c)* next 20 years. [157591]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* The UK and European Union import controls, based on recommendations in the International Office of Epizootics (OIE) International Animal Health Code, are designed to prevent the introduction of exotic diseases. This code sets out the conditions that will allow safe trade between countries of differing disease status.

The last outbreak of foot and mouth disease in this country was in 1981. Investigations at the time indicated that the likely transmission of the virus was wind-borne from France. A range of controls to prevent the introduction of foot and mouth disease (e.g. on imports and waste food disposal) have therefore been effective for the last 34 years.

If the existing controls are fully observed, the probability of reintroduction of foot and mouth disease is low. In addition, my Department is looking at what lessons can be learned from the current outbreak. Including putting in place measures to strengthen our current controls.

Once the country is free of foot and mouth disease, and in the event of any future outbreaks, our control policy will be in line with the EC Foot and Mouth Control directive and OIE's recommendations for re-establishing disease free status.

## Refrigerants

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to what extent his Department's headquarters buildings use hydrofluorocarbons for *(a)* refrigeration and *(b)* air conditioning; what amounts of hydrofluorocarbons have been purchased in each year since 1995; and what plans he has to phase out the (i) purchase and (ii) use of hydrofluorocarbons. [160008]

**Mr. Morley:** Hydrofluorocarbons are used in air conditioning equipment, and refrigeration equipment in kitchens and tea points (e.g. domestic refrigerators).

The equipment is maintained in good order, and is being replaced when maintenance becomes too costly or no longer feasible. Over the years only small quantities of refrigerant have been purchased to maintain equipment in good running order. Details of quantities purchased since 1995 are not readily available.

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his Department's policy is regarding the purchase of *(a)* hydrocarbons and *(b)* other environmentally benign refrigerants to meet the refrigeration and other relevant energy needs of London headquarters buildings and premises owned and leased by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [160007]

**Mr. Morley:** Maintenance is carried out by approved contractors, who supply refrigerants as necessary. It is anticipated that all equipment using hydrofluorocarbons will be replaced by equipment using more acceptable refrigerants within the present deadline.

Following the earlier agreement to phase out the production of chlorofluorocarbons, an exercise was undertaken in the Department to convert or replace all equipment using chlorofluorocarbons. This was accomplished well within the statutory time limit. Most conversions/replacements involved the use of hydrofluorocarbons.

As HCFC's are now being phased out another rolling programme is being planned to replace this refrigerant with environmentally acceptable alternatives.

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food which London headquarters building and premises owned or leased by his Department use *(a)* chlorofluorocarbons and *(b)* hydrochlorofluorocarbons for refrigeration and other relevant energy needs. [160006]

**Mr. Morley:** *(a)* The Department has phased out the use of chlorofluorocarbons.

*(b)* Hydrochlorofluorocarbons are used to a small degree in all London headquarters buildings owned or leased by MAFF.

### Arable Area Payments Scheme

**Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the largest single payment made to an applicant was in 2000 under the arable area payments scheme. [159845]

**Ms Quin:** £1,644,270.61. In common with other recipients of substantial payments under the arable area payments scheme, the applicant concerned is a large scale farm business with many different production units, widely situated in the United Kingdom.

### Livestock Movements

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what plans he has to carry out an economic analysis of the movement of livestock around the United Kingdom. [155615]

**Ms Quin:** The Ministry has no immediate plans to carry out such analysis but will keep the matter under review. However, taking account of what we have learned from the current foot and mouth outbreak, the Government are consulting on proposals to introduce a 20 day standstill period for cattle, sheep and goats. Officials will be meeting with industry to discuss the implications of the proposals.

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to take steps to reduce the length of animal movements by securing an increase nationally in the number of abattoirs. [159597]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* Despite the reduction in abattoir numbers over recent years there remains a spread of abattoirs across the country. However, where animals do have to travel, such journeys must comply with the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997 which sets out in some detail a variety of measures designed to protect animals, including maximum journey times, vehicle standards, transporter competence, etc. These rules are, of course, rigorously enforced.

### Farmers

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will prepare proposals to place before the next meeting of the Council of Agricultural Ministers of the Community designed to permit the United Kingdom to adopt systems of support to farmers and their auxiliary services aimed at sustaining their income and economic security at levels approximating to their purchasing power in the financial year 1999–2000. [158813]

**Ms Quin:** The Government recognise that this is a difficult time for farming, and have introduced a wide range of measures since 1997 investing around £1.35 billion in the industry. This is over and above regular support for UK farmers available under the CAP, totalling about £3 billion each year.

The CAP is clearly failing to deliver on its aim of ensuring a fair standard of living for the agricultural community. This is one of many factors underlying our commitment to secure a more economically rational CAP to enable the industry to react flexibly to consumer wishes without being constrained by the market-distorting nature of the current CAP.

We are working closely with like-minded member states to put pressure on the Council to reform the CAP on the basis of proposals from the EU Commission which we expect to issue next year.

### Sheep Exports

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will reinstate the special central unit of officials monitoring and enforcing statutory provisions relating to sheep exports. [157886]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The team in Animal Welfare Division concerned with policy towards the transport of live animals and the monitoring of international journeys has not been abolished. This function has always been part of the division.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of written parliamentary questions tabled to his Department during the last four weeks have received a holding answer; and what was the average time taken after the date of the holding answer for a full answer to be given. [157178]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* In the four week period from 6 March up to and including 4 April, 96 per cent. of Named Day questions received a holding reply. This Department receives large numbers of named day questions, for answer on the earliest permitted date.

Where full answers have now been given our records show the average gap between holding reply to full reply as 8.8 days.

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he intends to provide a substantive reply to the question about Dawn Cardington abattoir in Bedfordshire tabled for answer on 4 April; and what the reasons are for the delay in answering. [159183]

**Ms Quin:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 258W.

### Environment Agency Report

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when the Government will publish its response to the Environment Agency's "Lessons Learned" report. [159356]

**Mr. Morley:** In reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on 20 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 186W, I expressed the Government's welcome for this report and the work that we, the Environment Agency and others would be undertaking to pursue the lessons learned. I do not propose making any further response to the report at this time.

### Abattoirs

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what measures his Department is taking to help small and medium-sized abattoirs. [159371]

**Ms Quin:** The Government have agreed to transfer £8.7 million per year for the next three years to the Food Standards Agency (FSA) to enable them to implement the principal recommendations of the Maclean Task Force Report on charging for Meat Hygiene Service inspections in abattoirs and cutting plants. The Taskforce considered that in view of what it saw as a serious threat to small and medium-sized abattoirs and cutting plants, the Government should contribute to the costs of meat inspection in Great Britain. The Taskforce recommended that the Government should therefore change their policy of requiring the Meat Hygiene Service to recover as much as possible of its hygiene inspection costs from the meat industry (since this is not required by EU rules on charging). It recommends that the current method of charging for meat inspections on an hourly basis should be changed and that, instead, all abattoirs and cutting plants should be charged the standard (headage) fees laid down in the EU Charges Directive or their actual inspection costs where these are lower.

Implementation of the Maclean recommendations will significantly reduce inspection charges levied on many small and medium-sized meat plants and will be of considerable benefit to rural communities. We will be monitoring developments and giving further consideration as to how to maintain a sufficient number of small and medium-sized abattoirs.

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the number of slaughterhouses in the UK; and what assessment he has made of *(a)* the additional costs to farmers, *(b)* the animal welfare implications and *(c)* the impact on the environment from extra transport movements resulting from the contraction in the number of slaughterhouses since 1979. [159593]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* Abattoir numbers have been declining year on year for more than 20 years, in response to commercial pressures and demand in particular areas. There is intense competition between slaughterhouses, both for throughput and for customers, and profit margins are low.

Despite the reduction in abattoir numbers over recent years there remains a spread of abattoirs across the country. However, where animals do have to travel, such journeys must comply with the Welfare of Animals (Transport) Order 1997 which sets out in some detail a variety of measures designed to protect animals, including maximum journey times, vehicle standards, transporter competence, etc. These rules are, of course, rigorously enforced.

### BSE

**Mr. Gray:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the report into BSE which he has commissioned from Professor Gabriel Horn. [159263]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The review of the origin of BSE chaired by Professor Horn is well under way. It is expected that the group will submit their report by the end of May. Their conclusions will be included in the Government's detailed response to the BSE Inquiry Report.

### Pigs (Whey Feeding)

**Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of methods of disposal of whey as an alternative to feeding to pigs. [159434]

**Ms Quin:** We would assess alternative methods of disposal of whey in the event of it being banned as a feedingstuff to pigs.

**Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what volume of whey was fed to pigs in England in each of the last five years. [159433]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* We do not hold figures on the volume of whey fed annually. However, figures resulting from consultation with the industry indicate that approximately 450,000 tonnes of pasteurised milk waste products, including whey products, are used by pig industry per annum.

**Mr. David Heath:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many pigs in England were fed with whey in the last 12 months; and what proportion they constitute of the national herd. [159432]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* It is estimated that up to 20 per cent. (or 1,051,600 pigs) of the British pig production sector utilises high moisture and moist co-products in pig feeds through liquid-feeding systems, which includes whey.

### Bovine TB

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when a simplified version of the husbandry report on bovine TB will be made available to farmers. [154031]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 16 April 2001]:* The Government accepted the recommendation of the independent Husbandry Panel on the need for more effective guidance to farmers on reducing the risk of TB. We will re-assess the mechanisms used to deliver this

guidance in the light of the Panel's advice, although the timeframe for this work will be extended because of the foot and mouth outbreak.

## CABINET OFFICE

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the total cost was of employing special advisers in her Department from 1997 to date. [160039]

**Marjorie Mowlam:** Details of costs for special advisers within individual Departments are not given, in order to protect the privacy of the individuals concerned.

The estimated cost for special advisers as a whole in 2001–02 is £4.4 million.

The overall costs for the previous years since 1997 are as follows:

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 2.6 |
| 1998–99 | 3.5 |
| 1999–2000 | 4.0 |
| 2000–01 | 4.4 |

**Mr. Kemp:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list the special advisers employed by each Government Department on 1 March 1997, the date on which each resigned, and the reason for that resignation. [151896]

**Marjorie Mowlam:** A list of special advisers in post on 1 March 1997 is as follows:

| *Government Department* | *Special advisers* |
|---|---|
| Prime Minister's Office | Normal Blackwell |
| | Carolyn Fairbairn |
| | Katherine Ramsay |
| | Simon Walker |
| | Arabella Warburton |
| | Sean Williams |
| Chief Whip's Office | Shana Hole |
| Cabinet Office[1] | Andrew Caesar-Gordon |
| | Lady Eileen Strathnaver |
| Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food | George Osborne |
| Ministry of Defence | Alison Broome |
| Department for Education and Employment | Dr. Elizabeth Cottrell |
| | Nicholas Heslop |
| Department of the Environment | Keith Adams |
| | Gavin Barwell |
| | Tom Burke |
| | Liam O'Connor |
| Foreign and Commonwealth Office | Graham Carter |
| Department of Health | Tony Hockley |
| | Tim Rycroft |
| Department of National Heritage | Andrew Honnor |
| Home Office | Patrick Rock |
| | Rachael Whetstone |
| Privy Council Office | Sophie McEwen |
| | Praveen Moman |
| Department of Social Security | Peter Barnes |
| Department of Trade and Industry | Greg Clark |
| Department of Transport | Lucy Miller |
| Her Majesty's Treasury | Paul Gardner |
| | Anthony Teasdale |
| | Edward Troup |
| Scottish Office | Jacqui Low |
| | Gerald Warner |
| Welsh Office | Barnaby Towns |

[1] In addition, Sir Peter Levene was employed as Efficiency Adviser

Information on the date of resignation of individual special advisers and the reason for resignation is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Departmental Policies

**Caroline Flint:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to Don Valley constituency, the effects on Doncaster of her Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [153523]

**Mr. Kemp:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects of her Department's policies and actions on the constituency of Houghton and Washington, East since 2 May 1997. [152995]

**Mr. Stringer:** The Cabinet Office is responsible for a range of functions which cover England as a whole, or in relation to non-devolved matters, Great Britain or the United Kingdom. It is therefore not possible to say what their specific impact is on a particular constituency. Additionally any policy changes arising from reports by Cabinet Office units, such as the Social Exclusion Unit and the United Kingdom Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit, are implemented by the appropriate Government Department rather than by the Unit itself.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Prison Disorders

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison disorders have taken place in prisons in England and Wales during the last 12 months; and if he will list the prisons concerned. [158387]

**Mr. Boateng:** The term "disorder" is understood as referring to incidents of concerted indiscipline. An incident is classified as concerted indiscipline when prisoners collectively: refuse to comply with a lawful order; or involve themselves collectively in disruption of an establishment's normal regime and the incident is not otherwise reportable in its own right, unless that reportable incident presents a wider threat to the good order or discipline of the establishment.

During the last 12 months, 103 incidents of concerted indiscipline have taken place in prisons in England and Wales. The prisons at which the disorders took place are listed in the tables:

| *Establishment* | *Number of incidents in the last 12 months* |
|---|---|
| Full Sutton | 1 |
| Whitemoor | 8 |
| Woodhill | 4 |
| Lincoln | 1 |
| Ranby | 5 |
| Leicester | 1 |
| Wellingborough | 2 |
| Onley | 1 |
| Chelmsford | 4 |
| Highpoint | 3 |
| Hollesley Bay | 2 |
| Norwich | 1 |

| Establishment | Number of incidents in the last 12 months |
|---|---|
| Maidstone | 1 |
| Rochester | 1 |
| Swaleside | 1 |
| Dover | 1 |
| Garth | 1 |
| Lancaster Farms | 1 |
| Wandsworth | 1 |
| Forest Bank | 5 |
| Risley | 1 |
| Castington | 7 |
| Guys Marsh | 1 |
| Ashfield | 7 |
| Portland | 4 |
| Bullingdon | 4 |
| Aylesbury | 3 |
| Huntercombe | 3 |
| Cardiff | 1 |
| Parc | 1 |
| Birmingham | 3 |
| Blakenhurst | 1 |
| Stafford | 1 |
| Stoke Heath | 3 |
| Brinsford | 2 |
| Bullwood Hall | 2 |
| Holloway | 1 |
| Send | 1 |
| Low Newton | 1 |
| Lindholme | 2 |
| Moorland | 1 |
| Wolds | 2 |
| Northallerton | 1 |
| Wetherby | 3 |

*Table of reported acts of concerted indiscipline including the duration of the incident, in date order, from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001*

| Prison | Incident date | Duration of incidents (hours) |
|---|---|---|
| Ashfield | 6 April 2000 | 1 |
| Ranby | 8 April 2000 | 3 |
| Whitemoor | 6 April 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Ranby | 8 April 2000 | 14 |
| Ashfield | 10 April 2000 | 2 |
| Stoke Heath | 14 April 2000 | 3 |
| Aylesbury | 25 April 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Forest Bank | 25 April 2000 | 1 |
| Castington | 29 April 2000 | 3 |
| Forest Bank | 1 May 2000 | 1 |
| Whitemoor | 8 May 2000 | 1 |
| Hollesley Bay | 9 May 2000 | 1 |
| Portland | 4 May 2000 | 12 |
| Bullingdon | 14 May 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Blakenhurst | 12 May 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Highpoint | 16 May 2000 | 3 |
| Bullingdon | 20 May 2000 | 1 |
| Guys March | 21 May 2000 | 7 |
| Chelmsford | 20 May 2000 | 11 |
| Castington | 21 May 2000 | 3 |
| Forest Bank | 31 May 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Whitemoor | 27 May 2000 | 48 |
| Chelmsford | 4 June 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Bullwood Hall | 12 May 2000 | 2 |
| Risley | 9 June 2000 | 9 |
| Northallerton | 10 June 2000 | 1 |
| Norwich | 12 June 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Garth | 21 June 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Chelmsford | 24 June 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Huntercombe | 24 June 2000 | 1 |
| Whitemoor | 26 June 2000 | 2 |
| Huntercombe | 27 June 2000 | 1 |
| Lindholme | 1 July 2000 | 1 |

*Table of reported acts of concerted indiscipline including the duration of the incident, in date order, from 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001*

| Prison | Incident date | Duration of incidents (hours) |
|---|---|---|
| Full Sutton | 2 July 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Swaleside | 4 July 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Whitemoor | 4 July 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Ashfield | 9 July 2000 | 1 |
| Ranby | 9 July 2000 | 19 |
| Whitemoor | 8 July 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Castington | 14 July 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Stoke Heath | 14 July 2000 | 1 |
| Bullwood Hall | 23 July 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Highpoint | 19 July 2000 | 2 |
| Castington | 24 July 2000 | 1 |
| Forest Bank | 30 July 2000 | 8 |
| Birmingham | 2 August 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Aylesbury | 3 August 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Portland | 1 August 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Whitemoor | 1 August 2000 | 48 |
| Ranby | 6 August 2000 | 17 |
| Stoke Heath | 6 August 2000 | 3 |
| Send | 5 August 2000 | 1 |
| Birmingham | 12 August 2000 | 1 |
| Birmingham | 12 August 2000 | 1 |
| Highpoint | 13 August 2000 | 1 |
| Lancaster Farms | 15 August 2000 | 2 |
| Wetherby | 22 August 2000 | 1 |
| Ranby | 21 August 2000 | 9 |
| Bullingdon | 24 August 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Wetherby | 29 August 2000 | 2 |
| Wandsworth | 1 September 2000 | 8 |
| Castington | 14 September 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Woodhill | 25 August 2000 | 2 |
| Wolds | 18 September 2000 | 1 |
| Aylesbury | 3 October 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Chelmsford | 4 October 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Castington | 10 October 2000 | 4 |
| Woodhill | 11 October 2000 | 1 |
| Lindholme | 11 October 2000 | 9 |
| Woodhill | 10 October 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Dover | 17 October 2000 | 4 |
| Feltham | 21 October 2000 | 6 |
| Castington | 23 October 2000 | 3 |
| Ashfield | 5 November 2000 | Less than one hour |
| Bullingdon | 9 November 2000 | 1 |
| Hollesley Bay | 20 November 2000 | 8 |
| Low Newton | 28 November 2000 | 1 |
| Forest Bank | 29 November 2000 | 1 |
| Ashfield | 30 November 2000 | 2 |
| Portland | 4 December 2000 | 1 |
| Brinsford | 17 December 2000 | 1 |
| Ashfield | 25 December 2000 | 6 |
| Wellingborough | 25 December 2000 | 1 |
| Holloway | 27 December 2000 | 2 |
| Moorland | 25 December 2000 | 1 |
| Maidstone | 18 January 2001 | 1 |
| Rochester | 30 July 2000 | 1 |
| Onley | 24 January 2001 | 6 |
| Woodhill | 25 January 2001 | 2 |
| Ashfield | 26 January 2001 | 4 |
| Stafford | 25 January 2001 | Less than one hour |
| Portland | 31 January 2001 | 1 |
| Huntercombe | 17 February 2001 | 2 |
| Lincoln | 13 February 2001 | Less than one hour |
| Swansea | 18 February 2001 | 1 |
| Leicester | 22 February 2001 | 2 |
| Wellingborough | 2 March 2001 | 1 |
| Whitemoor | 12 March 2001 | 1 |
| Wolds | 14 March 2001 | Less than one hour |
| Wetherby | 17 March 2001 | 1 |
| Cardiff | 19 March 2001 | Less than one hour |
| Brinsford | 31 March 2001 | 1 |
| Parc | 23 February 2001 | Less than one hour |

## Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if, in deciding allocations of asylum seekers for dispersal to areas outside the south-east, he takes account of the number already coming in to such areas through ports of entry within the areas. [158914]

**Mrs. Roche:** The identification of suitable cluster areas for the dispersal of asylum seekers and their dependants is based on research conducted centrally by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). Information is obtained from local authorities and other organisations with an interest in asylum. The presence of asylum seekers already in the area will also be taken into consideration.

Only asylum seekers who request that accommodation be provided as part of a support package will be considered for dispersal. Asylum seekers making their claim in one dispersal area may, if they request accommodation, be required to move to another which is more suitable for their needs. An asylum seeker requesting support including accommodation who is already resident in a dispersal area may be housed here by NASS if his circumstances make this appropriate.

Asylum seekers who do not require support or who apply for subsistence only can live where they choose.

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of asylum applications include dependant children; and if he will make a statement. [159436]

**Mrs. Roche:** The proportion of principal applicants who have at least one dependant (excluding a spouse) at the application stage who is under the age of 18 is estimated to be 8 per cent.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many places have been provided for dispersed asylum seekers by *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* accommodation providers and *(c)* boarding houses since dispersal began. [159739]

**Mrs. Roche:** Bedspaces provided to the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) for the dispersal of asylum seekers since 1 April 2000 are:

| | *Bedspaces* |
|---|---|
| NASS public sector providers | 18,742 |
| NASS private sector providers | 20,584 |

No information is available on boarding houses.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what limits are placed on numbers of asylum seekers in any one property purchased by accommodation providers; and what guidance is given to them on the size of properties. [159737]

**Mrs. Roche:** All accommodation providers must as part of their contract with the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) comply with the provisions of the Housing Act 1985 or the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987. In addition providers must comply with local authority regulations relating to planning and environmental health and any local registration or licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs).

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who authorises the purchase of properties for the accommodation of asylum seekers in cluster areas by accommodation providers; and who bears the costs if planning permission is refused; [159738]

(2) which organisations commission and finance providers of accommodation for asylum seekers; and for how long their contracts last. [159723]

**Mrs. Roche:** The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is responsible for the commission and finance of accommodation for asylum seekers. The voluntary sector supplies initial emergency accommodation for asylum seekers while their application for support is being considered. Local authorities, registered social landlords and private sector companies provide accommodation in dispersal areas. The length of individual contracts varies from one to five years.

Accommodation providers under contract to NASS are responsible for obtaining sufficient accommodation in cluster areas to meet the terms of their contract. Once obtained the accommodation is offered to NASS who decide if it is acceptable. If the property contains more than six bedspaces it will be subject to a 28-day consultation period with the relevant local authority.

Accommodation providers would be expected to bear the costs of any unsuccessful applications for planning permission.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how he limits the numbers of properties and places private accommodation providers can purchase in each cluster area for asylum seekers; [159727]

(2) how he ensures that no area receives a disproportionate number of dispersed asylum seekers; and how he defines disproportionate for this purpose. [159752]

**Mrs. Roche:** The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) establishes cluster areas in consultation with local authorities. Accommodation providers are contracted to provide bedspaces in individual cluster areas up to the target specified in the contract.

The proportionate distribution of dispersed asylum seekers is achieved on the basis of local population figures or consideration of particular local circumstances.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 12 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 57W, what evidence he has to support the conclusion that people seeking asylum are managing to combine their vouchers and cash to ensure they do not lose out; and what representations he has received to the contrary. [159813]

**Mrs. Roche:** We have received a number of representations from non-governmental organisations, hon. Members, members of the public, retailers and others about the impact of the "no change" rule.

The issue is something we are looking at as part of the review of the operation of the asylum voucher scheme. As part of that review we have investigated asylum seekers' experiences and I have visited retailers and spoken to staff about the operation of the no change rule. We will make our conclusions available when the review reports.

### Life Prisoners (Appeals)

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are made to provide support to prisoners serving a life sentence who are released having had their conviction overturned on appeal; and if he will make a statement. [158895]

**Mr. Boateng:** The probation service does not have any obligation to provide support to such former prisoners since they are not on licence. However, where resources permit, they may be prepared to do so on a voluntary basis. The Government understand the difficulties that such former prisoners may face in resettling in the community and the Home Office has set up a working party to look at what might be needed, in terms of advice and counselling. A consultant has prepared a report and recommendations will go to Ministers by the summer.

### John Kamara

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support was provided to John Kamara following his release as a result of his conviction being overturned by the Court of Appeal; and if he will make a statement. [158896]

**Mr. Boateng:** Mr. Kamara has had voluntary contact with the Merseyside probation service since before his appeal was heard. Although there was no obligation on either side to continue contact after the successful appeal, there have been ongoing contacts with the probation service.

### Money Laundering

**Mr. Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations the Government have received regarding allegations of UK financial institutions being involved in money laundering activities in respect of money transferred out of Serbia and the former Yugoslavia; and if he will make a statement. [159245]

**Mr. Straw:** Allegations of money laundering activity involving any financial institution, or indeed any person, within the United Kingdom fall to be considered by the police. Reports are received by the National Criminal Intelligence Service, to be analysed and if necessary disseminated to competent authorities for further investigation. Such reports of suspicious transactions are received for the purposes of criminal intelligence and for the possible investigation of suspected criminal behaviour, and for operational reasons cannot be commented upon.

### Asylum Decisions

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken to reach an initial decision for applications for asylum is; and if he will make a statement. [159440]

**Mrs. Roche:** I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) on 26 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 852W, which gives the available information on the average time taken to reach an initial decision for applications for asylum.

### Class A Drug Offences

**Ms Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* arrests and *(b)* convictions there were for possession of Class A drugs in Luton in each year since 1991. [159415]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Information is not available in the form requested. Information is not collected centrally on arrests for drug offences. Although information is collected on cautions and convictions for drug offences, published breakdowns are not available in the specific form detailed in the question. It would be possible to provide information on cautions and convictions for possession of Class A drugs only at disproportionate cost.

The Area Tables of the Home Office bulletin "Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics, United Kingdom" give breakdowns by main type of drug or by main offence type for individual police force areas. Copies of these publications for the period up to and including 1999 are available in the Library. Unfortunately, it is impossible to provide these figures by any other geographical unit.

### Domestic Violence

**Ms Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the measures which he has taken to tackle domestic violence since May 1997. [159418]

**Mr. Boateng:** The most significant aspect of violence against women is domestic violence. It is a serious and abhorrent crime which the Government are determined to tackle effectively, and we have made it one of our key priorities. We have emphasised that the domestic context in which it occurs is an aggravating not a mitigating factor and that it is an issue which we expect the local crime reduction partnerships set up under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to cover in their audits of local problems and strategies for addressing them.

Since coming to office, we have undertaken a broad range of measures to reduce the level of domestic violence and strengthen support for victims.

I have mentioned the Crime and Disorder Act; other early measures were implementation of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and of Part IV of the Family Law Act 1996. We followed this with the successful "Break the Chain" publicity and awareness campaign for domestic violence survivors and those who might be able to help them.

Within the last year we have: issued multi-agency guidance to agencies dealing with domestic violence and specific guidance to Health Service professionals; issued a new Home Office circular to the police; included domestic violence within police Best Value performance indicators; provided £120 million additional capital funding for a new Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund for specified vulnerable groups, including the survivors of domestic violence; and, increased funding for Victim Support.

Last summer we provided £7 million under the Crime Reduction programme for a violence against women initiative addressing domestic violence and rape and sexual assault by known assailants. That money is currently funding for development and evaluation until March 2002, 34 projects that will help us identify what interventions in what circumstances are the most effective

and cost-effective in reducing crime. We have since announced, on 26 March, that we will be providing up to an extra £3.7 million to fund until March 2003 a further 24 projects addressing violence against women.

Other current initiatives include work with the Association of Chief Police Officers on a circular on effective use of provisions in the Protection from Harassment Act 1997; the evaluation of probation service domestic violence perpetrator programmes; the development of a domestic violence toolkit on the Home Office's crime reduction website; research on possible future publicity work; and, the inclusion in the British Crime Survey 2001 of a special module on domestic violence.

### Ministerial Group on the Family

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Ministerial Group on the Family last met; and if he will make a statement on its current programme of work. [159009]

**Mr. Boateng** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The Ministerial Group on the Family, as with other Ministerial Groups, meets as needed.

The Government have a robust framework of family policies in place. We have made excellent headway in tackling child poverty by helping parents back into work and ensuring that hard working families are rewarded through increases to the Working Families Tax Credit, and through the new Children's Tax Credit. All families with children have benefited from increases to Child Benefit. On 26 April, we outlined proposals to break the long-term cycle of disadvantage by setting up the new Child Trust Fund, starting at birth, with further investments at five, 11 and 16, to give young people a savings base with which to start their adult lives.

We have simplified and increased significantly maternity leave and pay, and announced the introduction of paternity pay ensuring that parents can spend time together as a family after the birth of a new baby. Parental leave provisions enable parents to take unpaid leave during the first few years of the children's lives. The National Childcare Strategy and free early education places for all four and many three-year-olds are providing an increasing number of high quality places for children, to enable parents to work. The Worklife Balance Campaign encourages employers to adopt flexible working practices which will enable employees to achieve a better work-life balance.

The Family Support Grant provides funding to over 60 voluntary organisations working with parents to improve their parenting skills. These include Parentline Plus which runs a national freephone helpline providing a listening ear for parents, and the National Family and Parenting Institute which is raising the profile and importance of parenting. We provide core and project funding to a range of marriage and relationship support organisations including Relate—the largest provider of marriage, family and relationship support in the country.

Locally based initiatives such as Early Excellence Centres, Sure Start and the Children's Fund provide a range of support services to children and their families in our most deprived areas. The new adoption framework and "Quality Protects" programme will help some of the most disadvantaged children and their families.

### Criminal Justice System

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets he *(a)* has set and *(b)* plans to set and what data he has identified to enable his Department to meet its PSA target to ensure just processes and just and effective outcomes in the criminal justice system. [159027]

**Mr. Boateng** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Targets have been set to reduce the rate of reconvictions of all offenders by 5 per cent. by 2004 compared to the predicted rate, and of all young offenders by 5 per cent. by 2004 compared to the predicted rate.

These calculations are based on evidence of "What Works" in reducing reconvictions. A range of interim targets have been set for effective completions of accredited Offender Behaviour Programmes including education and training for offenders in custody and those completing community sentences.

Predicted two-year reconviction rates used in the measurement of Public Service Agreement targets are not statistical forecasts, but are adjustments made once actual reconviction rates are known which make allowances for variations in the age, sex, offence and previous criminal history profile of persons commencing community sentences. These factors are known to be associated with the risk of re-offending. The purpose of the "predicted" rate is to ensure that comparisons between the reconviction rate when an improvement target was set and the reconviction rate when improvement is measured are meaningful.

### Firearms Certificates

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many applications for the renewal of firearm and shotgun certificates were *(a)* received and *(b)* processed by West Mercia Constabulary in (i) 1 January 2000 to 30 June 2000, (ii) 1 July 2000 to 31 December 2000 and (iii) 1 January to 31 March; [159186]

(2) how many firearm and shotgun certificates were *(a)* granted, *(b)* renewed and *(c)* varied by West Mercia Constabulary between 1 October 2000 and 31 March; [159184]

(3) how many firearm and shotgun certificates fell due for renewal in each month in the West Mercia Constabulary area in the last 12 months; [159187]

(4) how many temporary firearm and shotgun permits were issued by West Mercia Constabulary during the previous six month period to holders of firearm and shotgun certificates awaiting renewals and whose certificates had expired. [159185]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The information available from West Mercia Constabulary on the points raised is set out.

Between 1 October 2000 and 31 March 2001 West Mercia Constabulary issued the following:

Firearm Grants: 89

Firearm Renewals: 302

Firearm variations: 102

Shotgun Grants: 445

Shotgun Renewals: 3,182.

West Mercia Constabulary also issued 369 replacement certificates during the same period of time.

During the past six months, West Mercia Constabulary have issued 49 Firearm Temporary Permits and 59 Shotgun Temporary Permits.

Between the following dates, West Mercia Constabulary received and processed firearm and shotgun certificate applications for renewal as follows:

| *Firearms* | *Applications* | *Shotguns* | *Applications* |
|---|---|---|---|
| *1 January 2000 to 30 June 2000:* | | | |
| Renewal (actual) | 475 | Renewal | 4,521 |
| Processed | 198 | Processed | 2,138 |
| *1 July 2000 to 31 December 2000:* | | | |
| Renewal (estimated) | 485 | Renewal | 3,700 |
| Processed | 250 | Processed | 2,792 |
| *1 January 2001 to 31 March 2001:* | | | |
| Renewal | [1]— | Renewal | [1]— |
| Processed | 160 | Processed | 1,694 |

[1] Not known

These figures do not include cancellations, transfers out to other forces or applications for replacement certificates, which totalled 2,704.

Information on the number of certificates falling due for renewal in each individual month is not collected centrally and could be done so only at disproportionate cost. It is estimated, based on the total number of certificates registered in the force area, that an average of 972 renewal applications would fall due each month.

## First Offence (Imprisonment)

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of persons convicted of a first criminal offence were sentenced to a term of imprisonment in each year since 1971. [159253]

**Mr. Boateng:** The readily available information is shown in the table. The data relate to males with no known previous convictions for standard list offences who were sentenced to immediate imprisonment for a standard list offence.

*Percentage of males with no known previous convictions sentenced to immediate imprisonment[1], by age.*

| *Year* | *Males aged 10 and over but under 21* | *Males aged 21 and over* |
|---|---|---|
| 1977 | 4 | 5 |
| 1982 | 4 | 6 |
| 1987 | 5 | 11 |
| 1991 | 4 | 10 |
| 1993 | 6 | 14 |
| 1994 | 7 | 14 |
| 1995 | 6 | 14 |
| 1996 (old basis)[2] | 7 | 18 |
| 1996 (new basis)[2] | 7 | 13 |
| 1997 | 7 | 12 |
| 1998 | 6 | 12 |

[1] Includes Borstal training, detention centres, youth custody and young offender institution where appropriate.

[2] A number of offences were added to the Standard list in 1996. "Old basis" figures exclude the additional offences.

## Court Fines

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were imprisoned for failure to pay a court fine in each year since 1971. [159254]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Information relating to people imprisoned for failure to pay a court fine since 1971 is given in the table.

Provisional information for 1 January to 31 March 2001 shows that there have been 491 fine defaulters received into prison so far and that on 31 March 2001 there were 41 fine defaulters in prison.

*Number of fine defaulters received into prisons in England and Wales 1971 to 2001*

| *Year* | *Number of receptions* |
|---|---|
| 1971 | 10,871 |
| 1972 | 10,980 |
| 1973 | 10,406 |
| 1974 | 12,622 |
| 1975 | 14,417 |
| 1976 | 15,911 |
| 1977 | 16,040 |
| 1978 | 16,442 |
| 1979 | 17,044 |
| 1980 | 15,938 |
| 1981 | 21,153 |
| 1982 | 24,492 |
| 1983 | 23,241 |
| 1984 | 21,761 |
| 1985 | 20,493 |
| 1986 | 19,159 |
| 1987 | 18,723 |
| 1988 | 16,817 |
| 1989 | 16,985 |
| 1990 | 16,659 |
| 1991 | 18,973 |
| 1992 | 19,826 |
| 1993 | 22,403 |
| 1994 | 22,469 |
| 1995 | 20,157 |
| 1996 | 8,555 |
| 1997 | 6,336 |
| 1998 | 5,374 |
| 1999 | 3,727 |
| 2000 | [1]2,314 |

[1] Provisional data only

## Detention Centres

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the detention centres at Thurleigh, Harmondsworth, Aldington and Dungavel will begin to receive detainees. [159426]

**Mrs. Roche** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The immigration detention centres referred to will according to the current programme receive their first detainees as follows:

| *Detention centre* | |
|---|---|
| Yarl's Wood Detention Centre (Bedford) (formerly known as Thurleigh Detention Centre) | August 2001 |
| Harmondsworth Detention Centre (Heathrow) | July 2001 |
| Dungavel Detention Centre (Scotland) | September 2001 |
| Aldington Detention Centre (Kent) | No date available |

A date for the opening of the detention centre at Aldington cannot be given due to delays in the planning process.

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the planned initial capacity and the planned full operating capacity is of *(a)* Thurleigh Detention Centre, *(b)* Harmondsworth Detention Centre, *(c)* Aldington Detention Centre and *(d)* Dungavel Detention Centre. [159425]

**Mrs. Roche** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The planned full operating capacity of the immigration detention centres referred to will be as follows:

| *Detention centre* | *Places* |
|---|---|
| Yarl's Wood Detention Centre (Bedford) (formerly known as Thurleigh Detention Centre) | 900 |
| Harmondsworth Detention Centre (Heathrow) | 550 |
| Dungavel Detention Centre (Scotland) | 150 |
| Aldington Detention Centre (Kent) | 300 |

In each case there is no planned initial capacity and full operating capacity will be reached within three to four months of the centres opening, as agreed in the contract between the Immigration Service and operating contractors.

### Asylum Support Claims

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the terms of reference are of his review of the targets for the processing of asylum support claims; when he will announce the conclusions of that review; and if he will make a statement. [159406]

**Mrs. Roche** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The new target relating to decision times for asylum support applications can be found in the Home Office Business Plan for 2001–02 which was published on 2 April. The target is to reduce the average time taken to decide an application for asylum support by 20 per cent., by March 2002.

### Fraud Letters

**Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his assessment is of whether advance fee fraud letters arriving from overseas *(a)* constitute a serious crime and *(b)* affect the economic well-being of the UK. [159693]

**Mr. Charles Clarke** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* Any form of organised fraud is a serious crime. The offences of conspiracy to defraud and of obtaining property by deception both carry a maximum penalty of 10 years' imprisonment. We hope that most people in the United Kingdom will have the good sense not to pay advance fees in response to unsolicited correspondence and that therefore the overall economic threat will be limited. Anybody who receives such a letter should send it to their local police, for onward transmission to the National Criminal Intelligence Service, who are considering means of tackling the problem.

### Motorcycles

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many motorcycles have been *(a)* stolen and *(b)* recovered in each of the last four years; [159565]

(2) if he will make a statement on recent measures which have been taken to reduce motorcycle theft. [159566]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The National Criminal Intelligence Service has received additional Government funding to run a project aimed at tackling organised motorcycle theft. Crime prevention messages specifically aimed at motorcyclists will be included in the next phase of the national vehicle crime reduction communications campaign, which will take place in the current financial year.

Local authorities now have powers to provide secure parking for motorcycles under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 (as amended). The Vehicles (Crime) Act 2001 provides for statutory regulation of the motor salvage industry, which will help prevent vehicles, including motorcycles, from being stolen to be broken up for spare parts or being "rung" (ie taking on the identities of vehicles which have been written off in accidents).

Separate details of the theft and recovery of motorcycles are not collected centrally.

### Reparation Orders

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reparation orders have been made under the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which required reparation of the type specified in section 67(2)(b) of that Act. [159971]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** A reparation order can require a young offender to make reparation either to the victim, or to the community at large. Section 67 (2) (b) is the provision requiring reparation to the community.

The most recent figures from the Youth Justice Board indicate that between April to December 2000 a total of 3,818 reparation orders were made. Of these 2,738 (almost 72 per cent.) involved reparation to the community at large, 721 (19 per cent.) involved direct reparation to the victim and 355 (9 per cent.) involved reparation both to the community and to the victim.

### Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the operation of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000. [159980]

**Mr. Straw:** Implementation of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) is not yet complete. The interception (Part I Chapter I), covert

surveillance (Part II) and oversight and complaints provisions (Part IV) of the Act were brought into force by the end of October 2000. The intention is to commence the outstanding provisions governing the acquisition of communications data in Part I Chapter II, and those governing access to protected electronic data in Part III of the Act, by the end of 2001.

As with all new legislation, the Government will keep RIPA under review. In particular, the Government have undertaken to review the provisions in Parts I and III of the Act in order properly to assess their effectiveness and their impact on business.

### Child Curfew Orders

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many child curfew orders have been made under the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. [159970]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** No applications have been received from local authorities to establish child curfew schemes under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Following consultation with local authorities and the police we have proposed in the Criminal Justice and Police Bill currently before Parliament to extend the upper age limit to 15 and to allow the police, as well as local authorities, to initiate schemes.

### Proscribed Organisations

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to proscribe additional domestic terrorist organisations under the provisions of the Terrorism Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [159973]

**Mr. Straw:** As I made clear in the House on 13 March, I have no plans to add any organisations to the current list. But it is open to addition or subtraction at any future stage, and I will keep this issue under review.

### Children (Offending)

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the results of the surveys conducted by MORI for the Youth Justice Board on offending by children in 1999, 2000 and 2001. [159968]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** We shall place them in the Library this week.

### Council Compensation Claims

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many local authorities have applied for compensation under the terms of section D of RPA Circular 442; what the total amount claimed to date is; and if he will make a statement. [159981]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** Four local authorities have submitted claims for compensation for the additional costs they incurred. The total amount claimed is £634.80. The most recent claim was received on 20 April.

### Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders have been made under the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998; and how many were made against persons under the age of 18 years. [159972]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** A total of 104 anti-social behaviour orders were issued in England and Wales between 1 April 1999 and 31 May 2000. A breakdown by age for the orders issued in this period is not held centrally. However provisional data collected centrally from 1 June 2000 up to 31 December 2000 show a further 73 anti-social behaviour orders being made of which 31 were for persons aged under 18 years.

### Airwave Communications System

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Airwave communications system. [159975]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The final operational phase of the Airwave pilot, which started on 19 March, is continuing satisfactorily despite some technical problems. The service is now available in the two Divisions of Lancashire which are the subject of the evaluation. An interim review of the pilot began on 30 April and the final evaluation will be completed within five working days of pilot completion on 17 June.

Preparations for the rollout in Greater Manchester and other forces are also progressing well and are currently on schedule.

### Parliamentary Questions

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average cost to his Department has been of answering a written question from an hon. Member asking about the effects since May 1997 of his Department's policies on a particular hon. Member's constituency. [159969]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Compilation of these responses has involved staff in various Home Office Units, the Youth Justice Board and Youth Offending Teams. Each answer has drawn upon information which is already collected by the Home Office, its Agencies or other partners.

The exact time taken and hence the cost to the Department of answering these questions has not been collated as each response has been prepared. However, it is estimated that the average cost to the Home Office of answering them has been less than £100.

### Hilda Murrell

**Mr. Paul Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the results for the latest DNA tests in connection with the murder of Hilda Murrell were; and if he will make a statement. [159985]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Forensic Science Service has completed the latest round of tests in the re-examination of materials from exhibits in the Hilda Murrell murder investigation. The tests have not produced any significant DNA profile which advances the investigation at this stage. However, the results suggest that there is a realistic prospect that the next level of testing may produce a profile. In line with a strategy of sequential testing

agreed by West Mercia Constabulary and the Forensic Science Service, further examinations will continue in a systematic manner.

### National Asylum Support Service

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance NASS has issued to providers of accommodation for people seeking asylum on encouraging partnership working and promoting good community relations. [159774]

**Mrs. Roche:** All property providers who enter into contract with the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) are expected to meet the high standards of performance specified in the contract. They must provide a management system to assist the asylum seekers they are accommodating including help with registration with a general practitioner, getting children into school and access to the one stop services set up by the voluntary sector.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to monitor the numbers of people seeking asylum housed in each local authority area under the NASS scheme; and if these figures will be made publicly available. [159773]

**Mrs. Roche:** Numbers of asylum seekers allocated accommodation by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) are currently monitored within the regions and each cluster area. These figures are available from Immigration Research and Statistics Service.

Currently there are no plans to monitor numbers of asylum seekers in each local authority area.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the *(a)* private companies and *(b)* regional consortia that have entered into contracts with NASS to provide housing for people seeking asylum; how many bed spaces each one has provided; how many of those bed spaces are occupied; and how many of those bed spaces have been inspected by NASS inspectors. [159772]

**Mrs. Roche:** The following have contracts with the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) to provide accommodation for asylum seekers:

| *Private companies* | *Regional consortia* |
|---|---|
| Adelphi Hotels | Scotland |
| Angel Group Ltd. | North East |
| Accommodata Ltd. | Yorkshire and Humberside |
| Capital Accommodation Ltd. | North West (East Region) |
| Clearsprings | West Midlands |
| Roselodge Ltd. | Cardiff CC |
| Safe Haven | East Midlands |
| The Landmark | |
| YMCA Glasgow | |
| Leena Corporation | |

I am unable to provide information on the number of bedspaces provided under individual contracts since this information is commercial in confidence.

As at 30 April, 80 per cent. of accommodation provided by the private sector and 4 per cent. of accommodation provided by the public sector had been inspected either by or on behalf of NASS.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if NASS will publish an annual report. [159771]

**Mrs. Roche:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton North-East (Mr. Crausby) on 15 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 86W.

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are in place for consulting local authorities before people seeking asylum are placed in their areas under the NASS scheme; and under what circumstances authorities would not be consulted. [159789]

**Mrs. Roche:** The identification of suitable cluster areas for the dispersal of asylum seekers and their dependants is based on research conducted centrally by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). Information is obtained from local authorities and other organisations with an interest in asylum. Before entering into a contract with an accommodation provider NASS consults local authorities through the regional consortia. Local authorities receive weekly information of the numbers of asylum seekers dispersed to their area.

### Electronic Custody Systems

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the development and provision of electronic custody systems for the police; when such systems will be available; what is the expected cost of such systems; what has been the total cost of their development to date; and what was the planned date for such systems to be available. [159696]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Work is in progress to develop an electronic custody system. Implementation within all forces is likely to be achieved within two calendar years of a product becoming available. There is currently no planned date for a custody product to be available. Development costs of the application have been at the suppliers own risk. Internal project costs are estimated as being approximately £2 million. Central government is to provide £46 million to implement the custody and an electronic case preparation system once plans have been agreed. The original delivery date for the custody application was August 2000 with roll-out to all forces by December 2002.

### Police IT

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place to ensure that information technology systems and software provided to police forces offer value for money; and if he will make a statement. [159695]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** All information technology systems and software are acquired through procedures to ensure that they offer value for money.

Government and European procurement procedures ensure fair and open competition. Tenders are analysed to ensure that the bids represents value for money, and contracts are negotiated to ensure there is adequate protection provided to the Authority. Attention is paid to the selection of the right supplier and to working closely with the supplier through effective post contract

management. Great care is taken through consultation with stakeholders to ensure that the requirement reflects their needs. Major projects are managed through a recognised project management procedure. This ensures user requirements and the original project brief are monitored and adhered to, so that the result delivers police needs and is value for money.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special advisers worked in his Department from 1997 to date. [160028]

**Mr. Straw:** I have two special advisers. Ed Owen has been in post since May 1997. Norman Warner, now Lord Warner of Brockley, held the second special adviser post from May 1997 until October 1998. His successor is Justin Russell.

### Race Relations Act

**Mr. Hope:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional authorisations he has made under section 19D of the Race Relations Act 1976. [160122]

**Mrs. Roche:** In the light of evidence about the particular risks posed to the effective operation of our immigration controls by some members of certain ethnic groups, I have made an authorisation permitting members of the Immigration Service to discriminate, where necessary, in the examination of passengers belonging to the following ethnic or national groups: Tamils, Kurds, Pontic Greeks, Roma, Somalis, Albanians, Afghans and ethnic Chinese presenting a Malaysian or Japanese passport or any other travel document issued by Malaysia or Japan.

The decision on a passenger's entitlement to enter the United Kingdom will continue to be taken on the merits of the case in accordance with the Immigration Rules. The authorisation simply allows the Immigration Service to prioritise and manage its resources effectively in undertaking examinations necessary in order to reach that decision.

The Race Monitor to be appointed under section 19E of the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended) will report to Parliament via the Secretary of State on the likely effect of authorisations made by Ministers and on how they are operated in practice by officials.

A copy of the additional authorisation has been placed in the Library. Any future additional or amended authorisations will also be placed in the Library.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Wednesday 2 May 2001*

## FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

### Rapid Reaction Force

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 532W, on the rapid reaction force, if a representative of the Danish Government was *(a)* present at and *(b)* participated in the discussion of the Presidency report on European security and defence policy; and how much time the Council spent discussing the report. [158815]

**Mr. Vaz:** Representatives of the Danish Government were present at and participated in discussion of the Nice Presidency report on European defence. Competent bodies of the Council discussed this report at length in the weeks leading up to the Nice European Council.

### Israel

**Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library the agenda for the meeting of the EU Association Committee in May to review the operation of the EU-Israel Association agreement. [158804]

**Mr. Vaz:** A copy of the provisional agenda, agreed by the EU and Israel, was deposited in the Library on 26 April.

**Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the EU Association Committee will consider at its meeting in May to stop the import into the EU under preferences of goods labelled "made in Israel" which originate in Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. [158807]

**Mr. Vaz:** The EU-Israel Association committee will discuss goods from settlements under the agenda item entitled "Rules of Origin". We expect the EU to raise the post-verification requests for certificates of origin and to remind the Israelis that they have until June 2001 to respond.

In consultation with the European Commission, the UK and other members states are carrying out a post-verification exercise in relation to a number of goods exported to the EU and described as Israeli. These are goods which benefit from preferential access to the EU under the origin protocol in the EU-Israel Association agreement.

The UK continues to support the Commission's efforts to establish whether any infringement of the EU-Israel Association agreement has taken place.

**Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will represent the British Government at the meeting in May of the EU Association committee reviewing the EU-Israel Association agreement. [158805]

**Mr. Vaz:** The EU-Israel Association agreement states that "the Association Committee shall meet at official level". The UK will be represented by an official from the UK permanent representation to the EU.

### Iraq

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received concerning industrial activities undertaken at the Al Daura plant, near Baghdad. [159729]

**Mr. Wilson:** The Iraqi acting Minister for Foreign Affairs wrote to the UN Secretary-General on 28 March requesting that funds from the UN oil-for-food programme be used for the reactivation of the Al Daura facility for the production of foot and mouth vaccine.

In the continuing absence of UN monitors, the United Kingdom has opposed this request for reactivation of a plant known to have been used for biological weapons production in the past.

### Gibraltar

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* the Government of Spain regarding the handling of internationally dialled telephone calls routed through Spain destined for Gibraltar. [156134]

**Mr. Vaz:** This matter was raised with the Spanish Government on 20 March, and with the Commission on 30 March.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has received regarding using the Gibraltar international direct dialling code prefix 350. [156131]

**Mr. Vaz:** The Government of Gibraltar have brought to our attention various issues related to the use of Gibraltar's international direct dialling code.

As my hon. Friend the Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce made clear in her answer of 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 305W, we remain deeply concerned about the unsatisfactory situation. We will continue to pursue the issue as a matter of urgency.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the United Kingdom Government's relations with Spain regarding the freedom of movement of trade and services in relation to Gibraltar. [156132]

**Mr. Vaz:** When Gibraltar became part of the European Community upon the United Kingdom's accession in 1973, Gibraltar did not join the Customs Union. This is recognised by all member states. Subsequent EU legislation concerning the free movement of goods has not therefore been applied in relation to Gibraltar. EU legislation concerning the free movement of services has been applied.

### Clemency Pleas

**Mrs. Humble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if it is Her Majesty's Government's policy to support a plea for clemency from a British national imprisoned overseas. [160352]

**Mr. Wilson:** Our objective is to support pleas for clemency in deserving cases, while respecting the sovereign right of foreign Governments to sentence prisoners according to their own laws. Following an internal review, we have decided to widen our existing criteria for supporting clemency pleas. We will now consider supporting clemency pleas from British nationals imprisoned overseas in the following cases:

in compelling compassionate circumstances, such as where a prisoner is chronically ill or dying (particularly when prison conditions overseas are poor) or when a close family member is chronically ill or dying; where continued incarceration is likely to endanger life or is likely to reduce life expectancy significantly;

in cases of minors imprisoned overseas;

as a last resort, in cases where we have prima facie evidence of a denial or miscarriage of justice, where we have made representations, but where those representations have failed to secure a remedy. In these cases, our reasons for supporting a plea would not normally be mentioned explicitly in the plea itself.

We will also take the prisoner's family circumstances into account when considering whether to support a plea for clemency. We will examine all pleas on a case-by-case basis.

Our previous policy was to support clemency pleas in compelling compassionate circumstances, such as where a prisoner was terminally ill, or where the death of a spouse would leave young children with no one to care for them. The new policy demonstrates our commitment to protecting the human rights of British nationals.

### Humanitarian Crises

**Mr. David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made in Her Majesty's Government's consultations with international partners on UK proposals for international action in response to humanitarian crises. [160353]

**Mr. Battle:** We firmly believe that we have a shared responsibility to respond when confronted with massive violations of international humanitarian law and crimes against humanity. The UK has played a leading role in this continuously evolving debate. We have spent the past year trying to build the broadest possible consensus around a set of ideas on the conditions and circumstances that make international action appropriate. We believe such a consensus could strengthen the Security Council's ability to respond effectively and promptly to humanitarian crises. Our ideas have been framed as policy guidelines to help the international community decide when it is right to act.

The key elements of our ideas are:

that any intervention is by definition a failure of prevention. Force should always be the last resort;

that the immediate responsibility for halting violence rests with the state in which it occurs;

but when faced with an immediate humanitarian catastrophe and a Government who have demonstrated themselves unwilling or unable to halt or prevent it, the international community should take action;

any use of force in this context must be collective, proportionate, likely to achieve its objective, and carried out in accordance with international law.

Our consultations will continue, but progress has proved difficult. Many countries have reservations about the concepts involved, fearing that their endorsement would undermine the principle of state sovereignty.

Copies of our set of ideas have been placed in the Libraries of the House of Commons and House of Lords.

### MV Etireno

**Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures were taken by his Department during the recent hunt for the MV Etireno; and what steps his Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* intends to take, to combat the trade in child slavery. [159859]

**Mr. Wilson:** The UK was the first to respond to the Benin authorities' request for help to search for the Etireno. HMS Glasgow was in the area and we offered her services. This offer was declined when it became clear that the Etireno had returned to Benin.

The UK is firmly committed to eradicating slavery and bonded labour worldwide. We played a leading role in drafting and securing agreement to the International Labour Convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour. We are working with international and non-governmental organisations and industry to address the problem of child slavery, and are looking at what we can do to increase these efforts.

I am meeting industry representatives, and also Ministers from the Government of Cote d'Ivoire, on 4 May.

## ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

### Recycled Waste

**Mr. Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the deliveries of *(a)* incinerator ash, *(b)* mixed waste containing organics and *(c)* compost to (i) Burnside Farm at Heddon-on-the-Wall and (ii) other farms by (1) Newcastle Council's Waste Department, (2) City Works and (3) Associated Waste Services from (A) domestic, (B) commercial and (C) institutional premises; and what tests have been carried out on animal feed for dioxin, furan and PCB content. [155313]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Section 34 of the Environment Protection Act 1990 imposes a duty of care on waste producers and others who have control of waste. The parties to the transfer of waste are required to keep records but information on waste

transfers is not held centrally. Duty of care records can, of course, be sought locally through the Environment Agency's serving a notice on the parties concerned.

The Environment Agency advises that it has not carried out tests on animal feed and holds no information on any such tests carried out by others. In my reply of 30 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 818W, I have separately provided the hon. Member with a list of the sites which have received ash from the Byker Reclamation Plant—including farms.

### Local Government Services (Liverpool)

**Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue has been made available for local government services in Liverpool since 1997. [157443]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The capital and revenue made available for local government services in Liverpool since 1997—in total and from central Government sources—are as follows.

*£ million*

| | *1997–98*[1] | *1998–99*[1] | *1999–2000*[1] | *2000–01*[2] | *2001–02*[3] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *General Fund revenue account* | | | | | |
| Total revenue expenditure[4] | 484 | 522 | 563 | 575 | 632 |
| *Central Government support* | | | | | |
| General grants | | | | | |
| Revenue support grant | 263 | 285 | 297 | 298 | 312 |
| National non-domestic rates | 103 | 107 | 114 | 128 | 124 |
| Ring fenced grants[5] | 18 | 20 | 20 | 29 | 71 |
| Total central Government support[5] | 384 | 412 | 431 | 455 | 507 |
| *Housing revenue account (HRA)* | | | | | |
| Total revenue expenditure[4] | 182 | 182 | 171 | 160 | 183 |
| *Central Government support* | | | | | |
| HRA subsidy[6] | 101 | 94 | 91 | 85 | 98 |
| *Capital account* | | | | | |
| Total capital expenditure[4] | 57 | 73 | 76 | 146 | [7]— |
| *Central Government support* | | | | | |
| Capital grants[7] | 19 | 24 | 24 | 46 | [7]— |
| Credit approvals | 18 | 28 | 31 | 39 | [7]— |

[1] Outturn
[2] Estimated outturn
[3] Proposed
[4] Total expenditure is from all sources including central Government support and local sources such as Council Tax.
[5] Revenue account expenditure and central Government support figures are net of grants/loans outside aggregate exchequer finance (AEF) which flow through local authorities (eg rent allowances and rebates and mandatory student awards.) The revenue expenditure totals exclude capital expenditure financed from the revenue account (CERA).
[6] From 2001–02 housing subsidy includes the major repairs allowance (MRA) (£16 million in 2001–02). This is paid through the HRA but is intended to finance capital expenditure. Capital expenditure financed from the HRA (including from the MRA) has been excluded from total housing revenue expenditure.
[7] Including capital grants from non-departmental public bodies and the national lottery.
[8] Not yet available from a comparable source (i.e. local authority)

### Radioactive Waste

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent representations his Department has received in respect of the safety standards at, and hazards posed by, the high activity radioactive waste storage tanks at Sellafield. [156397]

**Mr. Meacher:** The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has received two written representations on this issue within the past six months. In addition, the Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee presented a Report, published in November 2000, on the Radioactive Waste Implications of Reprocessing. In their report, the Committee noted that the reduction of HAL stocks to buffer levels was extremely important and that HSE had set a target date of 2015 for this. The Committee recommended that progress towards this objective should be kept under close review and I have pressed for this time scale to be brought forward.

### Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the locations of each development on areas of outstanding natural beauty that he has given permission for since 1 May 1997. [158708]

**Mr. Raynsford** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The information is as follows:

*Site Location*

Gun Hill Industrial Estate, Blackbrook Hill, Langham, Essex

Folly Lane, Buckland St. Mary, Chard, Somerset

Former RAF buildings, RAF Little Rissington, Cheltenham, Gloscestershire

Binderton House, Binderton, West Den, Chichester, West Sussex

Spread Eagle Hotel, South Street, Midhurst, West Sussex
Wrens Warren, Hartfield Lane, East Sussex
Oakley Court, Nuffield, Oxfordshire.

### Sites of Special Scientific Interest

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the locations of each development on sites of special scientific interest that he has given permission for since 1 May 1997. [158707]

**Mr. Raynsford** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The information is as follows:

*Site Location*

Bank Farm, Wyre, Lancashire.

### A3 (Hindhead Improvement)

**Mrs. Virginia Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the timetable for completing A3 Hindhead improvement; what priority his Department is according to the project; and what measures remain to be taken prior to commencement of the scheme. [158926]

**Mr. Hill:** I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the right hon. Member.

*Letter from Tim Matthews to Mrs. Virginia Bottomley, dated 2 May 2001:*

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, Keith Hill, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the A3 Hindhead Improvement.

The scheme was added to the Government's Targeted Programme of Improvements last March.

Our first task is to appoint agents to carry out the detailed design of the scheme. After that we will have to complete the statutory procedures including an environmental assessment, a possible public inquiry and land acquisition.

Subject to completing the design process and obtaining the necessary statutory approvals, we expect to begin construction within seven years.

### Railways

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will establish a common standard of training through the Rail Industry Training Board for all personnel in the train operating companies, Railtrack and companies providing personnel with access to the railway; and if he will ensure that an independent audit of such training is carried out on a regular basis. [158825]

**Mr. Hill:** Late last year a Joint SRA/DfEE Working Group was established to look at the current and future skills needs of the rail industry. The Joint Working Group recently published an 18-Point Action Plan which provides a strategic approach to recruitment, training, assessment and competence of key staff. The Plan is being taken forward and monitored by the high level Rail Industry Group, chaired by Sir Alastair Morton, which had also identified the need for action and had set up its own cross-industry group to tackle the issues. Initial outcomes of the various initiatives are expected to be seen in the autumn.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library a copy of the Strategic Rail Authority's template Franchise Agreement. [158833]

**Mr. Hill:** I am arranging to place in the Library a copy of the Strategic Rail Authority's latest template franchise agreement together with a list of amendments yet to be incorporated. The template is subject to development as franchise replacement progresses. When actual franchise agreements are entered into, the Strategic Rail Authority is required by statute to make them available on its public register.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will instruct the Strategic Rail Authority to extend the Service Quality Incentive Regime beyond those services provided by the Passenger Transport Authorities to all services provided by franchisees. [158827]

**Mr. Hill:** No. The detailed provisions of franchise agreements are for the Strategic Rail Authority to decide. I understand that the Authority does not consider that SQUIRE, which involves direct checking of inputs by PTE inspectors, is the most suitable or efficient way to control standards. It prefers to measure service quality through the National Passenger Survey, Customer Satisfaction Surveys and Mystery Traveller Surveys which reflect passengers' opinions. Bidders for replacement franchises are being asked to demonstrate how they will develop and deliver a step-change in customer service.

**Mrs. Dunwoody:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to consult the railway industry on the proposed EU directive on railway safety; which Departments are involved in discussions with the Commission; and how many British representatives are on the working party to consider railway safety. [158824]

**Mr. Hill:** We will consult widely on the proposed EU directive on railway safety regulation once it is published by the Commission. We currently expect publication to be at the end of this year, as part of a broader package of proposed measures taking forward completion of the single market in the railway sector. My Department will co-ordinate the UK Government's input to any discussions convened on this directive, with support from all relevant bodies.

### A180

**Shona McIsaac:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on replacing the concrete road surface on the A180 with low-noise surfacing. [159355]

**Mr. Hill:** My hon. Friend's question relates to an operational matter on the A180 Trunk Road. I have accordingly asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Tim Matthews to Shona McIsaac, dated 2 May 2001:*

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question on resurfacing of the concrete section of the A180 with low noise surfacing.

On 29 December 2000 the Agency wrote to all English local highway authorities, and other interested organisations, seeking their views on its proposed criteria for prioritising the resurfacing of concrete trunk roads. We also published the consultation letter and the proposed criteria on our website inviting comments. The closing date for receiving comments was 23 March 2001 and we are currently giving careful consideration to all the responses that we have received.

It is anticipated that the final set of criteria will be announced this summer and will then be applied to determine the priority of concrete trunk roads, including the A180, for resurfacing.

The Agency will write to you as soon as the final set of criteria have been finalised.

## A12

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what was the accident rate on the A12 Brentwood—Ipswich in the last 12 months; and what was the average accident rate on motorways carrying a similar volume of traffic in the same period. [159008]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The table shows the number of injury accidents per month on the A12 between its junctions with the M25 and the A14 in 1999, for the last 12 months for which national statistics are available. Monthly traffic flow data are not readily available for this stretch of road and therefore it is not possible to present accident rates for comparison with other roads.

| *Month* | *Number* |
|---|---|
| January | 20 |
| February | 8 |
| March | 22 |
| April | 15 |
| May | 21 |
| June | 17 |
| July | 12 |
| August | 19 |
| September | 22 |
| October | 20 |
| November | 22 |
| December | 28 |

## Airport Provision

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his policy is towards the predict and provide approach to airport provision in the south-east of England. [159250]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** Our policy is one of sustainable development, applying the principles set out in the New Deal for Transport White Paper (Cm 3950) to airports in all parts of the United Kingdom. We are currently studying a wide range of options for the future development of airports in the south-east of England. When we announced this study, we said that it would assess the economic, environmental and social impacts of the options, and that we would balance all these before coming to a view about whether additional capacity should be provided, either at a particular site or at all. This remains our position.

## Commercial Property Market

**Mr. Cotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to address the issues of choice, flexibility and provision of information in the commercial property market; [159934]

(2) what plans he has to introduce greater flexibility into the commercial property market; [159929]

(3) what plans he has to review the 1995 code of practice for commercial property leases. [159930]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) on 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 5–6W.

## Crash Barriers

**Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 23 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 391W, if he will identify the type of crash barrier in use at the time for each of the fatalities that were involved in accidents involving vehicles crossing over the central reservation on *(a)* motorways and *(b)* trunk roads in each year since 1992–93. [160114]

**Mr. Hill:** The information requested is not held centrally.

## Animal Welfare

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the independent research to find alternatives to animal products used in traditional medicine, with special reference to bile from Asiatic black bears. [160073]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** My Department has commissioned research from Dr. Henry Lee, Head of Chinese Medicine Development at Middlesex University, to identify plant substitutes for four key animal species used in traditional medicine—Asiatic black bears, tigers, and white and black rhinos. The research, which is expected to report in early 2004, will identify the active chemical components of these animals, determine equivalent chemical substances from plant sources, and develop an appropriate strategy for introducing and encouraging the use of those plant alternatives. The total cost of this research is £135,472, towards which my Department is contributing £67,500. The remainder is being met by the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW).

## Local Government Finance

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the average Band D council tax was in the north-west for each of the years from 1997 to date. [160078]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Average Band D council tax levels in the north-west between 1997–98 and 2001–02 are given in the table:

£

| | *Average council tax for a Band D dwelling in the north-west* |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 798 |
| 1998–99 | 856 |
| 1999–2000 | 901 |
| 2000–01 | 943 |
| 2001–02 | 991 |

### Malewick Lane Waste Transfer Station

**Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he intends to publish the inspector's report on the Malewick Lane Waste Transfer Station, Sompting, West Sussex, planning application before 7 June. [160106]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions will publish the inspector's report when he determines the planning application for a waste management centre at Halewick Lane, Sompting, West Sussex. This decision will be issued as soon as possible.

### Incinerators

**Mr. St.Aubyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when his Department intends to require incinerator plant permit holders *(a)* under the IPC regime and *(b)* under the IPPC regime to adopt the environmental standards being proposed by the EU; [160111]

(2) what guidance his Department will issue to *(a)* planning authorities and *(b)* the Environment Agency on the latest EU proposals for environmental regulation of incinerator plants in respect of current projects; [160108]

(3) what his Department's policy is relating to the latest proposals for environmental regulation of incinerator plants. [160109]

**Mr. Hill:** The UK Government are committed to transposing the EU Waste Incineration Directive (WID) and the provisions therein, into UK law by 28 December 2002.

The new WID will apply to all new incinerators within its scope by 28 December 2002, and to existing plant by 28 December 2005. Incinerators are currently regulated under the Integrated Pollution Control or Local Authority Pollution Control systems.

This directive updates the two Municipal Waste Incineration Directives of 1989. The Environment Agency is of the opinion that all new Municipal Solid Waste Incinerator (MSWI) projects can already meet the requirements of the new Directive without excessive cost and therefore will apply these standards as a "minimum" requirement. The Agency intends to review the performance of existing plant before the Directive applies.

In addition, the Agency has already been setting limits for oxides of nitrogen and for dioxins for MSWIs. Most existing MSWIs already achieve dioxin release concentrations of 0.1 ng/m$^3$ and collectively the sector has shown almost a 30 fold fall with a share of UK emissions down from over 50 per cent. to under 5 per cent. since 1995.

In transposing the WID into UK law the Government will consider whether further guidance for planning authorities and the Environment Agency is necessary. Planning guidance on incineration is contained within PPG 10 "Planning and Waste Management", which as with all planning guidance documents is periodically reviewed.

### Heathrow

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what conditions and guarantees were imposed upon *(a)* BAA and *(b)* Heathrow Airport by his Department after granting permission for Terminal 4 at Heathrow Airport. [159824]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The information provided has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what factors were taken into account when final descent paths for aircraft approaching Heathrow were altered in 1995; [159826]

(2) what plans he has to alter the final descent paths for aircraft approaching Heathrow. [159827]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The final approach tracks followed by aircraft approaching Heathrow to land have to be aligned with the runways in order to comply with long established internationally agreed standards. They have not changed and cannot be changed unilaterally.

The paths that aircraft follow before aligning with the runway are not fixed, in order to allow for safe tactical integration of up to four streams of traffic, but the area of airspace used for this purpose has been established in its present form for about 30 years. An "early morning landings trial" commenced in September 1995, which required aircraft during westerly operations at night (before 6.00am) to join the 3° glideslope of the instrument landing system (ILS) at or above 3,000 ft (instead of 2,500 ft) and to join the final approach track at not less than 10 nautical miles (18½ km) from touchdown. The trial was evaluated and a summary of the findings was published in the November 1998 consultation paper on night restrictions at Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports (copies of which were placed in the Libraries of the House). It was found that the trial procedure produced a reduction in noise exposure in the area between 16½ km and 31½ km from touchdown. Some noise increases were caused in parts of Clapham, Deptford, Lewisham and Blackheath because more aircraft joined the ILS final approach track further from touchdown. A redistribution of traffic over built-up areas can result in gains and losses but may be justified, as in this case, where the gains substantially outweigh the losses. The study also found a small increase in the achievement of the noise reducing continuous descent approach (CDA) procedure even though the CDA instructions were not changed for the trial.

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measurements his Department takes of the impact of aircraft noise on residents in south-east England during the *(a)* day and *(b)* night. [159825]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** My Department publishes annual daytime noise contours for Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports. These contours cover the 16 hour day from 0700 to 2300 BST, averaged for the relatively busy period 16 June to 15 September. The contours for 2000 are about to be published by the CAA on the Department's behalf; and the explanatory booklets, including small-scale versions of the contours, will be placed on the DETR website shortly. All take-offs are monitored for compliance with the departure noise limits. The new daytime and night-time limits announced by my hon. Friend on 18 December 2000, *Official Report*, columns 11–12W, have come into effect. Readings from these and other noise monitors (covering both arrivals and departures), are used, along with radar data on the dispersion of aircraft tracks, to validate the model used to generate the contours. Other measurements are taken, and contours produced from time to time, for various studies on behalf of the Department and of the airports.

We do not routinely publish contours for aircraft noise at night at these airports, as research has suggested that, because of the uneven and distinct patterns of operation, these would not be sufficiently well correlated with sleep disturbance and annoyance. However, operations at night are subject to the restrictions, including movement limits and noise quotas made, after consultation, by Notice under s.78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982; and are monitored and reported by the airports accordingly.

Elsewhere in the South East, noise measurement and contouring are the responsibility of the individual airports. However, noise measurements collated from other airports will help inform the current South East and East Regional Airports Study (SERAS).

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Decommissioning

**Rev. Martin Smyth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent reports he has had from General de Chastelain on progress on arms decommissioning. [159633]

**Mr. Ingram:** On 22 March this year, the Independent Commission on Decommissioning issued a report stating that they believe progress on actual decommissioning can be made.

I look forward to early and positive reports from the Decommissioning Commission that progress is being made.

### Royal Ulster Constabulary

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many completed applications for the most recent Royal Ulster Constabulary recruiting campaign were received by 30 March; and how many were received from (i) Northern Ireland, (ii) the Republic of Ireland, (iii) Great Britain and (iv) outside the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. [158822]

**Dr. Reid:** I am advised that 7,843 completed applications have been received in response to the on-going Police Service of Northern Ireland recruitment competition. Analysis, in terms of applications received from addresses in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, Great Britain or elsewhere is as follows:

| | *Number* |
|---|---|
| Northern Ireland | 7,208 |
| Republic of Ireland | 332 |
| Great Britain | 262 |
| Elsewhere | 41 |

**Mr. John D. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the completed applications for the Royal Ulster Constabulary received by 30 March were from *(a)* Northern Ireland Protestants, *(b)* Northern Ireland Roman Catholics and *(c)* persons of no religion and from other religious backgrounds with addresses in Northern Ireland. [158823]

**Dr. Reid:** Equal opportunities analysis of the applications has yet to be undertaken.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS

### Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

**Mr. Peter Bottomley:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), representing the House of Commons Commission, (1) when the Commission was advised of assessments by *(a)* the House personnel staff and *(b)* formal staff inspections of the overworking in the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards; [159203]

(2) what the policy of the Commission is on acting on assessments of overload in support staff to departments of the House and in the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards; [159204]

(3) if he will estimate the under-resourcing of staff assisting the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards; when the Commission was informed of the problem; what information it has on it; and if he will make a statement on the publication of this information. [159202]

**Mr. Kirkwood:** Officials carried out a preliminary review of the staffing of the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards in spring 2000, because of concerns which had arisen over the office's work load. The outcome of this work was reported to the House of Commons Commission on 3 July 2000, and temporary additional secretarial support was provided, pending a more thorough review of work load to be carried out by the staff inspector from the internal review service (IRS).

The findings of the IRS review were reported to the Commission late in 2000. The Commission referred the matter to the Finance and Services Committee whose

advice was considered and agreed to in April 2001. The Committee's advice was that the case for permanent additional staffing had not been clearly established, and that the work load should be monitored over the early months of a new Parliament to ascertain what the long-term needs were. The temporary additional secretarial support would remain in place for the time being.

Commission meetings are deliberative and it is not the practice to publish papers relating to them.

## DEFENCE

### Type 45 Destroyer

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 20 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 105W, on type 45 destroyers, if a contract has been placed with Vosper Thornycroft; and if he will make a further statement. [157749]

**Mr. Hoon** *[holding answer 24 April 2001]:* No shipbuilding sub-contracts for the type 45 destroyer have yet been let by the prime contractor, BAE Systems Electronics. Under the procurement strategy I announced to the House in July last year for the type 45 programme, the prime contractor is working to a target of September 2001 for a commitment to Vosper Thornycroft.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford of 24 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 232–33W, what lessons he has drawn from such ships. [159777]

**Mr. Hoon:** Our close co-operation with allies such as the United States in the development and operation of warships continues, particularly through visits and naval officer exchange postings. This type of co-operation will ensure that we continue to share best practice with our allies to mutual benefit.

There has been no significant direct read across between the Arleigh Burke class, which includes the USS Winston Churchill, and our more recent type 45 programme. Although similar in size to the Arleigh Burke class, the type 45 anti-air warfare destroyer, equipped with the principal anti-air missile system, offers, we believe, significant acquisition and through-life cost benefits over earlier generations of destroyers.

### Army Training Estate

**Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the outcome of the Army training estate site utility review. [160354]

**Dr. Moonie:** As I said in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Wigan (Mr. Turner) on 23 May 2000, *Official Report*, column 459W, the Ministry of Defence has been conducting a site utility review (SUR) of the Army training estate to identify training areas, camps and ranges which are no longer required in order that they can be closed or sold, thereby saving maintenance costs and where possible generally revenue.

The SUR has now been completed, and 21 sites have been identified for disposal. They are as follows:

| *Site for disposal* | *Location* |
|---|---|
| Nesscliffe—Brooklea | West Midlands |
| Nesscliffe—Tanglewood | West Midlands |
| Caerwent—surrounds | Wales |
| Kinmel Park (part of)[1] | Wales |
| Hamsterley Forest | North East |
| Langdale Forest | North East |
| Ripon South Parks | North East |
| Stang Forest | North East |
| Fridaywood Farm Buildings | East |
| Stonebridge Camp | East |
| Flat 1 & 2, Grooms Cottage, Hawley | Home Counties |
| Rand Plantation, Ash | Home Counties |
| Land at Foxhills, Ash | Home Counties |
| Land at Junction 4a, M3 | Home Counties |
| Binhill Range | Scotland |
| Marne Training Area | North East |
| Rowlston Range | North East |
| Halton Training Camp[1] | North West |
| Pilning Range | South West |
| Wyke Regis Tented Camp Area[2] | South West |
| Quorn Terrace/Entrance Longmoor Camp | Home counties |

[1] Part of
[2] Tented camp area only

The Ministry of Defence expects to receive between £10 million and £18 million for the sale of the sites listed. A proportion of this, some £6.8 million, will be used to replace training facilities currently at Rowlston range, Halton training camp and Longmoor camp.

### Reserve Forces (Pensions)

**Mr. Cawsey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when regulations will be made governing the entitlement of members of the reserve forces to attributable pensions benefits. [160355]

**Dr. Moonie:** My hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces announced on 18 May 2000, *Official Report*, columns 200–01W, that the Department had been reviewing its policy on attributable benefits for members of the reserve forces, in particular with regard to those who served in the Gulf conflict. Under the existing regulations, awards are made to individuals who were medically discharged when demobilised from active service. As a result of the review, it was agreed that the eligibility would be extended to reservists who were medically discharged from the reserve forces at other times.

I am therefore pleased to announce that the new regulations, entitled the "Reserve Forces (Attributable Benefits Etc) Regulations 2001", have now been made and came into force on 30 April 2001. We will make payments under these regulations as soon as practicable after this date.

### Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency

**Mr. Michael J. Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency for 2001–02. [160356]

**Mr. Spellar:** The role of the Defence Geographic and Imagery Intelligence Agency is to provide imagery intelligence and geographic support to defence policy, operations and training; to meet customer requirements for imagery intelligence and geographic support in accordance with defence priorities; to maintain and develop agency capabilities and readiness in line with future defence requirements; and to become progressively more efficient, while improving the quality and delivery of our products and services. The key targets for the agency for the 12 months from April 2001 are:

*Key Target 1:*

To satisfy operational requirements for imagery intelligence and geographic support within timescales and to standards agreed between the agency and its customers.

(a) For imagery intelligence, by providing at least 95 per cent. of requirements overall, while delivering not less than 98 per cent. of priority 1 tasks.

(b) For geographic support, by providing 100 per cent. of geographic products and services essential to support current and potential operations, both from the agency's UK-based capabilities and its deployable units.

*Key Target 2:*

To achieve the required levels of operational readiness in line with defence planning assumptions while continuing to meet those deployable element outputs required under key target 1.

To maintain agreed states of readiness as set by PJHQ for all contingency forces (JRRF)

*Key Target 3:*

To satisfy strategic and contingency requirements for imagery intelligence and geographic support within time scales and to standards agreed between the agency and its customers.

(a) For imagery intelligence, by providing at least 80 per cent. of requirements overall, while delivering not less than 92 per cent. of priority 1 tasks.

(b) For geographic support, completing at least 90 per cent. of a customer endorsed programme of work for geographic products and services.

*Key Target 4:*

To demonstrate a 1 per cent. improvement in the coverage of geographic information holdings in comparison with the baseline established in 1999 and to maintain their quality for defence use.

Maintain the MOD map library collection at the agreed level of readiness and achieve a 1 per cent. improvement in coverage of geographic information holdings.

*Key Target 5:*

To achieve a 2.5 per cent. improvement in efficiency.

Achieve departmental efficiency targets by identifying efficiency measures which, taken together across the agency, deliver the required savings target (2.5 per cent.—cash based).

## Chilean Military

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list all visits to the UK since October 1998 by Chilean military officers. [158990]

**Mr. Hoon** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* We do not hold records of visits which Chilean military officers may have made to the UK for private purposes. Since October 1998, there have been four official visits to the UK by Chilean military officers which included contact with the UK Government. These are:

A Chilean Navy ship visited the UK and made a port call in London in October 1998;

A Chilean delegation attended Farnborough international air show in July 2000;

A Chilean delegation also visited RAF Cranwell on 31 October 2000;

A senior Chilean Naval Officer visited the UK for discussions with Ministry of Defence officials this month.

In addition, since October 1998 four Chilean officers have been present in the UK for various lengths of time attending military training courses.

## Nuclear Defence Policy

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn) of 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 97W, on UK nuclear defence policy, if he will place in the Library the material on which he based his reply on the compatibility between the non-proliferation treaty and the 1958 agreement. [159756]

**Mr. Hoon:** Copies of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) and the UK/US mutual defence agreement (MDA), with its subsequent amendments, are already held in the Library of the House.

Article I of the NPT states that

"each nuclear-weapon State Party to the Treaty undertakes not to transfer to any recipient whatsoever nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices or control over such weapons or explosive devices directly, or indirectly, and not in any way to assist, encourage or induce, any non-nuclear weapon State to manufacture or otherwise acquire nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices, or control over such weapons or explosive devices".

The terms and conditions of the 1958 UK/US MDA, and subsequent amendments, allow for the transfer of special nuclear materials between the UK and US. These movements are carried out in accordance with stringent safety procedures and, since they do not involve nuclear weapons or devices, they do not contravene the NPT.

## Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date veterinary surgeons from the RAVC were first made available for duties related to foot and mouth disease; and how many Army veterinary surgeons were made available *(a)* on that date and *(b)* subsequently. [159818]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The first deployment of armed forces personnel in support of MAFF was of two Royal Army Veterinary Corps vets and a small number of logistics advisers on 16 March. The number of vets was subsequently increased to four. The current number deployed is three.

## MV Etireno

**Mr. Welsh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what resources from his Department were put at the disposal of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office during the recent hunt for the MV Etireno. [159860]

**Mr. Spellar:** The Benin Government issued a request for assistance in searching for the MV Etireno on 16 April. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office asked the Ministry of Defence what assets were available. We were able to offer the services of HMS Glasgow, a type 42 destroyer, and RFA Black Rover, a small ship tanker.

This response was provided on the same day. The vessels were in the area as part of their patrol programme. Before they could reach the search area, the MV Etireno docked in Cotonou in the early hours of 17 April. We were subsequently informed by the Benin authorities that there was no further requirement for HMS Glasgow and RFA Black Rover.

## HEALTH

### Quality Protects

**Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the outcome is of the evaluation of the quality protects management action plans submitted to his Department by local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [160257]

**Mr. Hutton:** All local authorities with social services responsibilities submitted their "Quality Protects" management action plans (MAPs) to the Department of Health by the end of January. The Social Services Inspectorate has now completed its evaluation of the MAPs and I have considered their findings. The MAPs from all 150 local councils have reached an acceptable standard. I have today written to the chief executives of the authorities to confirm that, subject to normal grant procedures, they will receive payment of their allocation of the children's services grant for 2001–02.

The evidence nationally shows that "Quality Protects" is beginning to make a real difference to children's lives. Children who are looked after are experiencing fewer placement moves; more of them are finding new permanent families through adoption; and fewer are leaving care prematurely when they reach 16. We shall be publishing a national overview report on the evaluation of MAPs in the summer.

### Porton Down

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 6 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 188–89W, on Porton Down, if he will request officials in his Department to conduct an evaluation of the 1993 report by the US Institute of Medicine entitled, "Veterans at Risk - the Health Effects of Mustard Gas and Lewisite". [157402]

**Yvette Cooper:** I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 6 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 188–89W. As I made clear, the purpose of the Department's message was only to make general practitioners aware of the Ministry of Defence's medical assessment programme. The Department has no plans to review in detail the health effects of the chemicals that may have been used at Porton Down or international reports on such chemicals as this is a matter for the MOD.

### Ministerial Visits

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many visits abroad were made by his Department's Ministers on departmental business *(a)* in the three years up to 30 April 1997 and *(b)* in the 12 months up to 30 April 1997. [157616]

**Ms Stuart:** The information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Non-departmental Public Bodies

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total gross running costs were to his Department of the NDPBs accountable through his Department in the financial year 1996–97. [157615]

**Ms Stuart:** The table is extracted from data in "Public Bodies 1997" and shows a total departmental contribution of £118.6 million to the gross expenditure of Department's executive non-departmental public bodies in the financial year 1996–97.

*NDPBs—gross expenditure funded by Government, 1996–97*

| | *£ million* |
|---|---|
| Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work | 37.7 |
| English National Board for Nursing, Midwifery and Health Visiting | 6.6 |
| Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority | 1.8 |
| Medical Practices Committee | 0.5 |
| National Biological Standards Board | 10.4 |
| National Radiological Protection Board | 6.2 |
| Public Health Laboratory Service Board | 55.4 |
| Total | 118.6 |

### Running Costs

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total gross running cost to his Department was in the 12 months ending 30 April 1997 of *(a)* stationery and *(b)* printing and publishing. [157623]

**Ms Stuart:** During the financial year 1996–97 the Department spent £3,175,246 on printing and publishing and £1,589,895 on stationery.

### Sefton Health Authority

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people aged over 60 years have had eye tests in each year since 1995–96 in Sefton health authority. [158529]

**Mr. Denham:** From information obtained on the age of patients from an annual, national sample survey of opticians' work load, we estimate that the following numbers of sight tests were carried out among the 70,500 people, aged 60 and over, whom we estimate are resident in Sefton.

| *Year* | *Number of sight tests* |
|---|---|
| 1995–96 | 26,200 |
| 1996–97 | 27,000 |
| 1997–98 | 29,700 |
| 1998–99 | 28,100 |
| 1999–2000 | 32,500 |

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many individuals within the Sefton Health Authority have had *(a)* hip replacements, *(b)* knee replacements, *(c)* hernia operations and *(d)* cataract

operations each year since 1996–97; what the age profile was of the people undergoing these operations; and what the average cost of these operations is in the private sector. [158515]

**Mr. Denham:** Consultant episodes by operation and age for the period 1996–97 to 1999–2000, the latest data available, are shown in the table. Data on private sector costs are not available.

*Finished consultant episodes by operation and age where the patient was resident in Sefton health authority NHS hospitals, England 1996–97 to 1999–2000*

| | Age | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Year/operation* | *0–4* | *10–14* | *15–44* | *45–64* | *65–74* | *75–84* | *85 and over* | *Total* |
| *1996–97* | | | | | | | | |
| Hip replacement | 0 | 0 | — | 82 | 123 | 127 | 64 | 400 |
| Knee replacement | 0 | 0 | — | 40 | 64 | 51 | 6 | 161 |
| Hernia | 36 | 27 | 7 | 143 | 89 | 52 | 14 | 437 |
| Cataract | 2 | 3 | 2 | 112 | 277 | 477 | 224 | 1124 |
| *1997–98* | | | | | | | | |
| Hip replacement | 0 | 0 | — | 85 | 131 | 136 | 79 | 440 |
| Knee replacement | 0 | 0 | — | 29 | 66 | 45 | 9 | 149 |
| Hernia | 39 | 20 | 9 | 145 | 108 | 54 | 8 | 465 |
| Cataract | 4 | 0 | — | 109 | 251 | 479 | 224 | 1074 |
| *1998–99* | | | | | | | | |
| Hip replacement | 0 | 0 | 1 | 87 | 116 | 133 | 69 | 418 |
| Knee replacement | 0 | 0 | — | 33 | 84 | 63 | 3 | 184 |
| Hernia | 31 | 29 | 8 | 148 | 88 | 66 | 4 | 449 |
| Cataract | 0 | 1 | 1 | 137 | 362 | 616 | 274 | 1403 |
| *1999–2000* | | | | | | | | |
| Hip replacement | 0 | 0 | — | 71 | 113 | 138 | 81 | 410 |
| Knee replacement | 0 | 0 | — | 45 | 76 | 53 | 7 | 181 |
| Hernia | 37 | 20 | 9 | 133 | 103 | 64 | 13 | 461 |
| Cataract | 3 | 0 | 2 | 137 | 374 | 576 | 257 | 1369 |

*Note:*
An FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified nurses are working in the NHS in the Sefton health authority; and what the number was in 1997. [158510]

**Mr. Denham:** The information requested is given in the table.

*National health service hospital and community health services: Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and general medical service practice nurses employed within the Sefton health authority area as at 30 September each year*

| | *Headcount* | *Whole-time equivalents* |
|---|---|---|
| *1997* | | |
| Total Qualified Nurses | 2,420 | 1,840 |
| *Of which:* | | |
| HCHS Nurses | 2,360 | 1,790 |
| | 60 | 40 |
| *2000* | | |
| Total Qualified Nurses | 2,160 | 1,970 |
| *Of which:* | | |
| HCHS Nurses | 2,080 | 1,940 |
| Nurses | 80 | 30 |

*Notes:*
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10
2. Figures exclude learners and agency staff

*Source:*
Department of Health non-medical workforce census

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors worked in Sefton health authority in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* 2000–01; and what the forecast is for 2001–02. [158511]

**Mr. Denham:** The number of all National Health Service doctors in the Sefton health authority as at 1 October 1996 and 30 September 2000 is shown in the table. The Department does not currently produce projections of total doctor numbers for individual health authorities.

*All NHS doctors in the Sefton health authority 1996 and 2000*

| | | *Headcount* |
|---|---|---|
| | *1996* | *2000* |
| All NHS doctors | 660 | 820 |
| *Of whom:* | | |
| General Medical Practitioners[1, 2] | 160 | 160 |
| HCHS[3] medical and dental staff[4] | 510 | 650 |
| *Of whom:* | | |
| Consultants | 210 | 270 |

[1] General Medical Practitioners includes UPEs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (para 525FA), and PMS others

[2] Excluding GP Retainers

[3] Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Service staff

[4] Excludes Hospital Practitioners and Clinical Assistants who are normally GMPs and has already been counted

*Note:*
Figures rounded to the nearest 10

*Sources:*
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics as at 1 October 1996 and 30 September 2000
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census as at 30 September

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants were working in the NHS in Sefton health authority in 1996–97; and what the number is for 2000–01. [158512]

**Mr. Denham:** The number of all National Health Service doctors, including consultants, in the Sefton health authority as at 1 October 1996 and 30 September 2000 is shown in the table. The Department does not currently produce projections of total doctor or consultant numbers for individual health authorities.

*All NHS doctors in the Sefton health authority, 1996 and 2000*

*Headcount*

| | *1996* | *2000* |
|---|---|---|
| All NHS doctors | 660 | 820 |
| *of whom:* | | |
| General Medical Practitioners[1] (excluding GP Retainers) | 160 | 160 |
| HCHS[2] medical and dental staff[3] | 510 | 650 |
| *of whom:* | | |
| Consultants | 210 | 270 |

[1] General Medical Practitioners includes UPEs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (para. 525FA), and PMS others

[2] Hospital, Public Health Medicine and Community Health Service staff

[3] Excludes Hospital Practitioners and Clinical Assistants who are normally GMPs and has already been counted

*Note:*

Figures rounded to the nearest ten

*Sources:*

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics as at 1 October 1996 and 30 September 2000

Department of Health medical and dental work force census as at 30 September

## Fluoridation

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the health data for the fluoride compounds used in artificial fluoridation procedures. [158441]

**Mr. Denham:** Fluoride compounds used for artificial fluoridation break down to release fluoride and other ions when mixed with water. These ions occur naturally in water supplies. The recently published review by York University found no evidence of any harmful effects on systemic health from drinking fluoridated water and acknowledged benefits in reducing tooth decay. However, as the review was critical of the quality of the research available, we have asked the Medical Research Council how the evidence base might be strengthened.

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on dental fluorosis with specific regard to links to systemic toxicity. [158440]

**Mr. Denham:** Dental fluorosis is considered to be an effect seen in teeth and is due to the presence of fluoride in the body while teeth are being formed. Its presence does not necessarily imply any harm to health or that fluoride is having any effect, good or bad, on any other part of the body.

## Cord-stem Cell Bank

**Mr. Wood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for establishing a cord-stem cell bank and offering the facility to the mothers of all new-born children. [158783]

**Mr. Denham:** There are already three cord blood banks run by the National Blood Service in London, Newcastle and Bristol where mothers volunteer to donate their cord blood for the benefit of others. There are no plans to collect cords from mothers of all new-born children.

## Bone Marrow

**Mr. Wood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* children and *(b)* other patients requiring a bone marrow match failed to find such a match in the year 2000–01. [158782]

**Mr. Denham:** This information is not collected centrally. Information from the experts indicates that between 70 per cent. and 80 per cent. of all people requiring bone marrow transplantation find a match. Newer technology is increasing the availability of bone marrow suitable for transplantation, especially in children.

## Health Budgets

**Mr. Heald:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions have taken place between his Department and the East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust and the East and North Hertfordshire division of the Hertfordshire health authority about the current and underlying deficits in the local NHS in East and North Hertfordshire; and if he will make a statement; [158947]

(2) if there will be cuts in health services in East and North Hertfordshire in order to reduce the current and underlying budget deficits in the local NHS; and if he will make a statement; [158948]

(3) what steps he intends to take to reduce the underlying and current budget deficits of the East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust and the East and North Hertfordshire division of the Hertfordshire health authority; and if he will make a statement; [158940]

(4) if he will make further funding available to the East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust and the East and North Hertfordshire division of the Hertfordshire health authority in order to reduce their respective deficits. [158949]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The Eastern Regional Office of the National Health Service Executive is working closely with the East and North Hertfordshire NHS trust and Hertfordshire health authority to address deep seated and longstanding financial and service challenges going back at least a decade. For 2001–02 the health authority received additional funding of £26.5 million (8.25 per cent.) to enable it to meet waiting time targets, to effect service improvements to deliver the NHS Plan, and to meet cost and service pressures.

At the end of March 2001, as a result of reallocation of funding within the Department, the regional office was able to allocate a further £6.5 million to East and North Hertfordshire. In addition, two reviews on financial

management and on the management of waiting lists within that health system have just been concluded. The extra funding and the recommendations from the reviews for the more effective management of services will allow financial balance to be achieved alongside the significant service improvements outlined by the Government in the NHS Plan.

### Community Health Councils

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the Government's consultations regarding community health councils. [159367]

**Ms Stuart:** Chapter 10 of the NHS Plan proposed that community health councils be abolished and new structures set in place to increase patient and public empowerment across all sectors of the health service. Following the launch of the NHS Plan in July 2001 a public undertaking was given to involve national and local stakeholder groups in developing the detail of the new structures. A series of seminars was held in November and December 2001 and focused on the various elements of the new arrangements and involved key representative groups. Since then the proposal for abolition of CHCs and the development of the new structures have been subject to debate through the introduction of the Health and Social Care Bill. Key stakeholder groups have continued to be involved in the development of the new arrangements.

### NHS Beds

**Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of beds is in NHS hospitals *(a)* built, *(b)* commissioned and *(c)* planned since 1 May 1997. [159438]

**Mr. Denham:** The physical stock of beds (defined as number of staffed in-patient and day case beds) in the major acute hospitals (capital value over £25 million) in England is as follows:

| | *Number of beds* |
|---|---|
| *(a) Built and operational since 1 May 1997* | |
| Carlisle | 444 |
| Dartford and Gravesham | 402 |
| South Buckinghamshire | 342 |
| Greenwich | 571 |
| Rochdale | 492 |
| Central Sheffield University Hospital (Stonegrove—maternity only) | 119 |
| *(b) In the process of being constructed since 1 May 1997* | |
| Norfolk and Norwich | 953 |
| North Durham Healthcare | 524 |
| Calderdale | 614 |
| South Manchester University Hospitals | 1,031 |
| Bromley Healthcare | 525 |
| Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals | 459 |
| Worcester Royal Infirmary | 474 |
| Hereford Hospitals | 340 |
| South Durham Healthcare | 347 |
| South Tees Acute Hospitals | 1,060 |
| Swindon and Marlborough | 594 |
| King's Healthcare | 902 |
| St. George's Hospital | 1,123 |
| University College London Hospitals | 664 |
| West Middlesex University Hospitals | 434 |
| Hull and East Yorkshire Maternity | 150 |
| *(c) Planned since 1 May 1997*[1] | |
| Barts and The London | [2]1,200 |
| Central Manchester/Manchester Childrens Hospitals | 1,178 |
| Dudley Group of Hospitals | 830 |
| West Berkshire Priority Care | 203 |
| Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals | 1,890 |
| Walsgrave Hospitals/Coventry Healthcare | 969 |
| Leeds Teaching Hospitals | [3]— |
| Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals | 207 |
| Havering Hospitals | 798 |
| Portsmouth Hospitals | 908 |
| Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley | 274 |
| Southern Debyshire Acute Hospitals | 1,127 |
| University Hospital Birmingham/South Birmingham Mental Health | 1,128 |
| Bradford Hospitals | 1,791 |
| Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health | 605 |
| North West London Hospitals | 214 |
| East Kent Hospitals | 1,720 |
| University Hospitals of Leicester | 2,545 |
| Lewisham Hospital | 572 |
| Peterborough Hospitals | 716 |
| Salford Royal Hospitals | 1,014 |
| Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells/Invicta Community Care | 852 |
| Pinderfield and Pontefract Hospitals/Wakefield and Pontefract Community/Dewsbury Health Care | 1,686 |
| Forest Healthcare | 783 |
| Brighton Healthcare | 100 |
| United Bristol Healthcare | 1,261 |
| Sherwood Forest Hospitals | 921 |
| Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals | 566 |
| Mid Essex Hospitals | 973 |
| Essex Rivers Healthcare | 844 |
| Hull and East Yorkshire | 1,533 |
| North Middlesex Hospitals | 482 |
| North Staffordshire Hospital | 1,442 |
| Plymouth Hospitals | 1,432 |
| St. Helens and Knowsley Hospitals | 1,278 |
| Walsall Hospitals/Walsall Community | 749 |
| Paddington Basin | [3]— |
| Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals | 1,162 |
| Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals | 117 |
| Southampton University Hospitals | 112 |
| South Devon Healthcare | 939 |
| Tameside and Glossop Acute | 670 |
| Gloucestershire Royal | [3]— |
| Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospital | 806 |
| Guy's and St. Thomas' | 1,150 |

[1] Numbers at this stage are provisional and may change
[2] Approximate
[3] Under review

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds there are per head of population in *(a)* the National Health Service and *(b)* private facilities. [159559]

**Mr. Denham:** During 1999–2000, in the National Health Service in England, there were 3.74 beds per 1,000 population. Information on bed capacities at private facilities is not centrally collected.

### www.nhsonline.net

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what endorsement has been given by his Department to the website www.nhsonline.net. [159193]

**Mr. Denham:** The Department has given no endorsement for nhsonline.net.

### Mental Health White Paper

**Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish the statutory guidance relating to residential options and refusals referred to in paragraph 7.12 (page 73) of the Mental Health White Paper. [159536]

**Mr. Hutton:** We intend to issue the guidance referred to in paragraph 7.12 of the White Paper "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" in summer 2001.

### Vitamins and Minerals

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the progress being made by his Ad Hoc Expert Advisory Group on Vitamins and Minerals; and if he expects the group to produce its final report before the publication of the report by the European Commission's Scientific Committee for Food on the safety of vitamins and minerals; [159539]

(2) what assessment he has made of the ability of the Ad Hoc Expert Advisory Group on Vitamins and Minerals to produce its report according to the timetable originally envisaged with its present level of resources; [159541]

(3) what steps he is taking to ensure that the work of his Ad Hoc Expert Advisory Group on Vitamins and Minerals progresses with sufficient speed as to inform his input into the work of the European Scientific Committee for Foods. [159540]

**Ms Stuart:** The Ad Hoc Expert Advisory Group on Vitamins and Minerals have published the reviews of individual vitamins and minerals on the Food Standards Agency website at www. Foodstandards.gov.uk as the work has progressed. At the same time copies have been sent to the secretariat of the Scientific Committee on Food.

The Expert Group on Vitamins and Minerals expect to complete considering the reviews of the relevant scientific information on the safety of individual vitamins and minerals by July 2001. The group's risk assessments for the vitamins and minerals reviewed will be issued for public consultation later this year. After the consultation process the group will publish its final report, a copy of which will be sent to the Scientific Committee on Food.

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress being made by the European Commission's Scientific Committee for Food in reviewing the safety of vitamins and minerals; when he expects that Committee will adopt upper safe levels; and for which nutrients. [159538]

**Ms Stuart:** The European Commission's Scientific Committee for Food have expressed opinions on the tolerable upper intake levels of beta-carotene, vitamin B6, vitamin B12, folate, manganese, selenium, molybdenum and vitamin B2 which are available on their website. Opinions on the remaining vitamins and minerals are being prepared by the Committee and will be published in due course. The timetable for the adoption of tolerable upper intake levels is not known.

### NHS Restructuring

**Mr. Hammond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the net number of administrative, clerical and managerial jobs lost in the NHS Executive, Department of Health and health authorities will be, as a result of the reorganisation announced by him on 25 April, *(a)* within the next 12 months and *(b)* upon full implementation of the restructuring he has outlined. [159603]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* By 2004 control of 75 per cent. of the National Health Service budget will be devolved to frontline staff in primary care trusts and care trusts. The number of health authorities will be cut by around two thirds, and it is expected that around half of the posts currently in regional offices will go. Net savings will be at least £100 million. Precise staffing arrangements will be for local decision. Where possible, job reductions will be achieved by natural turnover.

### Correspondence

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his target time is for replying to letters from hon. Members; and what his policy is on the issuing of acknowledgement letters from the Ministerial Correspondence Unit. [159792]

**Ms Stuart:** The Department has a Service First target of 20 working days to reply to correspondence from hon. Members. It is the Department's policy to issue acknowledgement letters to all correspondence received from hon. Members. Unfortunately, the Department had to suspend this practice in late 2000 due to problems with the system producing incorrect dates on acknowledgement letters. The problem has now been resolved and all correspondence is now being acknowledged.

**Sir Brian Mawhinney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a reply to his letter of 23 March on behalf of his constituents, Mr. and Mrs. McGuire. [159870]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* A reply to the right hon. Member's letter concerning his constituents Mr. and Mrs. McGuire was sent on 30 April 2001.

### Bed-and-Breakfast Accommodation

**Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his assessment is of the average cost of bed-and-breakfast accommodation per night for the relatives and friends of in-patients at *(a)* Harefield Hospital, Middlesex and *(b)* St. Mary's Hospital, Paddington, London. [158605]

**Mr. Denham** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The information requested is not held centrally.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many special advisers worked in his Department from 1997 to date. [160022]

**Ms Stuart** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Since 3 May 1997, no more than two special advisers have been in post at any one time.

### Child Protection

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how compliance with the "Working Together" guidelines for child protection is monitored and inspected; which agencies are monitored; and which inspectorates discharge this function. [158888]

**Mr. Hutton:** The social services inspectorate social care regions and inspection groups, and the SSI/Audit Commission joint review team all contribute to the assessment of the performance of each local council with social services responsibilities. Their work is informed by the performance information collected by the local council, through the performance assessment framework. Some inspections cover broad areas of services, such as children's services. Others focus on more specific tasks, such as monitoring the performance of authorities which are subject to special measures.

The SSI social care regions monitor the progress made by all councils in implementing the "Government's Objectives for Children's Social Services", progress on major initiatives such as "Quality Protects", and action plans to address the recommendations of inspections and joint reviews.

Many agencies beyond social services departments have child protection responsibilities. These responsibilities are set out in detail in "Working Together to Safeguard Children". For the first time ever, beginning later this year, there will be a programme of children's safeguards inspections. These inspections will focus on the working of area child protection committees in their implementation of "Working Together to Safeguard Children", and the inter-agency arrangements to assess and address the risks posed by dangerous adults. They will be undertaken by a team of inspectors drawn from each of the inspectorates for the range of agencies with regular contact with children, and will be led by the SSI. It will therefore include inspectors from Ofsted, the Commission for Health Improvement, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, HMI Prisons, and will be supported by the Magistrates Courts Service Inspectorate and the Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Tourism

**Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the interim marketing budgets of the regional tourist boards for the next 12 months.. [159345]

**Janet Anderson:** Regional tourist boards (RTBs) in England will receive £5.5 million during the current financial year. The funding, allocated to the RTBs by the English Tourism Council (ETC), is provided for work that complements the ETC's role in delivering national and regional programmes—in line with "Tomorrow's Tourism", the Government's tourism strategy—rather than for direct marketing.

However, the ETC have received an additional allocation of £3.8 million to fund a national and regional information and promotion campaign as part of the foot and mouth recovery plan. More than half of this additional money is being passed to the RTBs to help fund specific regional promotions and information campaigns. RTBs will also benefit from the additional funding which regional development agencies (RDAs) will allocate for promotional work to support tourism. I do not yet have detailed information about this funding.

### Sports Funding

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many young people from *(a)* the south-east, *(b)* London and *(c)* the UK have been given financial assistance for training for national squads in (i) boxing, (ii) cricket and (iii) football in the current financial year. [158210]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** The financial assistance provided by Sport England to assist young people with the potential to reach the national squads is currently provided through the lottery funded world class programmes: performance, potential and start.

The funding is provided to both the national governing body for the main costs associated with the programmes and also to individual athletes included in the plans.

In the current financial year, boxing has been awarded funding for world class performance, potential and start. The potential squad includes 14 young people around the ages of 18/19 who are receiving individual financial assistance. Two are from the south-east, one of whom is from London. Cricket similarly has been awarded financial support for its world class programmes. However, while no young people currently receive individual assistance they will benefit from the £2 million programme award. Football does not have a world class programme due to the lack of financial need, which therefore means that no young people currently receive financial assistance through the world class programmes.

### Helplines

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by his Department and its agencies. [159507]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** My Department operates a public enquiry unit to assist the public. The unit can be reached on 020 7211 6200 or at enquiries@culture.gov.uk.

The Department and the Royal Parks Agency operate no other helplines.

### Creative Industries Task Force

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the membership and terms of reference of the creative industries taskforce; what publications and reports have been completed to date; what work is under way; and what measures the group has taken to promote creative works among members of ethnic minorities, including the Irish community in Britain. [159554]

**Janet Anderson:** The creative industries taskforce was established in 1997. Its terms of reference were

> "to provide a forum in which Government Ministers could come together with a few senior industry figures to assess the value of the creative industries, analyse their needs in terms of Government policies and identify ways of maximising their economic impact".

It commissioned the first creative industries mapping documents, published in November 1998, and agreed a work programme in December 1998 to analyse key generic issues impacting on the creative industries.

The reports and publications commissioned by the creative industries task force were:

Creative Industries Mapping Document, November 1998

Exports: Our Hidden Potential, November 1999

UK Television Exports Inquiry, November 1999

Internet Inquiry: Snapshot of a Rolling Wave, February 2000

The Regional Dimension: the Report of the Regional Issues Working Group, February 2000

Report from the Intellectual Property Group of the Creative Industries Task Force, March 2000

Your Creative Future, April 2000

Report on the Finance Conference: Connecting Creativity with Capital, May 2000

Cfeative Industries Mapping Document, March 2001.

Having fulfilled its initial remit, the taskforce was wound up in June 2000. The work of ensuring its analysis is turned into action is now being carried forward by the ministerial creative industries strategy group, whose current membership is:

Right hon. Chris Smith, MP

Right hon. Hilary Armstrong, MP

Patricia Hewitt, MP

Stephen Timms, MP

Janet Anderson, MP

Dr. Kim Howells, MP

Michael Wills, MP

Baroness Scotland of Asthal

Michael McGimpsey, MLA

Jenny Randerson, AM

Allan Wilson, MSP.

In terms of activities currently under way, we are working with Universities UK towards establishing a creative industries higher education forum to promote better communication between education and industry; we are encouraging the development of innovative approaches to funding creative businesses and are planning a finance good practice workshop this summer; we are examining the possibility of organising a workshop on creative industries in a rural environment to be held this autumn; we will shortly report to the better regulation taskforce on the regulatory burden facing creative businesses; Scottish Enterprise has identified the creative industries as a key industry cluster and announced a £25 million support programme over five years; the Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure, in partnership with three other Departments in the Northern Ireland Assembly, has launched a consultation exercise called "Unlocking Creativity" providing a career path from school to work; and we have established a creative industries statistical review group to consider how to improve data collection on the creative industries.

We are also encouraging regional players such as the regional development agencies and cultural consortiums to work together to maximise the potential of the creative industries in their area, and similarly with local authorities, in terms of developing their cultural strategies. Through efforts at these levels, we look to promote creative opportunity for all, including the Irish community in Britain.

### Analogue Switchover

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make it his policy to include in the forthcoming communication Bill a statutory duty on OFCOM to promote *(a)* take up of digital television and *(b)* early analogue switchover date. [159600]

**Janet Anderson** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The Government are committed to encouraging the take-up of digital television and the early switchover from analogue to digital television so that the benefits of digital broadcasting can be universally available. Many responses to the communications White Paper, "A New Future for Communications", argued that we should place a specific duty on OFCOM to achieve this. We are currently considering them.

### World Cup 2002

**Dr. Whitehead:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has held with the Kirch group about their proposals to restrict the viewing of World cup 2002 matches to pay-per-view only. [159830]

**Kate Hoey:** We understand that the Kirch group intends to hold an open auction for the live UK broadcasting rights to the 2002 World cup finals tournament but that they intend to comply with the UK listed event legislation. Through correspondence and a meeting with officials, we have made the Kirch group fully aware of the extent of this legislation: that the whole of the World cup finals tournament (all 64 matches) is a listed event, and that any broadcaster purchasing live rights from Kirch would have to comply with the provisions of the 1996 Broadcasting Act.

### Regional Arts Councils

**Dr. Whitehead:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has held with the Arts Council about their proposals to reorganise regional arts councils. [159831]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** My right hon. Friend and I were consulted by the chairman and chief executive of the Arts Council prior to the recent announcement of the proposed changes and further discussion will occur as the proposals develop.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many special advisers worked in his Department from 1997 to date. [160030]

**Mr. Chris Smith** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Since 3 May 1997, no more than two special advisers have been in post at any one time.

### Inheritance Tax

**Maria Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the allocations of items accepted in lieu of inheritance tax, made in the financial

year 2000–01 under sections 9(3) and (4) of the National Heritage Act 1980. [160256]

**Mr. Alan Howarth:** The information that my hon. Friend requests is as follows:

*Allocations made under National Heritage Act 9(3) of items accepted in lieu of tax in the financial year 2000–01—permanent allocations*

| *Item* | *To whom permanently allocated* |
|---|---|
| Paintings by Jan Steen, Aelbert Cuyp and Adriaen van Ostade | The National Trust for display at Waddesdon Manor and Ascott |
| A collection of mostly 18th and 19th century architectural drawings | Victoria and Albert Museum |
| A pair of rococo silver candelabra and a 17th century silver tankard | Victoria and Albert Museum |
| A group of Limoges Renaissance enamels | The National Trust for display at Waddesdon Manor |
| Paintings by Jan van Goyen | National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside (Walker Art Gallery) |
| Five sculptures by Barbara Hepworth | Fitzwilliam Museum (three on display at Snape, Suffolk and one at Churchill College) |
| A silver-gilt William and Mary communion set | Winchester Cathedral |
| Two paintings by William Gear | Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art |
| Four portraits of the Meynell family by Francis Grant and John Hoppner | Temple Newsam House, Leeds |
| Two Longton Hall 'Snowman' figures | Stoke on Trent, Potteries Museum |
| Cimabue: Virgin and Child Enthroned | National Gallery |
| Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger: Portrait of an Unknown Woman | Tate |
| The Dacre Beasts | Victoria and Albert Museum |
| Henry Moore: Mother and Child | Leeds City Art Gallery |
| William Gomm Library Furniture | Stoneleigh Abbey Preservation Trust |
| Richard Wilson: Landscape | National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside (Walker Art Gallery) |
| George Romney: Viscountess Bulkeley as Hebe | National Museum and Gallery, Cardiff |
| Thomas Jones: Landscape | National Museum and Gallery, Cardiff |

*Allocations made under National Heritage Act 9(4) of items accepted in lieu of tax in the financial year 2000–01—temporary allocations (and not yet superseded by a permanent direction)*

| *Item* | *To whom temporarily allocated* |
|---|---|
| Chippendale and Adam Chairs | National Gallery of Scotland for Duff House |
| The archive of Sir Ernest Makins and Baron Sherfield | Bodleian Library, Oxford University |
| Three mediaeval books | The National Library of Scotland |
| Walter Smith: The Wydow Edith (1525) | British Library |
| The Wentworth Muniments | Sheffield Record Office and North Yorkshire Record Office |
| A 14th century ivory mirror back | Victoria and Albert Museum |
| John Crome: Fishmarket at Boulogne | Norwich, The Castle Museum |
| Metsu: Lady at a Spinet | English Heritage for display at Kenwood |
| Tintoretto: Portrait of an Unknown Man | Leighton House, Kensington |
| George Stubbs: Lord Rockingham's Arab Stallion | National Gallery of Scotland |
| George Ehret: Deliciae Botanicae | National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside |
| Hendrick Goltzius: Drawing | National Gallery of Scotland |
| Three mediaeval books | National Library of Scotland |
| A collection of 18th century Scottish silver | National Museum of Seotland |
| A Norwegian 14th century ivory crozier head | Victoria and Albert Museum |
| Land at Ham Hill, Somerset | South Somerset District Council |

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Departmental Policies (Sherwood)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the Sherwood constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158859]

**Mr. Wills** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the Sherwood constituency and Nottinghamshire LEA have been placed in the Library.

### Departmental Policies (Wellingborough)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effects on the constituency of Wellingborough of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158858]

**Mr. Wills** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on Wellingborough constituency and Northamptonshire LEA have been placed in the Library.

### Departmental Policies (Bristol, South)

**Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the constituency of Bristol, South of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [158857]

**Mr. Wills** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Outlined are details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on Bristol, South constituency and City of Bristol LEA.

*Sure Start*

Bristol has one Sure Start scheme in the Bristol, South constituency. A trailblazer project in the Hartcliffe, Highridge, and Withywood area of the city has been allocated £3,161,682 (to March 2002) towards offering increased play and family learning opportunities and will benefit the 1,328 under-fours in the area.

The Knowle West area of Bristol also has a scheme to enable a comprehensive care and education service for children aged 0 to four to be created, a grant of £2.5 million was approved for the first three years and will benefit the 990 under-fours living in the catchment area.

*Beacon schools*

There are three Beacon schools within Bristol local education authority: St. Mary Redcliffe and Temple School, Hotwells Primary and Ilminster Avenue Specialist Nursery School. Of these only Illminster School is in the Bristol, South constituency.

*Schools with specialist status*

*City of Bristol*

| *Specialist School* | *Designated* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *2001–02* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Speedwell* | September 1997 | 57,480 | 95,100 | 107,856 | 121,944 | 123,000 |
| Capital | | 100,000 | — | — | — | — |
| *Cotham Grammar* | September 2000 | — | — | — | 74,000 | 124,845 |
| Capital | | — | — | — | 100,000 | — |
| *Totals* | | | | | | |
| Recurrent | | 57,480 | 95,100 | 107,856 | 195,944 | 247,845 |
| Capital | | 100,000 | — | — | 100,000 | — |
| | | 157,480 | 95,100 | 107,856 | 295,944 | 247,845 |

There are no Specialist Schools in the Bristol, South constituency.

*School Achievement Awards*

| | £ |
|---|---|
| Novers Lane Junior School | 5,950 |
| Weston Park Primary School | 7,000 |
| Hareclive Primary School | 9,450 |
| St. Bernard's Catholic Primary School | 2,800 |
| Total | 25,200 |

With the exception of Weston Park Primary School, all are in the Bristol, South constituency.

*Excellence in Cities*

Bristol LEA was included in the second phase of Excellence in Cities, announced on 23 March 2000. All 22 maintained mainstream secondary schools in Bristol are involved in the EiC programme, and special schools have been involved in the partnership planning process too.

There are seven EiC secondary schools in Bristol, South constituency:

Hengrove School

Ashton Park School

Bedminster Down School

Withywood Community School

Hartcliffe Secondary School

Merrywood School

St. Bernadette Catholic School.

These have all benefited proportionately to need from Excellence in Cities but individual school allocations are determined within local partnerships.

*Small EAZs*

Bristol Excellence in Cities has approval for two small EAZs with a proposed starting date of September 2001 for both. One is in the Bristol, South constituency, covers the Withywood area and is based at the Withywood Community School, and the other is the North Bristol Achievement Partnership which is based at Henbury School.

*Education Action Zone*

A group of 17 schools in the east of the city are included in the Bristol Education Action Zone formed in September 2000.

*Key activities:*

Teaching and learning

Pupil engagement—setting up groups within schools to support young people in establishing their cultural and gender identity

Children as effective communicators

Parental engagement—developing groups to support parents from minority ethnic backgrounds

Participation and progression

Developing effective urban leaders and managers

ICT—providing networked computers, free training for teachers, out of hours access for community use.

Support from the Arts Council of England means that arts will form part of each of these strands.

*Infant class sizes*

Progress in implementing plan:

| | *KS1 pupils in classes of 31 or more* |
|---|---|
| *January 1997* | |
| Number | 3,708 |
| Percentage | 29 |
| *January 1998* | |
| Number | 3,770 |
| Percentage | 29.5 |
| *January 1999* | |
| Number | 3,763 |
| Percentage | 29.5 |

| | KS1 pupils in classes of 31 or more |
|---|---|
| *January 2000* | |
| Number | 2,382 |
| Percentage | 19 |
| *January 2001* | |
| Number | 444 |
| Percentage | 3.7 |

In Bristol, South constituency the number has declined from 1,091 (26.7 per cent.) to 126 (3.3 per cent.).

*Funding revenue and capital*

| Financial year | Revenue (£) | Number of teachers | Capital (£) | Number of classrooms |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1998–99 | 0 | 0 | 203,000 | 3 |
| 1999–2000 | 231,000 | 14 | 303,256 | 3 |
| 2000–01 | 675,000 | 40 | 95,000 | 1 |
| 2001–02 | 702,313 | 19 | 0 | 0 |
| 2002–03[1] | 201,875 | 19 | 0 | 0 |

[1] Provisional summer costs only

*Performance Data* (England averages include independent schools)

*Key Stage 2 test results: pupils achieving level 4 or above*

Percentage

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 | 1997 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *English* | | | | |
| Bristol LEA | 66 | 62 | 55 | 54 |
| England average | 75 | 71 | 65 | 63 |
| *Maths* | | | | |
| Bristol LEA | 63 | 59 | 47 | 52 |
| England average | 72 | 69 | 59 | 62 |

*Key Stage 2 test results: pupils achieving level 4 or above*

Percentage

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 | 1997 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Science* | | | | |
| Bristol LEA | 78 | 71 | 59 | 56 |
| England average | 85 | 78 | 69 | 69 |

*GCSE and GNVQ results*

Percentage

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 | 1997 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *5+ A*-C passes* | | | | |
| Bristol LEA | 31.2 | 31.0 | 29.0 | 32.1 |
| England average | 49.2 | 47.9 | 46.3 | 45.1 |
| *5+ A*-G passes* | | | | |
| Bristol LEA | 81.1 | 80.5 | 80.4 | 81.2 |
| England average | 88.9 | 88.5 | 87.5 | 86.4 |
| *No passes* | | | | |
| Bristol LEA | 10.4 | 10.7 | 10.9 | 10.9 |
| England average | 5.6 | 6.0 | 6.6 | 7.7 |

*GCE A/AS examinations and advanced GNVQs*

Percentage

| | 2000 | 1999 | 1998 | 1997 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Average points for fewer than two A/AS levels* | | | | |
| LEA | 2.6 | 2.5 | 2.4 | 2.9 |
| England average | 3.0 | 3.0 | 3.0 | 2.9 |
| *Average points for two or more A/AS levels* | | | | |
| LEA | 15.4 | 13.8 | 13.6 | 13.7 |
| England average | 18.5 | 18.2 | 17.8 | 17.3 |
| *Advanced GNVQs* | | | | |
| LEA | 9.4 | 8.8 | 9.1 | — |
| England average | 10.1 | 9.9 | 9.6 | — |

*LEA capital funding*

£000

| | 2001–02 | 2000–01 | 1999–2000 | 1998–99 | 1997–98 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Credit approvals* | | | | | | |
| Annual Capital Guideline (ACG) | 3,952 | 2,914 | 1,422 | 437 | 174 | 8,899 |
| Supplementary Credit Approval (SCA) | 1,783 | 1,453 | 1,712 | 3,357 | 162 | 8,467 |
| PFI credits | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| *Grants* | | | | | | |
| NDS Devolved Capital | 2,007 | — | — | — | — | 2,007 |
| NDS Condition | 1,155 | — | — | — | — | 1,155 |
| NDS | — | 4,457 | 2,026 | 355 | 620 | 7,458 |
| NGfL | 1,631 | 1,099 | 1,229 | 764 | — | 4,723 |
| Voluntary Aided (VA) Grant | 256 | 827 | 251 | 351 | 165 | 1,850 |
| Schools' Devolved/Formula Capital | — | 2,417 | — | — | — | 2,417 |
| Science labs | 177 | 177 | — | — | — | 354 |
| Nursery provision | — | 75 | — | — | — | 75 |
| Energy | — | — | — | 99 | — | 99 |
| Assist Management Plan (AMP) support | — | — | 46 | — | — | 46 |
| SEED challenge | 234 | 207 | — | — | — | 441 |
| Infant Class Size | — | 5 | 298 | 203 | — | 506 |
| Outside toilets | — | — | — | 40 | — | 40 |
| Access Initiative | 349 | — | — | — | — | 349 |
| Security | 81 | 116 | 119 | 117 | 94 | 527 |
| SSLU's | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Early Excellence Grant | — | 210 | — | — | — | 210 |
| Total | 11,625 | 13,957 | 7,103 | 5,723 | 1,215 | — |

*Funding per pupil*

In City of Bristol LEA, funding per pupil has increased by £590 in real terms between 1997–98 and 2001–02.

*Further education*

Student numbers at all FEFC funded institutions where home postcode is in the local authority district of Bristol.

*1996–97 to 1999–2000*

| | *16–18* | | *Adult* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Full-time* | *Part-time* | *Full-time* | *Part-time* |
| *FEFC funded* | | | | |
| 1996–97 | 3,174 | 1,115 | 2,500 | 20,718 |
| 1997–98 | 3,228 | 1,113 | 2,515 | 21,140 |
| 1998–99 | 2,999 | 1,269 | 2,219 | 20,904 |
| 1999–2000 | 3,192 | 1,218 | 2,102 | 22,657 |
| *Non-FEFC funded* | | | | |
| 1996–97 | 53 | 262 | 101 | 933 |
| 1997–98 | 72 | 395 | 138 | 770 |
| 1998–99 | 85 | 430 | 245 | 1,231 |
| 1999–2000 | 82 | 388 | 424 | 1,825 |

*Modern apprenticeships*

Information on Modern Apprenticeships for all English constituencies were placed in the Library of the House of Commons on 30 March 2001.

*New Deal for Young People*

In the Bristol, South constituency, 1,221 young people have joined the New Deal to end January 2001. 637 have found jobs, 479 of which are sustained.

*Labour market statistics*

The working age employment rate in City of Bristol in winter 2000–01 was 79.4 per cent., above the UK rate of 74.5 per cent. The rate in winter 1996–97 was 71.7 per cent.

The claimant unemployment rate has fallen from 9.8 per cent. in March 1997 to 3.8 per cent. in March 2001 in the Bristol, South constituency.

### Children's Fund

**Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what arrangements have been made for the administration of Children's Fund moneys in Staffordshire. [159194]

**Mr. Boateng:** I hope to be able to make an announcement about the second and third wave children's fund areas before the end of this year. An announcement on the areas to receive first wave children's fund local network funding will be made shortly. All areas of England will have access to the children's fund by 2003–04.

### Education Rights (UN)

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what the conclusions of his meeting were with the UN special rapporteur on the right to education on 7 February; [159564]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 419W, on education rights, what the conditions of the meeting were with the special rapporteur on 7 February. [159575]

**Jacqui Smith:** I was scheduled to meet the special rapporteur on the right to education during the morning of 7 February but the meeting was cancelled at the special rapporteur's request owing to adverse weather conditions in Sweden.

### Individual Learning Accounts

**Mr. Etherington:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on plans for opening individual learning accounts by March 2002. [160197]

**Mr. Blunkett:** I am pleased to announce that nearly a year ahead of target the manifesto commitment has been met. There are now over 1 million individual learning accounts in the UK, with over 3,000 opened every day.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Porton Down

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many times since 1 March 1998 the War Pension Agency has requested information from the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down, with regard to former service personnel who are claiming disablement as a result of experiments at Porton Down. [159810]

**Mr. Bayley:** The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

### Occupational Pension Schemes

**Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to reform the system for appointing members of occupational pension schemes to serve as trustees. [159362]

**Mr. Rooker:** The Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000 includes changes to the current legislation governing the nomination and selection of member-nominated trustees and directors. We are currently working on the supporting regulations and aim to bring the new provisions into force in October this year.

The new provisions will ensure that employers can no longer "opt out" of having member nominated trustees, and will be easier and more flexible to implement than the current arrangements.

### Social Inclusion

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how the Government measure the impact of their policies on social inclusion. [159107]

**Mr. Bayley:** Poverty and social exclusion are multi faceted problems. Therefore, we do not use a single definition but instead use a range of indicators to monitor the progress of our strategy. Information relating to the indicators can be found in the second Government "Opportunity for all" report on tackling poverty and social exclusion, "One year on: making a difference" (Cm 4865). The report also describes and monitors the impact of policies we have already introduced, and sets out our plans for the future.

### Unmarried Partners

**Mr. Dawson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will allow the payment of widows/widowers benefit to be based on the national insurance contributions of deceased unmarried partners; [159950]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that unmarried partners are given the same recognition as married couples in all aspects of social security legislation. [159949]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* A founding principle of the social insurance system is that all rights to benefit derived from another person's contributions are based on the concept of legal marriage. This principle applies equally to bereavement benefits. We have no plans to change the current arrangements.

### Helplines

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by his Department and its agencies. [159504]

**Mr. Rooker:** The following national helplines and orderlines are administered by this Department or one of its agencies.

| *Helpline* | *Description* |
|---|---|
| Benefits Agency Publicity Register | For advisers to join the mailing list for information and receive a newsletter |
| Benefit Enquiry Line | Information and advice on disability benefits |
| Child Benefit Enquiry Line | Advice and information on Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance |
| Child Support Literature Line | — |
| CSA National Enquiry Line | General advice on child maintenance and maintenance estimates |
| Disability Living Allowance Customer Care helpline | Advice on existing DLA claims |
| Inherited SERPS Enquiry line | For public to ask questions about the new plans |
| Medical Benefits Direct | Advises on the repayment of medical costs incurred by UK residents on a temporary visit overseas to another European Economic Area country and health cover for people getting UK Retirement Pension, widow's benefits, bereavement benefits or Incapacity Benefit who live permanently in another EEA country |
| MIG (Minimum Income Guarantee) claimline | For people aged 60 or over to apply for the Minimum Income Guarantee (paid as Income Support) |
| Mortgage Payment Protection leaflet orderline | — |
| National Benefit Fraud Hotline | For public to report suspected benefit fraud |
| New Deal for Lone Parents helpline | For public and advisers to request literature and ask questions about the programme |
| Overseas customer service helplines | Advice on transfer of pensions overseas, medical cover and making claims overseas |
| Pensioners' guide orderline | — |
| Pensions Direct | General advice about state Retirement Pension or widow's benefits paid directly into a bank or building society account |
| Pensions Info-Line | Leaflets orderline, primarily pensions education leaflets |
| Print Direct Customer Services helpline | For advisers to inquire about the progress of bulk literature orders and other miscellaneous queries |
| Public Enquiry Office | — |
| Retirement Pensions Forecasting and Advice Service | For public to make inquiries about their pensions forecast |
| Retirement Pension Tele-claims line | To make a claim for state Retirement Payment over the phone or to ask for a state Retirement Pension form to be issued to be completed at home |
| War Pensions Agency Customer Services Unit | For public inquiries and complaints |
| War Pensions freeline | Provides information and advice on all aspects of war pensions |
| Welfare Reform leaflets orderline | Stocks various leaflets |
| Winter Fuel Payments leaflets orderline (seasonal) | Primarily for advisers |
| Winter Fuel Payments claimline | Public can ask questions of Winter Fuel Payments or request a claim form |

In addition, there are a number of regionally based helplines administered by the Department or one of its agencies.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Refrigerants

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development to what extent her Department's headquarters buildings use hydrofluorocarbons for *(a)* refrigeration and *(b)* air conditioning; what amounts of hydrofluorocarbons have been purchased in each year since 1995; and what plans she has to phase out the (i) purchase and (ii) use of hydrofluorocarbons. [160012]

**Clare Short:** My Department's London buildings, all of which are leased, do not currently use hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), but there is limited use of HFCs in our East Kilbride office. In our new London headquarters building, which we are due to move into later this year, we are replacing the old hydrochlorofluorocarbon-based (HCFC) systems with a HFC alternative, "134A", which has zero ozone depletion potential. This follows a detailed evaluation of the most appropriate system given the requirements and constraints of the existing building. We will also actively consider using hydrocarbon (HC) systems for smaller uses such as catering and small refrigerators wherever possible.

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department's policy is regarding the purchase of *(a)* hydrocarbons and *(b)* other environmentally benign refrigerants to meet the refrigeration and other relevant energy needs of buildings and premises owned and leased by her Department; and if she will make a statement. [160016]

**Clare Short:** My Department already actively considers the use of appropriate alternative refrigerants, and leakage control systems, for our main headquarters buildings. For instance, we will be relocating to a new London headquarters building at the end of this year, and as part of the refurbishment works a wide range of refrigerants were considered for both their ozone depletion potential (ODP) and global warming potential (GWP). We have decided to replace the current hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC) refrigerant—R22—with a modern HFC alternative, "134A", which has zero ODP. This will meet the requirements under the Montreal protocol to phase out the use of R22. We will also carry out a review of the suitable refrigerant alternatives for a second much smaller London building, for which we have just taken responsibility.

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which London headquarters building or premises owned or leased by her Department use *(a)* chlorofluorocarbons and *(b)* hydrochlorofluorocarbons for refrigeration and other relevant energy needs. [160020]

**Clare Short:** DFID currently has a main London building at 94 Victoria street, SW1, and two much smaller offices at 20 Victoria street and Glen House, Stag Place SW1, all of which are leased. Information provided from the Landlords confirms that all of these make use of HCFCs in the air conditioning/refrigeration systems.

### West Timor

**Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are being taken to provide humanitarian relief to the refugees in West Timor; and what discussions he has had with the Indonesian Government over ensuring a secure environment for refugees and humanitarian agencies in West Timor. [159927]

**Clare Short:** Accurate information on conditions in the refugee camps in West Timor remains difficult to obtain, following the withdrawal of UN staff and international NGOs in the aftermath of the killing of three UN workers in Atambua last September. The Indonesian Government appear to be managing the situation relatively well, and there have been no reports of widespread hunger, or appeals for humanitarian assistance.

Staff from my Department and from the Embassy in Jakarta participated in a meeting last week at which a draft Government of Indonesia plan to resolve the refugee situation in West Timor was discussed. This included a discussion of security, particularly ensuring a secure environment for the planned registration of refugees due to take place in late May. A UN mission to review security conditions in West Timor is expected to visit in mid May.

### Fish (Research)

**Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 25 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 300W, on genetically modified fish, if she will identify the two environmental impact assessments referred to in her answer, indicating where the reports are available. [159864]

**Clare Short:** Results of the first study are described in "Transgenic fish: an evaluation of benefits and risks" published in *Fish and Fisheries*. Results of the second study are described in "Growth and nutritional trials on transgenic Nile tilapia containing an exogenous fish growth hormone gene". This paper has been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Fish Biology*.

**Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contractual relationship exists between her Majesty's Government and fish geneticists at the University of Wales; and what returns her Department has had to date from the profit-sharing agreement. [160059]

**Clare Short:** The University of Wales was contracted to manage my Departments fish genetics research programme until 31 March 2001 when the contract ended. From 1 April 2001, the programme has merged with the aquaculture research programme managed by the University of Stirling.

Fishgen Ltd., a company established by the University of Wales to market the products of fisheries research, uses a proportion of its profits to supplement funding from my Department for fisheries research of benefit to the needs of poor people in developing countries.

**Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 10 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 547W, if she will list Departmental staff involved at the Hanoi conference in November 2000, other United Kingdom participants who attended and those assisted to do so by Her Majesty's Government's funding; and where the conference report and papers are available. [160058]

**Clare Short:** I shall send my hon. Friend a summary note of the meeting and a list of participants. A report of the proceedings is in preparation.

### Zimbabwe

**Mr. Wells:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the projects funded by her Department in Zimbabwe. [159567]

**Clare Short:** DFID is currently operating the following projects in Zimbabwe:

| *Project* | *Date* | *£ million* |
|---|---|---|
| Sexual and Reproductive Health Phase 2 | 2000–04 | 20 |
| Rural District Councils Capacity Building Programme | 1996–2001 | 10.6 |
| Civil Society Land Resettlement Challenge Fund | 2000–04 | 5 |
| Integrated Poverty Monitoring and Analysis System | 2000–03 | 1.06 |
| Wills and Inheritance Laws | 2000–02 | 0.86 |
| Bikita and Lupane Integrated Rural Water Supply and Sanitation projects | 1995–2002 | 6.27 |
| Social Marketing of Condoms | 1996–2001 | 2.8 |
| Small Dams Rehabilitation | 1997–2001 | 1.96 |

| Project | Date | £ million |
|---|---|---|
| Empowerment of Farm Worker Communities | 1999–2002 | 1.6 |
| Credit for the Informal Sector | 1995–2002 | 1.3 |
| Agribusiness Entrepreneur Network and Training Development | 1997–2001 | 0.49 |
| Bulilima-Mangwe Water Supply and Environmental Rehabilitation project | 1998–2001 | 0.31 |
| Election monitoring | 2000–01 | 0.25 |
| Community Based Maintenance of Water Points in Binga | 1998–2001 | 0.24 |
| Food security Risk Mapping | 1997–2001 | 0.23 |
| Dynamics of Rural Poverty study | 1999–2001 | 0.2 |
| Emergency Preparedness | 2000–01 | 0.17 |
| Education sector HIV/AIDS impact assessment | 2001 | 0.13 |
| Emergency cholera control | 2001 | 0.05 |

I have closed 12 development projects and suspended or substantially modified five others over the last 12 months. I continue to keep the Zimbabwe programme under regular review to ensure it is still effective and appropriate in the current difficult circumstances.

### Vision 2020

**Mr. Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department has given to the Vision 2020 proposals for agricultural reform in Andhra Pradesh, India. [159759]

**Clare Short:** DFID is providing £45 million over seven years to support a major rural livelihoods project in Andhra Pradesh. A key objective is to support the development of agricultural productivity in the state's rain-fed drylands. Another objective is to support the state Government's capacity to address key policy issues in agriculture, natural resources management and rural development.

We are also currently financing a review of public expenditure in the state. This review will assist the state Government in reallocating resources to meet the Vision 2020 objectives, including those in the agricultural sector.

With the World Bank, we are considering budgetary assistance to Andhra Pradesh. In the rural sector, the proposed programme would help the state Government provide the necessary enabling environment for faster agricultural growth.

## TREASURY

### Minimum Wage

**Mr. Salmond:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people between the ages of 18 and 21 years are entitled to receive the minimum wage in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the United Kingdom. [159853]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Alex Salmond, dated 2 May 2001:*

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about the number of 18 to 21 year olds in Scotland and the United Kingdom who are entitled to receive the minimum wage (NMW) (159853).

All 18 to 21 year olds who are in employment are entitled to NMW rates, except those on apprenticeships. For people aged 19 and above, exemption from the NMW is only for the first year of the apprenticeship.

The latest Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates, for winter 2000 (not seasonally adjusted), show that there are 1,800,000 18 to 21 year olds in employment in the UK and 169,000 in Scotland. Among these, further LFS estimates available for the UK, but not for Scotland, show that 43,000 18 year olds on apprenticeships would not be entitled to receive NMW rates. A further 73,000 19 to 21 year olds in the UK were on apprenticeships, but no information is available about the number of these in the first year of their apprenticeship who would not be entitled to receive NMW rates.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) pursuant to his answers of 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 341W, if he will list by valuation office area the number of appeals *(a)* made and *(b)* decided at the most recent date for which the information is available; [160065]

(2) on what date the Valuation Office agency began its consultation on the approach and timetable for determining appeals for a temporary reduction in rating assessments on the grounds of the impact of foot and mouth disease; and when the consultation will be complete; [159961]

(3) what additional resources are being made available to the Valuation Office Agency to enable appeals for a temporary reduction in rating assessments on the grounds of the impact of foot and mouth to be decided quickly. [159962]

**Dawn Primarolo** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The Valuation Office agency opened consultations about FMD with the national ratepayers valuation forum on 30 March 2001.

As I said in my answer of 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 341W, the Valuation Office is continuing to receive appeals. It is not possible to give a final figure.

The need for additional resource is being considered.

### Stamp Duty

**Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will present his detailed proposals for the operation of differential stamp duty rates in areas of deprivation. [160107]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The Government are working closely with the devolved authorities to ensure that the stamp duty relief for disadvantaged communities is

targeted at the most disadvantaged areas in all parts of the UK. The areas to qualify will be published as soon as possible.

### Fuel Smuggling

**Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated loss to the Treasury was in unpaid duty arising from fuel smuggling from the Irish Republic into Northern Ireland; and if he will publish the tonnage of legitimate fuel deliveries on which duty has been paid in Northern Ireland in each of the last five years. [159819]

**Dawn Primarolo** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* For an estimate of the revenue lost through oils fraud and legitimate cross-border shopping in Northern Ireland, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) on 21 March 2001, *Official Report,* column 233W.

For the tonnage of fuel deliveries in Northern Ireland I refer the hon. Member to "Digest of UK Energy Statistics", table 3.9, published annually by the Department of Trade and Industry, which sets out these estimates.

### Research and Development

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase research and development tax credits for large firms. [159670]

**Mr. Timms:** The Government have already introduced an R&D tax credit for smaller firms, in order to address the particular difficulty that these firms face in accessing capital to invest in innovation and R&D. In order to complement this measure and further to improve the UK's innovation performance, the Government have published a consultative document, "Increasing Innovation", which sets out the Government's proposals for a new tax credit to encourage R&D among larger firms and consults on the design of such a measure.

The consultation document was published at the time of Budget 2001 and can be found on the Inland Revenue internet site at the following address:

www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/consult new/index.

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase support for near-market high-technology research and development, with particular reference to technology demonstration projects designed to prove concepts and to reduce technical and financial risk. [159672]

**Mr. Timms:** The Government have in place a range of measures aimed at enhancing the innovative capacity of the UK through investing in, facilitating and regulating innovation and R&D, as set out in the 2001 White Paper on enterprise, skills and innovation, "Opportunity for all in a world of change".

An R&D tax credit for small firms was introduced in April of last year, and all companies are entitled to an immediate 100 per cent. tax allowance for capital investment in R&D. In addition, the Government published a consultation document in March 2001, entitled "Increasing Innovation", which sets out the Government's proposals for a new tax credit to encourage R&D and innovation among larger firms and consults on the design of such a measure.

### Petrol and Diesel

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total combined tax revenue from petrol and diesel was for each of the years from 1997 to date. [160077]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The amount of excise duty raised from petrol and diesel for each of the financial years from 1997 to 1999–2000 is published on the HM Customs and Excise webside www.hmce.gov.uk/general/about/ann-report-conts.htm.

### Fiscal Incentives

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fiscal measures he is planning to shift resources from household consumption to business investment. [159668]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Government keep all taxes under review, and changes are considered as part of the Budget process. New measures to build opportunity and prosperity for all were set out in the Economic and Fiscal Strategy report and Financial Statement and Budget report March 2001, which can be found in the Library.

### Public Investment

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his measures to increase investment in *(a)* infrastructure, *(b)* lifelong learning and *(c)* research and development. [159669]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The Government's plans for investment in infrastructure, lifelong learning and research and development are detailed in "Spending Review 2000—Prudent for a Purpose: Building Opportunity and Security for All", published in July 2000, as Command Paper 4807.

### Climate Change Levy

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review *(a)* the impact of the climate change levy and *(b)* negotiated agreements associated with the levy. [159674]

**Mr. Timms:** As with any tax, the Chancellor will keep the climate change levy under review as part of the normal Budget process.

For the levy negotiated agreements, the first review of performance against targets will take place at the end of 2002. The first review of the targets themselves will take place at the end of 2004.

### Free TV Licences

**Mr. Russell Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many households are entitled to free TV licences in each parliamentary constituency. [160357]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** Information concerning the number of pensioners aged 75 or over by parliamentary constituency, given in written answers by Treasury Ministers between 14 December 2000 and 2 April, was derived from estimates published by the Department of Social Security. These estimates were incorrect. The Department of Social Security has corrected the error and published revised and updated statistics in "Retirement

Pensioners, by Parliamentary Constituency and Age in Great Britain—at 30 September 2000", a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Correspondence

**Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Putney will receive a reply to his series of letters on behalf of his constituent Mrs. Truong (Ref. P402281). [158889]

**Mrs. Roche:** I replied to my hon. Friend on May 2001.

### Sham Marriages

**Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many suspected sham marriages reported under section 24 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 he has accepted as sham marriages; [159840]

(2) how many marriages have been reported by registrars as sham marriages since the introduction of section 24 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; and from which registration district they were reported. [159839]

**Mrs. Roche:** Since 1 January this year, superintendent registrars have reported a total of 201 marriages which they suspect to have been contracted solely for immigration purposes. These figures cannot be broken down into registration districts. However, of the total number reported, 115 were from the London metropolitan district, 20 from the midlands, 14 from the south-west, 12 from the north-west, 11 from the south-east, 10 from the south and seven from Wales. Figures are not available for Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Good grounds have been given in these reports to suggest that the relationship may not be genuine, but many of the cases are still under investigation.

### Lord Birt

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (1) pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Taunton (Jackie Ballard), of 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 594W, what the nature of the work undertaken by Lord Birt was; and if he will make a statement; [159978]

(2) if he will place in the Library copies of the research on crime undertaken by Lord Birt in his capacity as the Government's adviser on crime; [159982]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 25 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 285W, what were the conclusions of Lord Birt's analysis of existing data on offenders, offences, victims and crime reduction; and if he will place them in the Library; [159979]

(4) what work Lord Birt has undertaken in his role as the Government's adviser on crime other than that which contributed to "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead" (Cm 5074); and if he will make a statement on work being undertaken by Lord Birt. [159868]

**Mr. Straw** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Lord Birt's work has ranged widely over the criminal justice field. His advice, research and analysis are reflected in the Government's strategy document, "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead" (Cm 5074). Lord Birt continues to provide advice on issues as requested by the Prime Minister.

### Asylum Seekers

**Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been issued by the National Asylum Support Service with a Department of Health certificate HC2 entitling them to free NHS services in the last 12 months; and what services are available with an HC2 certificate. [159836]

**Mrs. Roche:** 33,000[1] asylum seekers have been provided with National Asylum Support Service (NASS) support during the period 3 April 2000 to 28 February 2001. All principal NASS applicants are issued with a HC2 on successful application to NASS for support. Details of dependants, if any, are included on the certificate. The HC2 lists the services available. This includes free NHS prescriptions, free NHS dental treatment and free NHS sight tests.

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 10.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what opportunities for appeal *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* local electors have against the designation of their areas as a cluster for asylum seekers; [159678]

(2) how many places have had their designation as cluster areas for asylum seekers removed; and for what reasons. [159740]

**Mrs. Roche:** The National Asylum Support Service consults regional consortiums which are local authority-led about the identification of cluster areas. Any evidence put forward about the suitability of the area for the accommodation of asylum seekers received as part of this consultation process will be taken into account. Once an area has been identified as a cluster area there is no formal appeal process against its use for accommodating asylum seekers, but any evidence put forward as to why a particular area should no longer be a cluster would be given due consideration. No area has had their designation as a cluster area removed.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether North-East Lincolnshire council was consulted about the suitability of Springfield hostel, Grimsby for asylum seekers; and to whom it can now make representations on the suitability of that location. [159763]

**Mrs. Roche:** The Springfield hostel Grimsby has not been presented to the national asylum support service (NASS) as possible accommodation for asylum seekers by any of its providers. In the event that it is presented to NASS it will, if it contains more than six bed spaces, be subject to a 28-day consultation period with the local authority.

If North-East Lincolnshire council wishes to make representations to NASS about the potential use of this property in advance of its possible future presentation it should contact the NASS regional manager for Yorkshire and Humberside.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many places have been designated as cluster areas for asylum seekers; and if he will list them, giving the area covered by each. [159747]

**Mrs. Roche:** To date 71 cluster areas have been identified throughout the United Kingdom. These areas are recorded by region:

| *Region* | |
|---|---|
| East of England | Ipswich |
| | Norwich |
| | Cambridge |
| | Great Yarmouth |
| | Peterborough |
| East Midlands | Leicester |
| | Nottingham |
| | Derby |
| South Central and East | Brighton and Hove |
| | Hastings and St. Leonards |
| | Portsmouth |
| North East | Newcastle |
| | Middlesborough |
| | Sunderland |
| | North Tyneside |
| | Gateshead |
| | South Tyneside |
| | Redcar and Cleveland |
| | Hartlepool |
| | Darlington |
| | Stockton on Tees |
| North West | Manchester (Greater Manchester) |
| | Bolton (Greater Manchester) |
| | Bury (Greater Manchester) |
| | Oldham (Greater Manchester) |
| | Rochdale (Greater Manchester) |
| | Salford (Greater Manchester) |
| | Stockport (Greater Manchester) |
| | Tameside (Greater Manchester) |
| | Trafford (Greater Manchester) |
| | Wigan (Greater Manchester) |
| | Burnley |
| | Blackburn |
| | Liverpool |
| | Nelson |
| Scotland | Edinburgh |
| | Glasgow |
| South West | Bristol |
| | Gloucester |
| | Swindon |
| | Taunton and Bridgewater |
| | Exeter |
| | South Gloucestershire |
| | Torbay |
| | Plymouth |
| | North Somerset |
| | Bath |
| Wales | Cardiff |
| | Newport |
| | Swansea |
| | Wrexham |
| | Bridgend and Porthcawl |
| West Midlands | Birmingham |
| | Coventry |
| | Wolverhampton |
| | Dudley |
| | Sandwell |
| | Solihull |
| | Walsall |
| | Stoke on Trent |
| Yorkshire | Sheffield |
| | Bradford and Keighley |
| | Leeds |
| | Rotherham |
| | Wakefield |
| | Hull |
| | Kirklees |
| | Doncaster |
| | Halifax |
| | Barnsley |
| | Grimsby |

Destitute asylum seekers may also be accommodated in Northern Ireland, although they are not dispersed there.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the membership and location are of each regional consortium for the dispersal of asylum seekers; and how the members were appointed. [159736]

**Mrs. Roche:** Regional consortiums have been established throughout the United Kingdom as follows:

London

South East and Central

North East

North West

Yorkshire and Humberside

West Midlands

East Midlands

East of England

Scotland

Wales

Northern Ireland

Arrangements exist for the South West of England.

Each consortium is responsible for appointing its own members, but it is recognised that no one agency or organisation is equipped to deliver the full range of services. Accordingly, they should have a structure that enables input from a wide range of agencies such as local authorities, the police, health and education authorities, the voluntary sector, accommodation providers and other organisations with an interest.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what account is taken of local *(a)* unemployment rates, *(b)* health services and *(c)* education provision in the designation of cluster areas and the allocation of asylum seekers to them; [159733]

(2) how he intends to secure a fair and equitable dispersal of asylum seekers between areas designated and areas not designated as cluster areas; [159749]

(3) what control *(a)* the local authority, *(b)* the Health Service and *(c)* the education authority have on the number of asylum seekers allocated to a cluster area; and how their views are taken into account; [159725]

(4) if the Commission for Racial Equality is consulted about the dispersal of asylum seekers, the designation of cluster areas for their reception and the numbers sent to each area. [159726]

**Mrs. Roche:** The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) conducts research to identify cluster areas. Information is received from the local authority led regional consortiums, voluntary groups and other organisations with an interest in asylum. There is a consultation process in place to seek advice from local health and education authorities. Any information received will be taken into account, and this can include information about unemployment rates, health services and education provision. The Commission for Racial Equality is consulted on specific issues.

Ideally, NASS aims to establish cluster areas where there is suitable and available accommodation and where it would be possible to link with existing communities and to develop the support of voluntary and community groups. In some cases not all of the above criteria will be in place before asylum seekers are dispersed and it is recognised that some support structures are unlikely to develop until asylum seekers are actually located in an area.

NASS is continuing its research to identify further cluster areas to ensure that dispersal is fair and equitable.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the *(a)* total population and *(b)* ethnic minority percentage are of each cluster area for dispersal of asylum seekers; [159744]

(2) what the criteria are for the designation of cluster areas for the reception of asylum seekers; [159745]

(3) what weighting is given to the size of the ethnic minority population as a factor designating cluster areas for asylum seekers; and what racial or ethnic affinities are taken into account; [159750]

(4) in taking account of the size of the local ethnic minority population in designating cluster areas for the reception of asylum seekers, whether asylum seekers already there are included; and what part the numbers of the latter play in the decision to locate further asylum seekers there. [159751]

**Mrs. Roche:** The identification of cluster areas follows research conducted centrally by the National Asylum Support Service and on information fed through by the local authority led regional consortiums, voluntary groups and other organisations with an interest. When considering if an area is suitable for accommodating asylum seekers a number of factors are taken into account. These include the make up of the local population, the number of asylum seekers already present in the area and the effect on the local area of placing additional asylum seekers there. The weight given to actual numbers will vary between areas. Information on the total population and percentage from ethnic minorities in individual cluster areas is not recorded centrally.

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds and when Grimsby was designated a cluster area for the reception of asylum seekers; and if he will set out the consequences of this designation. [159746]

**Mrs. Roche:** The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) consulted all regional consortiums to identify suitable cluster areas for the accommodation of asylum seekers before Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 came into force. As part of this consultation process NASS sought the views of the Yorkshire and Humberside regional consortium, of which Grimsby is part. The consortiums provided a list of towns and cities that were considered suitable to accommodate asylum seekers and the list from the Yorkshire and Humberside regional consortium included Grimsby. Grimsby has been designated as a cluster area since 3 April 2000, when the new support arrangements came into force.

Designation as a cluster area means that an area is deemed suitable to send asylum seekers under the dispersal arrangements operated by the National Asylum Support Service. Further, schools with asylum seeking children dispersed to the area by NASS on their registers were able in the last financial year 2000–01 to apply for additional grant of up to £500 per pupil. This grant could be used to assist the child to settle quickly into school. In addition the grant to the local authority is based on the standard spending assessment which takes account of rises in the local population.

**Mr. Coleman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum applications made in each year since 1996 are yet to be determined by his Department. [159581]

**Mrs. Roche:** The information is not readily available, and could be obtained only by examination of individual case records, and is, therefore, available only at disproportionate cost.

Information on the total number of applications awaiting an initial decision is published monthly on the web page: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html

The provisional number of applications awaiting an initial decision at the end of March 2001 was 36,390.

**Mr. Coleman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many asylum applicants whose applications were refused for non-compliance were subsequently granted *(a)* refugee status and *(b)* exceptional leave to enter or remain in each month of (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001; and what proportion this represents of the total numbers refused on that basis; [159586]

(2) in how many cases where asylum applications were refused for non-compliance those decisions were subsequently withdrawn in each month of *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [159585]

**Mrs. Roche:** The information is not readily available. Reliable data could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case files.

**Mr. Coleman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were granted *(a)* refugee status and *(b)* exceptional leave to enter or remain in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001, including those granted such status following an initial refusal of asylum. [159584]

**Mrs. Roche:** The information requested is not readily available and would be obtained only by examination of individual case files relating to the outcomes of initial decisions and of appeals, which would incur disproportionate cost.

Information on the outcomes of initial decisions, and on the outcomes or appeals determined by the immigration appellate authority, is published monthly on the Department's website at:

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/index.htm.

**Mr. Coleman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons whose asylum applications were refused in each month of *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001 were refused for (i) failing to return a statement of evidence within the time specified, (ii) returning a statement of evidence in a language other than English and (iii) returning a statement of evidence on time but inadequately completed. [159583]

**Mrs. Roche:** Information relating to asylum applicants who did not submit their statement of evidence form (SEF) within the 10 working day deadline, or submitted it within the time specified but inadequately completed or in a language other than English, is not currently routinely collected and so could be obtained only through examination of individual case records and is therefore available only at disproportionate cost.

The available information relates to total refusals of asylum on non-compliance grounds (failure to comply with our procedures and regulations) including failure to provide further evidence as required, failure to respond to invitations to interview to establish identity, failure to complete a SEF correctly and within the time allowed.

Information on the number of refusals, and the number of refusals on non-compliance grounds, is published regularly on the Department's website at:

www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/index.htm.

The statistics show that at least three quarters of applicants do complete their SEFs in time.

**Mr. Coleman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department makes a decision to refuse an asylum application on non-compliance grounds and later withdraws that decision to grant or refuse asylum in that case, if the second decision on that case is included as a decision made in the monthly statistics published by his Department. [159582]

**Mrs. Roche:** A small number of refusals on non-compliance grounds are reconsidered for a variety of reasons. Those cases are granted asylum, exceptional leave to remain or are refused based on the individual merits of each case. If in due course we find that a significant number of those cases result in the grant of asylum or exceptional leave to remain, we will consider what is the best way to publish the data on the outcomes of reconsidered decisions once we are satisfied that it is reliable.

The monthly statistics published by the Home Office are based on initial decision only.

### Ms Rachel Akuary

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to be able to confirm the identity of Ms Rachel Akuary of the Leeds, Central constituency in respect of her claim for income support. [158941]

**Mrs. Roche** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* I understand that Alexis Cleveland, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency, will be writing to my hon. Friend shortly regarding Ms Akuary's claim.

### Immigration Detainees

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the date and place of all suicide attempts by persons held under immigration law for each year since 1992. [158971]

**Mrs. Roche** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* Central records are not maintained specifically for suicide attempts by individuals detained under Immigration Act powers. Information is, however, maintained on actual self-inflicted deaths. In terms of immigration service detention centres, there has been one such incident: this occurred in January 2000 at Harmondsworth detention centre. Similarly, in terms of immigration detainees held in Prison Service accommodation, there has been one incident of self-inflicted death: this was in August 1995 at Her Majesty's prison, Norwich.

### Asylum and Immigration Act

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions there have been under section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* the period to April 2001; and if he will make a statement. [159441]

**Mrs. Roche:** For the year 2000, provisional data from the Home Office Court Proceedings database show that for the first three quarters of the year there were eight cases.

Data are not yet available about the number of section 8 prosecutions in the first quarter of 2001. The latest provisional information is that there have been 18 prosecutions to date under section 8 of the 1996 Act.

We are aware of the problem caused by unscrupulous gangmasters, and by others who commit offences under this section. Operation Leighton is a recent example of our commitment to combat illegal working and the exploitation of vulnerable people. Conducted on the morning of 24 April, it resulted in the arrest of 18 people on suspicion of involvement in facilitation, production of false documents and organising labour and the arrest of a further 107 people on suspicion of entering the United Kingdom illegally, overstaying or working in breach of entry conditions. To date, 111 people have been removed. The arrests mark the outcome of a comprehensive investigation demonstrating the value of a multi-agency approach against highly sophisticated and organised criminal activity.

### Licensing Laws

**Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce the outcome of consultations on the proposals for reform of the licensing laws set out in the White Paper, "Time for Reform". [160121]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** We are grateful for all the responses to our proposals. We have concluded that they confirm the case for comprehensive modernisation of the alcohol and entertainment licensing laws in England and Wales. They show that the White Paper proposals represent a sound basis for legislation and strike the right overall balance between the needs of business, the enlargement of consumer choice, and the interests of local residents.

Two issues raised by the White Paper attracted most comment: which body should be responsible for the new integrated licensing arrangements and whether licensing hours should be extended.

As to the former, the responses to the White Paper showed a great divergence of opinion. We have considered with care the views of those who argued that the new licensing authorities should be based on magistrates courts. However, there remains a clear need to bring greater democratic accountability to licensing, and we remain persuaded that local authorities are the right bodies for this purpose. It will of course be important for all licensing decisions to be taken, as the White Paper stressed, in accordance with fair and consistent procedures.

The balance of opinion among those who commented specifically on licensing hours in responding to the White Paper clearly supported our proposals for more flexible arrangements. They will make an important contribution to dealing with the problems of alcohol-related crime and disorder, alongside the provisions in the Criminal Justice and Police Bill.

The responses to the White Paper include a number of reservations or suggestions which are helpful, and which we shall want to pursue as we work up the detail of legislative proposals to bring before Parliament in due course. There is, however, one major point on which we have been persuaded by the consultations that a substantive change to the White Paper proposals is required.

The appeal arrangements described in the White Paper gave rise to considerable anxiety for many interested parties. We now intend to provide in legislation that appeals against licensing decisions should go to local magistrates courts on both law and merits, rather than to the Crown court.

We will continue to consult closely with all the interested parties as work on preparing the necessary legislation proceeds.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Electrical Goods

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in what respects average prices for each of the categories of electrical goods subject to the Restriction on Agreements and Conduct (Specified Domestic Electrical Goods) Order 1998 have altered in each of the last five years in *(a)* cash terms and *(b)* real terms. [159963]

**Dr. Howells** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The Office for National Statistics does not publish retail prices for individual goods. Rather, official retail price statistics are compiled in categories. The categories which include those electrical goods covered by the Restriction on Agreements and Conduct (Specified Domestic Electrical Goods) Order 1998 are:

audio-visual equipment (includes TVs, video recorders and hi fi systems);

household electrical appliances (includes washing machines, tumble dryers, dishwashers and cold food storage equipment); and

toys, photographic and sports equipment (includes camcorders).

The following table lists the year on year nominal and real price changes for these categories.

*Percentage*

| | *1995–96* | *1996–97* | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Audio visual* | | | | | |
| Nominal | –5.1 | –62. | –12.6 | –16.9 | –13.6 |
| Real | –7.3 | –9.1 | –15.5 | –18.2 | –16.1 |
| *Electrical appliances* | | | | | |
| Nominal | –2.9 | –3.5 | –2.4 | –2.9 | –4.9 |
| Real | –5.2 | –6.5 | –5.6 | –4.4 | –7.6 |
| *Toys, photographic and sports equipment* | | | | | |
| Nominal | 0.5 | –0.4 | –1.4 | –2.7 | –4.3 |
| Real | –1.9 | –3.4 | –4.7 | –4.2 | –7.1 |

### Engineering

**Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to protect employment levels in engineering. [159837]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** Our framework for encouraging macro-economic stability, together with our policies to help manufacturing and engineering companies to invest, innovate and to grow, are the best way to facilitate the long-term success of the UK engineering sector and enhance the job prospects of those within it.

### Internet Access (Merseyside)

**Mr. Hesford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he has taken to increase internet access for businesses in the Merseyside sub-region. [159561]

**Ms Hewitt:** Options for high-speed internet access for businesses in Merseyside have increased significantly in the last year.

BT have been upgrading exchanges across the UK to deliver ADSL services. Some 839 exchanges, serving over 50 per cent. of households and businesses, have been upgraded, a number of which are in Merseyside. Cable modem services are also being rolled out, and on Merseyside are available from the cable operator, Telewest.

Last November the Government auctioned licences in the 28 Ghz radio spectrum band which will enable the delivery of internet and multimedia services using wireless technology. Three licences were awarded for the region encompassing Greater Manchester, Merseyside and Cheshire.

### Post Offices

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much financial assistance will be made available to those post offices identified by the Government as most vulnerable. [158767]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** The Cabinet Office PIU report on modernising the post office network identified post offices in the rural network and in deprived urban areas as in need of special protection.

The Government have accepted all the recommendations of the PIU report on the post office network and under the spending review 2000, as the first stage of modernising the post office network, have ring-fenced support of £270 million over the next three years for new investment to start the implementation of the PIU report. £15 million of this ring-fenced funding has been allocated specifically to help sustain and improve post offices in deprived urban areas. A report from the Postal Services Commission advising the Government on the best way to channel financial assistance to rural post offices is expected in the autumn, following consultations and discussions with the Consumer Council for Post Services, the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters and other key post office network stakeholders.

In addition, a fund of £2 million has been set up to support relocation and refurbishment initiatives by volunteer or community groups to maintain or reopen post office facilities in areas where the traditional post office is closing.

### Export Licences

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Government will respond to the Defence, Foreign Affairs, International Development and Trade and Industry Committees' revised proposals for prior parliamentary scrutiny of export licences. [159708]

**Dr. Howells:** We will be publishing our official response to the quadripartite committee in due course.

### World Trade Organisation

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the use of World Trade Organisation-sponsored trade sanctions against developing countries which produce and export generic medicines used in the treatment of HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis and other diseases. [159706]

**Mr. Caborn:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, columns 585–86W.

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if it is his policy to support the reform of the World Trade Organisation's TRIPS agreement to improve poor people's access to essential drugs and medicines. [159705]

**Mr. Caborn:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 9 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 348W.

### Export Control and Non-proliferation Bill

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if, in developing the proposals in the draft Export Control and Non-Proliferation Bill, the Government will be evaluating measures to monitor the use of controlled goods once they have been exported from the UK. [159709]

**Dr. Howells:** The Government keep all export control procedures under continuous review, including the need for monitoring, where appropriate, the use of controlled goods once they have been exported from the UK. The Government will consider carefully any comments received on the issue of end-use monitoring during the current public consultation on the draft Export Control and Non-Proliferation Bill, which ends on 24 May.

### Rural Post Offices

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will respond to the recommendations of the PostComm inquiry into the future of the rural post office network. [159936]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** The recent responses to the PostComm discussion paper on preserving access to post offices in rural areas will feed into PostComm's annual report on the rural post office network and their advice to the Government on the best way to channel financial assistance to rural post offices due later in the year. The Government will then respond to the report's findings and to PostComm's advice.

**Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the rural post office network. [153643]

**Mr. Alan Johnson** *[pursuant to his reply, 22 March 2001, c. 480W]:* The reversal of the recent year-on-year trend of increasing rural closures is both welcome and important. However, I now realise that I was mistaken in claiming, as I did in response to the hon. Lady's supplementary question, that the 20 per cent. reduction in rural post office closures in the nine months to December 2000 compared with the corresponding period of the previous year was the first reduction of any sort in the past 18 years. I apologise for the error.

### Universal Bank

**Mr. Kirkwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will announce the final details of the proposed universal bank; and when he expects the new accounts to become available to post office users. [159935]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** Our intention is to sign a memorandum of understanding with the banks on universal banking services shortly. Detailed implementation is for the longer term and subject to further negotiations between the Post Office and the banks, and between the Post Office, their clients and potential suppliers. Universal banking services are scheduled to come on stream either before or at the time of transfer of benefit payments to ACT in 2003.

### Helplines

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by his Department and its agencies. [159502]

**Dr. Howells:** My Department operates an enquiry unit, which refers those members of the public contacting our general enquiry number 020 7215 5000 (Minicom for the hearing impaired: 020 7215 6740) to the range of sources of help and advice provided by the Department. DTI's website: www.dti.gov.uk also provides a number of links to such sources of information and advice.

A list of those individual helplines currently operated by the Department, which have been notified to the enquiry unit, as well as those provided by Companies House, the Employment Tribunals Service, the Radiocommunications Agency and the Small Business Service has been placed in the Library of the House.

The chief executives of the Insolvency Service and the Patent Office will reply direct to my hon. Friend.

Trade Partners UK, which brings together the work of my Department and the FCO in support of British trade and investment overseas, operates an UK enquiry service—020 7215 5444/5445—to assist UK businesses to find the appropriate contact within their network.

Individual Government offices for the regions also advertise their main contact points on their websites and in selected directories and publications.

### Miners' Compensation

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps are being taken to secure access to the health records of retired miners when the holders of these records refuse access. [159742]

**Mr. Hain:** Assessing compensation is part of an on-going legal process and they are required by law to release the records.

If there are difficulties of non-co-operation, Healthcall (who manage the medical assessment process for the Department) in liaison with the Department, issue two warning letters in sequence. If there is no satisfactory response within one week of the second letter, the Department will begin court proceedings. It has not been necessary to go beyond the second warning letter to date.

### Zimbabwe

**Mr. Wells:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the projects funded by his Department in Zimbabwe. [159569]

**Mr. Caborn:** My Department is not currently funding any projects in Zimbabwe.

### Appointments (Age Limits)

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what age limit is placed on appointments to public bodies in his Department; if this limit is mentioned in advertisements for such posts; and what the basis for this limit is. [158107]

**Dr. Howells:** As a general rule, none of the public appointments made by my Department has age limits, whether upper or lower, attached to them. The only exceptions to this general rule are a number of judicial appointments. They are:

*Employment Tribunals and the Employment Appeal Tribunal*

The retirement age is 70 for current members of these tribunals and will be 65 for all members appointed after 2000. Advertisements generally specify that applicants should be in a position to serve a full three year term before reaching the retirement age. This is based on the need to obtain a reasonable return of service for the investment in recruitment and training of the successful applicants.

*Central Arbitration Committee*

The current CAC Chairman is a High Court Judge and is therefore subject to arrangements for the judiciary. In the last recruitment round for Deputy Chairmen and Members no age limit was stipulated in the advertisement.

## PRIME MINISTER

### Lord Birt

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Prime Minister (1) how the work on crime undertaken by Lord Birt contributed to his speech "Improving Your Local Environment", delivered on 24 April; and if he will make a statement; [159967]

(2) which of the proposals in his speech "Improving Your Local Environment", delivered on 24 April, were put forward by Lord Birt in his capacity as the Government's adviser on crime; and if he will make a statement. [159966]

**The Prime Minister** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The proposals in my 24 April speech which related to crime reduction drew on the Government's strategy document "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead" (Cm 5074).

### Global Health Project

**Mr. Browne:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the performance and innovation unit's progress on the global health project. [159113]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 19 March 2001, *Official Report,* column 9W.

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Prime Minister if the Performance and Innovation Unit's global health project will examine the issue of patents protection and its impact on access to medicines; [159608]

(2) if he will make a statement on the PIU's progress on their global health project. [159609]

**The Prime Minister:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) on 19 March 2001, *Official Report,* column 9W. The project includes consideration of intellectual property protection.

### Sanctions

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Prime Minister if he will discuss with President Bush the consequences of sanctions against *(a)* Libya and *(b)* Iraq on the availability of oil supplies to the West. [159171]

**The Prime Minister:** UN sanctions against Libya have been suspended since April 1999. Therefore, they have no impact on the availability of oil supplies from Libya to the West.

Following the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1284 (1999), Iraq is permitted to export unlimited amounts of oil under the UN oil-for-food programme.

### Laeken Summit

**Mr. Maude:** To ask the Prime Minister what the conclusions were of his recent discussions with the Belgian Prime Minister on the preparations for the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council and the Laeken Summit. [159862]

**The Prime Minister:** Mr. Verhofstadt and I had useful discussions on a range of issues likely to feature during the Belgian Presidency of the European Union. We agreed to work closely together throughout the Presidency.

## WALES

### GM Crops

**Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Secretary for Rural Affairs of the National Assembly for Wales about the proposed trial growing of GM maize at Mathry, Pembrokeshire. [159996]

**Mr. Hanson:** I have regular discussions with the Secretary for Rural Affairs of the National Assembly for Wales on a variety of issues, including GM issues.

The decision on locations for the trials was taken by the scientific steering committee, on the basis of advice from the research consortium and information about the availability of sites from the supply chain initiative on modified agricultural crops (SCIMAC).

**Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Cabinet Office concerning the National Assembly for Wales's policy on GM crops. [159993]

**Mr. Hanson:** As a member of the Ministerial Committee on Biotechnology and Genetic Modification, I have regular discussions with the Minister of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on policy on GM crops.

European Directive 90/220/EEC governs the release and marketing of GMOs in the European Union. It recognises two broad categories of release of GMOs into the environment: part B releases for research trials and part C releases for marketing purposes.

Applications for part C consents in any EU member state are circulated to the European Commission and to all other member states, who forward them to their experts and competent authorities (including the devolved Administrations in the case of the UK). When all member states have commented and if there are no objections, then the application will proceed. Once a part C consent has been approved in any one member state of the European Union, it is valid throughout the European Union. GM Maize already has a part C consent.

However, the Government have negotiated a voluntary written agreement with the industry biotechnology body, SCIMAC, that there will be no commercial growing of GM crops for a three-year period during which farm scale evaluations (FSEs) are undertaken. This means there will be no widespread planting leading to general market access of GM crops grown in the UK until the FSEs are complete.

In Great Britain, directive 90/220 has been implemented by part VI of the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) 1990 and the Genetically Modified Organisms (Deliberate Release) Regulations 1992, as amended in 1995 and 1997. The functions of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under part VI of the EPA have been transferred to the National Assembly for Wales. The Assembly has now recognised that it does not have a sufficient basis for the exercise of its powers under section 110 of the EPA 1990 to restrict the planting of GM crops on the sites currently proposed. It now proposes to place existing separation distances between sites of GM and non-GM means of production on a statutory basis. This will trigger a notification to Europe under article 16 of European directive 90/220, affording the Assembly an opportunity to take its concerns directly to the European Commission.

UK Ministers continue to keep the issues under review and are committed to ensuring the coexistence of different types of farming.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Helplines

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by her Department and its agencies. [159499]

**Jane Kennedy:** The departmental headquarters operates a general telephone helpline facility for members of the public. The Court Service headquarters operates two helplines; a general customer service line and one that deals specifically with disability issues. The Crown court at Blackfriars operates a jury summoning helpline, Central London county court and Birmingham county court operate general helplines, as does the Immigration Appellate Authority in Loughborough. Most of the associated offices operate general inquiry lines that are manned during normal working hours; the judge Advocate General's office (four lines), the Public Guardianship Office (four lines), the Official Solicitor's Office (two lines), the Legal Services Ombudsman (one line) and the Council on Tribunals (one line). The Public Record Office has a contact centre to respond to inquiries from the public that uses an automated system with the option to speak to a member of staff. The 24 district land registries along with the Land Registry headquarters and land charges department operate a mixture of automated and manned helplines to assist the public.

### Domestic Boundary Dispute

**Mr. Laxton:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* double registration and *(b)* other domestic boundary disputes were handled by the Land Registry in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000; of these, how many were (i) the subject of court action, (ii) resolved in court and (iii) settled in court on the basis of (A) loser pays winner's costs, (B) each party pays its own costs and (C) other

arrangements for bearing costs; how long on average it took to settle such disputes; and what the average legal costs were for both parties combined. [159676]

**Jane Kennedy:** The Land Registry does not keep a record of the total number of boundary disputes which arise in cases it handles. It does, however, maintain a record of those cases in which an error in the extent of a registered title leads to the payment of indemnity under the Land Registration Act 1925. The figures for the last four financial years are as follows:

| | *Number of cases* |
|---|---|
| 1997–98 | 231 |
| 1998–99 | 288 |
| 1999–2000 | 359 |
| 2000–01 | 329 |

To determine how many of these related to *(a)* double registrations and *(b)* domestic properties would be possible only at disproportionate cost.

### Immigration Appeals Tribunal

**Mrs. Ewing:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has to review the Immigration Appeals Tribunal established in Scotland in February 1997. [159858]

**Jane Kennedy:** There are no current plans to review the tribunal in Scotland. In view of the impending move of the tribunal tier of the Immigration Appellate Authorities to a new premises in London later this year it is intended to undertake a review of the administrative process of the tribunal. The review will be carried out in consultation with users and will consider the most effective and fair way to deal with the increase in work resulting from the Government's dispersal initiative.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many special advisers worked in her Department from 1997 to date. [160037]

**Jane Kennedy:** The Lord Chancellor's Department has one special adviser, who joined the Department on 5 March 1998.

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total cost was of employing special advisers in her Department from 1997 to date. [160046]

**Jane Kennedy:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 607W.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### BSE

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the results from the second BSE survey of cattle aged over five years begun in May 2000 are available. [160400]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** Yes. 9,526 samples taken from cattle over five years old slaughtered in Great Britain under the over-30-months scheme (OTMS) between May and December 2000 were tested for BSE by histological examination of the brain. Of these 0.41 per cent. (39) tested positive. This compares with 0.45 per cent. (18) positive results by the same method of examination in the first survey in 1999 when 3,951 cattle aged over five years old were tested. These brain samples, and others that proved unsuitable for examination by histological examination are being further tested by means of a rapid test, and results will be reported as soon as they are available.

These results will be used to evaluate results of additional surveys of fallen stock or casualties, and to enable the decline of the BSE epidemic in Great Britain to be more fully analysed. Because of the OTMS none of these cattle would have gone into the food chain.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Baker:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out his policy in respect of the vaccination of rare breeds during the present foot and mouth outbreak. [159591]

**Mr. Morley** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The chief scientific adviser's foot and mouth disease science group said last month that it did not recommend a vaccination programme for rare breeds. In the light of this, the Government have not sought EC approval to vaccinate rare breeds. Following consultations, my right hon. Friend announced measures to protect rare breeds of sheep in his statements to the House on 26 April and these were covered in the joint instruction on slaughter policy on contiguous premises issued by the Ministry on 27 April.

**Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what his estimate is of the number of dairy herds unable to be inseminated for the purposes of continuing milk production. [156914]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* We are aware that the current ban on artificial insemination (AI) by technicians in infected areas will pose problems for some farmers, although we are not in a position to quantify the extent. On 29 April there were around 8,000 dairy holdings (as classified in the June 2000 agricultural census) in the infected areas in England. Not all of these will use AI; some will own a bull. Of those that do use AI, some will use the DIY method (where licensed movement of semen is permitted, subject to certain conditions) and others AI companies. We have already taken some action to alleviate the problems faced by farmers and we are actively considering other ways in which we can provide assistance in this area.

### Flood Defences

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list local authorities which have *(a)* indicated that they are unwilling or unable to inspect flood defences and critical watercourses and *(b)* failed to respond to the Environment Agency's inquiries on this. [159351]

**Mr. Morley:** The Environment Agency has provided the following information:

(a) local authorities who have so far indicated that they are unwilling or unable to inspect flood defences and critical watercourses.

*Local authorities not prepared to inspect defences*

Bedford Borough Council
Forest Heath District Council
Haringey London Borough Council
North Hertfordshire District Council
Reading Borough Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council
South Oxfordshire District Council

*Local authorities not prepared to inspect but have informed where defences are*

Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council
Gedling Borough Council
Merton London Borough Council
Newark and Sherwood District Council
Oxford City Council
Richmond upon Thames London Borough Council
Rushcliffe Borough Council
Wandsworth London Borough Council
Woking Borough Council
Wokingham Council

*Local authorities willing but unable*[1]

Alnwick District Council
Ashford Borough Council
Bath and North Somerset Council
Barnet London Borough Council
Basildon District Council
Baskingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Berwick upon Tweed Borough Council
Borough of Blyth Valley Council
Bournemouth Borough Council
Bracknell Forest Borough Council
Bromley London Borough Council
Bromsgrove District Council
Broxbourne District Council
Bury Borough Council
Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Cannock Chase District Council
Canterbury City Council
Carrick District Council
Castle Morpeth Borough Council
Chester le Street District Council
Christchurch Borough Council
Coventry City Council
Crawley District Council
Croydon London Borough Council
Dacorum Borough Council
Dartford Borough Council
Derwentside District Council
Dover District Council
Dudley Metropolitan Council
Durham City Council
Easington District Council
East Dorset District Council
East Hampshire District Council
East Hertfordshire District Council
East Northamptonshire District Council
Eastleigh Borough Council
Elmbridge Borough Council
Enfield London Borough Council
Epsom and Ewell Borough Council
Greenwich London Borough Council
Hackney London Borough Council
Harlow District Council
Hart District Council
Hillingdon London Borough Council
Ipswich Borough Council
Kent County Council
Kerrier District Council
Kington upon Thames Royal Borough Council
Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council
Lewisham London Borough Council
Maidstone Borough Council
Maldon District Council
Malvern District Council
Medway Council
Mendip District Council
Newcastle upon Tyne City Council
North Dorset District Council
North Norfolk District Council
North Shropshire District Council
North Somerset Council
Penwith District Council
Plymouth City Council
Poole Borough Council
Purbeck District Council
Reigate and Banstead Borough Council
Richmondshire District Council
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Rushmoor Borough Council
Salisbury District Council
Sedgemoor District Council
Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council
Sevenoaks District Council
Sheffield City Council
South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
Southend on Sea Borough Council
St. Albans District Council
St. Helens Borough Council
Stafford Borough Council
Stevenage Borough Council
Stoke on Trent City Council
Stratford on Avon District Council
Stroud District Council
Suffolk Coastal District Council
Sunderland City Council
Sutton London Borough Council
Swale Borough Council
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council
Tamworth Borough Council
Taunton Deane Borough Council
Telford and Wrekin Council
Test Valley Borough Council
Three Rivers District Council

Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council
Wakefield City Council
Waltham Forest London Borough Council
Wansbeck District Council
Watford Borough Council
West Berkshire Council
West Dorset District Council
West Somerset District Council
West Wiltshire District Council
Weymouth and Portland Borough Council
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council
Wrexham Borough Council
Wyre Forest District Council

[1] Have identified where defences are and some are actively seeking resources to carry out inspections

(b) local authorities who have so far failed to respond to the Environment Agency's inquiries regarding these inspections:

Breckland District Council
Castle Point Borough Council
Ealing London Borough Council
East Cambridgeshire District Council
East Lindsey District Council
Fenland District Council
Huntingdonshire District Council
King's Lynn and West Norfolk District Council
Lambeth London Borough Council
Milton Keynes District Council
North East Lincolnshire Council
Norwich City Council
Shepway District Council
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

### Animal Welfare

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, with statistical information, the effects of his Department's policies and actions in relation to animal welfare since 2 May 1997. [158904]

**Mr. Morley:** This Department has concluded a range of measures since May 1997 to improve farm animal welfare, both at EU level and domestically. We have successfully negotiated a protocol to the treaty of Rome that recognises animals as sentient beings; agreed minimum EU welfare standards for all farm animals; and secured detailed EU rules for the welfare of laying hens. At home, we have introduced an updated code of recommendations on the welfare of sheep; continued our advisory campaigns for farmers on welfare issues; and committed substantial sums to farm animal welfare research and development. Full details of these, and many other, measures may be obtained from the Department's website http://www.maff.gov.uk/.

### Environmental Impact Assessment Directive

**Mr. Todd:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he will publish proposals on implementing the uncultivated land provisions of the environmental impact assessment directive. [159350]

**Mr. Morley:** The Rural White Paper gave an undertaking that MAFF would consult on the application of environmental impact assessment procedures to projects intended to make more intensive agricultural use of uncultivated land. The consultation paper will be published today.

## CABINET OFFICE

### Positive Futures

6. **Ms Blears:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans she has to involve more young people in Positive Futures projects in the north-west region. [159100]

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** We have set aside an extra £5 million over two years to help expand the scope and scale of Positive Futures. Up to 80 new projects will be set up and we aim to expand those already in place including Blackburn, Bolton and Salford.

To help with this expansion major sports stars, including Sir Alex Ferguson, Tammi Grey Thompson and Andy Cole, have offered their support and will act as role models for the kids. There is no doubt that the participation of heroes from the world of sport can make all the difference in helping a vulnerable young person reach their potential.

The areas being earmarked for expansion include Coventry, Leicester, Sunderland, Liverpool, Leeds, north London, Brighton, the West Country, Essex and South Wales.

### Special Advisers

8. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the Government's policy on employing special advisers during a general election. [159102]

12. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the Government's policy towards employing special advisers. [159106]

15. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the Government's policy towards employing special advisers. [159110]

16. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the Government's policy towards employing special advisers. [159112]

**Marjorie Mowlam:** The rules are unchanged from the previous Administration. Special advisers who remain in post during the election period will continue to be governed by the Model Contract for Special Advisers. Guidance has also been issued to them on their activities during the election period. The Guidance that will be issued to all civil servants as soon as the election is announced will also apply.

9. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the salary bill for special advisers will be for the 2001–02 financial year assuming they all receive the maximum performance increments during this financial year. [159103]

**Marjorie Mowlam:** The estimated salary bill for special advisers for 2001–02 is £4.4 million.

## European Regulatory Environment

10. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress she has made on reform of the European regulatory environment; and if she will make a statement. [159104]

**Mr. Stringer:** We have worked closely with other member states for instance through joint statements and initiatives, such as the Mandelkern Group and the Commission to achieve the real progress my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister reported to this House on 26 March following the Stockholm European Council.

11. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what action her Department has taken to tackle the problem of drug misuse in South Ribble; and if she will make a statement. [159105]

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** We are making good progress nation-wide in all areas of the Government's anti-drugs strategy as reported in the UK Anti-Drugs Coordinator's Annual Report for 1999–2000, published on 7 November 2000.

South Ribble lies within the boundary of the Lancashire Drug Action Team—one of the largest DATs in the country. To date, over 230 individuals have benefited from Arrest Referral Services.

New Government resources are being targeted at increasing GP shared care, service capacity and child specific services.

17. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much the Government are spending in the financial year 2001–02 on misuse of drugs across all its Departments and agencies. [159114]

**Marjorie Mowlam:** The Government have made available substantial resources for directly tackling the problem of drug misuse. These are planned to increase from £700 million in 2000–01 to over £1 billion in 2003–04.

Details for 2001–02 are set out in the tables.

Key expenditure figures:

*2000 spending review—resources directly allocated for tackling drug abuse (by main aim of the national anti-drugs strategy)*[1]

*£ million*

| | *2001–02* |
|---|---|
| Drug Treatment[2] | 328 |
| Protecting Young People | 90 |
| Safeguarding Communities | 79 |
| Reducing Availability[3] | 373 |
| Total | 870 |

[1] Excludes expenditure by devolved Administration

[2] Comprises mainstream spending by Department of Health, local authorities and the pooled National Treatment Agency budget. Excludes additional Prison Service treatment spend, brigaded under Communities.

[3] Based on projected anti-drugs allocation from anti-Organised Crime shared funding

*2000 spending review—new resources provided for related programmes*[1]

*£ million*

| | *2001–02* |
|---|---|
| Criminal Justice System | 1,420 |
| Neighbourhood Renewal Fund | 200 |
| Children's Fund | 100 |
| Connexions[2] | 77 |

[1] Excludes expenditure by devolved Administration

[2] This was added to existing provision for the careers service. Funding will go to the careers services in areas where Connexions is not yet running

*Budget 2001—new resources for anti-drugs measures*[1]

*£ million*

| | *2001–02* |
|---|---|
| Strengthening communities | 50 |
| Extending drug testing in the CJS | 0 |
| Providing more help to find jobs | 5 |
| Strengthening DATs | 5 |
| Expanding Positive Futures | 2 |

[1] Excludes expenditure by devolved Administration

22. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress has been made in multi-agency co-operation in tackling drug abuse problems in the last year. [159123]

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** Co-operation between agencies is essential to the success of the Government's anti-drugs strategy, particularly at local level. The Lancashire Drug Action Team is working closely with 12 Community Safety Partnerships on a range of initiatives designed to tackle drug misuse in the area. Examples in Burnley include targeting action to increase child specific services, reducing waiting times for specialist treatment, auditing service provision to ensure new resources are targeted where they are most needed, and encouraging opportunities for residents to voice their views on substance misuse.

We have also made available nationwide an additional £220 million to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships working with Drug Action Teams to build stronger community links and help police and local communities tackle neighbourhood drug problems and the crime associated with them. Partnerships will be free to use this money imaginatively on what will work in their own areas—for example, CCTV in key places, better street lighting or other environmental initiatives that improve visibility and make people feel safer, or to fund police actions against crime associated with drugs.

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress has been made on establishing baseline figures for measuring the Government's targets on reducing drug use. [159118]

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** The Government have set demanding targets in all four areas of their 10 year anti-drugs strategy—halving drug use among young people, halving re-offending by drug-misusing offenders, doubling the numbers of people entering treatment and halving the availability of Class A drugs—and have put in place comprehensive research and information projects to measure progress.

In one of the areas—halving drug misuse among young people—a baseline figure has been established using the 1998 British Crime Survey. This showed that the proportion of 16 to 24-year-olds reporting use of Class A drugs in the last years was 8.3 per cent. and in the last month was 3.4 per cent.

Baselines for the other areas will be established within the next 12 months.

23. **Mrs. Gilroy:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment she has made of the impact of the Government's anti-drug policies on the south-west. [159124]

**Marjorie Mowlam:** We review the progress of local Drug Action Teams annually, through their reports and plans. Reports for 2000–01 are due from Drug Action Teams by the end of April, which will allow us to assess progress of the Government's anti-drugs strategy nationally, regionally and locally.

Emerging information indicates that all Drug Action Teams in the south-west have submitted treatment plans. In addition, a Public Health Observatory has been established to assess the health impact of drug use in the region; Arrest Referral Schemes have been implemented in custody suites in all police force areas; and Drug Treatment and Testing Orders continue to be rolled out across the region.

### Departmental Advertising

13. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on her departmental budget for advertising. [159108]

**Mr. Stringer:** The UK Online project has a budget for Marketing Communications, including advertising, in the current financial year of £5 million. Apart from that, the departmental budget for advertising in the current financial year is under £200,000, most of which is for civil service recruitment.

### Senior Civil Service

14. **Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what percentage of the Senior Civil Service has been recruited from the private sector. [159109]

**Mr. Stringer:** In 1996, 23 people were recruited from the private sector into the Senior Civil Service. In 1999–2000 this had increased to 44 (27.9 per cent. of appointments made). 158 vacancies in the Senior Civil Service were filled by open competition in this period, and nearly two-thirds of them were filled by people from outside the civil service. In addition people are brought in on secondment; last year there were 354 from other sectors into the Senior Civil Service.

### Public Appointments Commission

18. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office on how many occasions since May 1997 the Public Appointments Commission has rejected candidates on the grounds of political affiliation. [159115]

**Mr. Stringer:** The Commissioner for Public Appointments is responsible for overseeing the process for appointments to public bodies. She has no involvement in individual appointment decisions.

### Modernising Government

19. **Mr. Mackinlay:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent progress has been made on items contained in the latest annual report on modernising Government. [159116]

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** I have been impressed with the progress I have seen since the publication last September of the Modernising Government annual report, "Citizens First". For example:

> Employment Service Direct, which featured in "Open All Hours", our "Citizens First" report on extended hours services published in March, is available for anyone looking for a full or part-time job. And a network of employer service centres will be running by October to help employers advertise their vacancies quickly and easily.

In my hon. Friend's own constituency, modernisation is going well. For example, the Thurrock Youth Service is supporting young people in the period of their transition from dependence to independence by offering a wide-ranging curriculum that facilitates personal and social development and enables young people to gain a voice, influence and place in society.

### Better Regulation Taskforce

21. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the work of the better regulation taskforce. [159119]

**Mr. Stringer:** Further to my reply of 21 March to the hon. Gentleman, the Better Regulation Taskforce studies of the economic regulators, the impact of Housing Benefit on lone parents, and regulations affecting local shopkeepers will be published over the course of the summer.

### Rough Sleepers Strategy

24. **Mr. Hope:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent meetings she has had with charities and local service providers to discuss the Government's rough sleepers strategy. [159125]

**Marjorie Mowlam:** In the past six months I have met with or had visits to the following organisations involved with helping rough sleepers: Huge Move, Help the Aged, Look Ahead, St. Thomas's Nightshelter, Brighton Housing Trust, Passage House Nightshelter, Bethnal Green Training Centre for the homeless.

I also regularly meet my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions, the Minister responsible for the Government's strategy on rough sleeping, and Louise Casey, Head of the Rough Sleepers' Unit, who is in contact with charities and local service providers on a day-to-day basis.

### Regulatory Burden (Public Sector Workers)

25. **Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps are being taken to reduce the burden of regulation on public sector workers. [159126]

**Mr. Stringer:** In November 1999 the Minister for the Cabinet Office established a Public Sector Team within the Regulatory Impact Unit with the remit of cutting red tape and burden in the public sector.

The team has focused on reducing the burden on frontline public sector workers and in the last 12 months has produced reports on:

the police saving an estimated 166,000 hours annually;

headteachers saving an estimated 200 hours per school annually; and

most recently GP doctors, launched by the Prime Minister, saving an estimated 7.2 million appointments and 750,000 hours annually.

The reports were widely welcomed among public sector workers and the Public Sector Team is continuing with this work. There are plans for a further three reports during the next 12 months.

### NHS Appointments

26. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when she last met the Commissioner for Public Appointments to discuss NHS appointments. [159127]

**Mr. Stringer:** NHS appointments are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health.

### Government Websites

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps her Department has taken to co-ordinate the development of protocols for providing content for Government websites. [159097]

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** In 1999 my Department published a Framework for Information Age Government Websites. Included within these guidelines is information on the type of content to be expected on Government sites.

The websites are subject to the conventions on Government publicity. Basically they require that information should:

be relevant to Government responsibilities;

be objective and explanatory;

not be, or be liable to misrepresentation as being, party political; and

be conducted in an economic and appropriate way, having regard to the need to be able to justify the costs as expenditure of public funds.

These guidelines are available on the Cabinet Office website.

### Rural Affairs Committee

**Mr. St. Aubyn:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many meetings of the Government's Rural Affairs Committee she has attended in the last 12 months. [159101]

**Marjorie Mowlam:** It is established practice under exemption two of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committees.

### Iran

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to her answer of 21 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 325, what action she has taken following the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Iran on drugs co-operation; and if she will make a statement. [159111]

**Marjorie Mowlam:** Since signing the Memorandum of Understanding on drugs co-operation on 27 February, UK and Iranian specialists have commenced a UNDCP facilitated technical mission to examine ways of sustaining the reduction of opium poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. We are also discussing ways of furthering our bilateral assistance with the Iranian customs. Both the UK and Iran are committed to vigorous anti-drugs efforts.

### Departmental Policies (Amber Valley)

**Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Amber Valley constituency, the effects on Amber Valley of her Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157136]

**Mr. Stringer:** The Cabinet Office is responsible for a range of functions which cover England as a whole, or in relation to non-devolved matters, Great Britain or the United Kingdom. It is therefore not possible to say what their specific impact is on a particular constituency. Additionally any policy changes arising form reports by Cabinet Office units, such as the Social Exclusion Unit and the United Kingdom Anti-Drugs Co-ordination Unit, are implemented by the appropriate Government Department, rather than by the Unit itself.

# Written Answers to Questions

*Thursday 3 May 2001*

## SOLICITOR-GENERAL

### Treasury Solicitor's Department

**Mr. Miller:** To ask the Solicitor-General what progress has been made in the review of the work of the Treasury Solicitor's Department. [160590]

**The Solicitor-General:** I refer to the review of the Treasury Solicitor's Department that I announced to this House on 8 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 336W.

I am pleased to announce the publication of the report on the first stage of the review. The report concludes that the Treasury Solicitor's Department has generally provided a high quality service to the Government and should continue to be an agency. Stage 2 of the review will examine how the agency's performance can be enhanced and improved to meet the increasing demands upon its services.

## INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### External Development Assistance

**Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the Government's plans for future collaboration with the European Community in the area of external development assistance. [160533]

**Clare Short:** I have approved a new Department for International Development institutional strategy paper for the European Community, which has been prepared in consultation with the European Commission, other member states and civil society. The paper sets out a number of objectives for my Department's work with the EC over the next three to four years. These focus on four key impact areas: EC external assistance programmes which contribute effectively to the achievement of the international development targets; trade and other EC policies that help developing countries benefit from the global economy; integration of environmental issues for sustainable poverty reduction; and effective EC responses to crises, conflict and humanitarian disasters.

A copy of the institutional strategy paper is available in the Library of the House.

### Official Visits

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what visits her Permanent Secretary attended with members and officials of the United States Government during his visits to New York on 20 to 22 March 2000 and to Washington on 15 to 22 April 2000. [159807]

**Clare Short:** From 20–22 March 2000, the Permanent Secretary of DFID held discussions with the UK Mission to the UN, New York; with the Deputy Secretary-General of the UN; with the heads of the UNDP and UNICEF; and with the Under Secretary-General for the UN for Economic and Social Affairs.

From 15–22 April 2000, the Permanent Secretary of DFID held discussions, at the time of the IMF/World Bank spring meetings, with the President of the World Bank; with the head of USAID; and with a number of visiting Finance Ministers. He attended the meetings of the IMF and Development Committees.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the visits outside Britain made by her Department's Permanent Secretary on official business since 11 July 2000, indicating the date and purpose of the visit in each case. [159806]

**Clare Short:** The Permanent Secretary of the DFID made the following visits outside Britain on official business since 11 July 2000:

| *Country* | *Date* | *Purpose* |
|---|---|---|
| *2000* | | |
| Malta | 19–21 September | Commonwealth Finance Ministers Meeting |
| Czech Republic | 23–28 September | IMF/World bank Spring Meetings |
| New York and Ottawa | 12–13 October | Discussion with heads of UN Funds and Programmes<br>Discussions with Canadian International Development Agency |
| Germany | 9 November | Discussion with the German Ministry for Development Corporation |
| Nepal | 20–22 November | Discussions with Ministers and DFID Office |
| India | 23–25 November | Discussions with Ministers and DFID Office |
| *2001* | | |
| Zimbabwe | 22–24 January | Discussions with DFID Office |
| Malawi | 24–26 January | Discussions with Ministers and DFID Office |
| Tanzania | 19–21 February | Discussions with Ministers and DFID Office |
| Kenya | 22 February | Discussions with Ministers and DFID Office |
| Australia, Fiji and Thailand | 20–25 March | Discussions with Australian officials<br>Discussion with DFID Office<br>Discussion with DFID Office |
| Washington | 27–30 April | IMF/IBRD Spring Meetings |

### Earthquake (Turkey)

**Ann Clwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the earthquake relief given by her Department to Turkey. [159923]

**Clare Short:** In response to both the earthquakes in Turkey, in August and November 1999, my Department contributed a total of nearly £2 million to support the emergency relief effort, co-ordinated by the Turkish Government.

We provided immediate support to the search and rescue effort with specialist personnel from the UK fire service as well as other independent UK-based rescue organisations. In addition, we transported numerous relief items to the region (on behalf of the Red Cross and UNICEF), including medical supplies and tents.

We also channelled funds through the UN and the Red Cross for the provision of essential relief items such as shelter materials, medical supplies, food, water and sanitation equipment.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Immigration and Nationality Directorate

**Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will receive the annual report for 2000 of the immigration and nationality directorate's independent complaints audit committee; and if he will make a statement. [160481]

**Mr. Straw:** A copy of the report has been placed in the Library and on the immigration and nationality directorate website. It is a useful and informative document, and I am grateful to the committee for its comments and its recommendations, which will all be followed up.

### Electronic Data Tags

**Mr. Stephen Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on adopting the use of electronic data tags to reduce property crime. [160482]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** In May last year, the Government announced the allocation of £4.5 million to combat the trade in stolen goods by planting small identity microchips in consumer products at risk from theft. In partnership with a range of commercial companies, we are developing a series of pilot demonstrator projects to show how property crime can be reduced throughout the supply chain. These pilot projects aim to demonstrate the effectiveness of radio frequency identification technology (RFID) in combating property crime by providing proof of ownership of goods and confirming that they are not stolen or counterfeit.

The initiative aims to make it more difficult for offenders to steal and sell stolen property, easier for the police to recover it when they do, and to accelerate the adoption of this technology by business. The response from industry to the scheme has been excellent and details of the first pilot projects will be announced very shortly. In view of the high level of interest generated, I am pleased to announce that the Government have allocated an additional £1 million to this initiative to allow the number and scope of pilot projects to be increased.

### Asylum Support Adjudicators

**Mr. Pond:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce the increase in remuneration for the asylum support adjudicators for 2001–02. [160483]

**Mr. Straw:** The chief asylum support adjudicator's remuneration will be equivalent to grade 6.1 of the SSRB judicial scale, which for 2001–02 will be £99,420.

The asylum support adjudicators remuneration (and daily fees) will be increased by 3.7 per cent. in line with the recommendations of the Senior Salaries Review Body report No. 46, the twenty-third report on senior salaries (Cm 4995), which was presented to Parliament in February 2001.

### Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act

**Dr. Gibson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review schedule 1 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. [160594]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** I am arranging for possible changes to the schedule to be considered by the Animal Procedures Committee, the statutory body which advises the Secretary of State on the operation of the 1986 Act. Before deciding on the action to be taken we will carefully consider the committee's recommendations.

### Appointment of Assistant Surveillance Commissioners

**Maria Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements have been made for the appointment of assistant surveillance commissioners under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [160595]

**Mr. Straw:** On 1 May 2001, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister appointed three assistant surveillance commissioners—His Honour John Jeremy Fordham, His Honour Colin Francis Kolbert, and Viscount Colville of Culross QC—for a period of three years to assist the chief surveillance commissioner in his duties.

### HM Chief Inspectors

**Maria Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who has been appointed as the next HM chief inspector of prisons; and if he will make a statement. [160596]

**Mr. Straw:** Recruitment for the post of Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons has been run under Commissioner for Public Appointments guidelines following advertisements in the national press. The choice of candidates has been guided by an advisory panel including two independent assessors. As we announced on 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 357W, these were Baroness Stern, former director of the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders and now senior research fellow at the international centre for prison studies, and Lord Laming, former chief

inspector of the social services inspectorate and author of the report "Modernising the Management of the Prison Service".

From the candidates selected by the advisory panel, I have recommended that Her Majesty the Queen should appoint Ms Anne Owers CBE, the director of the non-governmental organisation JUSTICE, as the next Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons. Her Majesty has consented to this appointment.

I am delighted that Ms Owers has accepted the appointment, which takes effect from 1 August this year. I am confident she will uphold the high standards of integrity, rigour and independence we expect from the inspection of this key public service.

### Voluntary and Community Sector

**Mr. Michael:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for the funding of mentoring organisations, for making the small grants programmes more integrated and accessible to community groups and for strengthening the infrastructure that builds the capacity of the voluntary and community sector. [160258]

**Mr. Boateng:** In working towards our goal of encouraging and supporting new mentors, I am today pleased to be able to announce the launch of a mentoring fund grants programme.

With up to £5.3 million available over three years, the mentoring fund will provide grants for mentoring organisations to:

enhance or extend their current mentoring activity;

develop schemes in new geographical areas;

reach new audiences.

This will enable more volunteer mentors to be available where they are needed, on the ground in local areas.

This Government also recognise the need for a national infrastructure to promote, develop and celebrate mentoring and to establish a framework of national quality standards for local mentoring schemes. I am therefore pleased to announce that we will be awarding the national mentoring network a grant of £1.05 million over three years to develop the infrastructure of mentoring. I am also pleased to announce that to team up new mentors with mentoring opportunities, we are investing a further £1.4 million into mentor points.

We also want to make it easier for people in community groups to apply for Government funds. So we are happy to announce the publication today of a consultation document on funding community groups. This sets out a number of proposals that aim to ensure that in future Government small grants programmes will be more integrated, and that application processes will be simpler and more accessible to local community groups. The document also explains how the Government plan to establish and operate the new neighbourhood renewal community chests, announced in the national strategy action plan in January 2001.

I have today placed a copy of the consultation document in the Library.

We recognise the independent role of the voluntary and community sector in building strong communities, and the need that organisations and groups, and the individuals involved, have for "capacity building" support to help them fulfil that role as effectively as possible. In addition to providing strategic funding to over 60 national infrastructure organisations, the Government have earmarked funds for:

an integrated database to provide comprehensive and co-ordinated information;

a major training programme to support charity trustees;

a media awareness training programme for volunteer bureaux;

an integrated database of social entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial organisations to facilitate better networking.

The Government are also announcing today funding totalling £320,000 over three years to the Federation of Community Work Training Groups to develop the infrastructure for community development learning.

### Police IT

**Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place to ensure there is fair and open competition for the provision of information technology systems and software to police services; and if he will make a statement. [159694]

**Mr. Charles Clarke** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Government procurement procedures are followed to ensure that there is fair and open competition for the provision of information technology systems and software for the police. These procedures comply with the relevant European Directive on procurement.

### Data Protection Act

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many alleged contraventions of the Data Protection Act 1998 are outstanding before the Information Commissioner; what the date is of the oldest complaint; what is *(a)* the average and *(b)* the mean age of outstanding complaints; and if he will make a statement; [160161]

(2) in what circumstances, when requested to do so on a complaint under section 55 of the Data Protection Act 1998, the Information Commissioner will institute *(a)* criminal inquiries and *(b)* downgrade the complaint to an assessment under section 42; [160160]

(3) in what circumstances the Information Commissioner will require from a complainant, before investigating a complaint under *(a)* section 55 and *(b)* section 42, (i) conclusive evidence of breaches of the Data Protection Act 1998, (ii) compelling evidence, (iii) prima facie case or (iv) other supporting evidence, and in each case, on what basis the request by the Commissioner is made; and if he will make a statement; [160158]

(4) under a complaint made under section 42 of the Data Protection Act 1998, evidence obtained by the Information Commissioner is admissible evidence where breaches of section 55 are revealed by the Commissioner's investigation; and if he will make a statement; [160157]

(5) when he expects to receive a report on the complaint to the Data Protection Commissioner, dated 27 July 2000, made by Hendon Conservative Association against the Conservative Party Secretariat; and if he will make a statement. [160159]

**Mr. Mike O'Brien:** These questions cover matters which fall within the operational responsibility of the Information Commissioner. The Commissioner administers and enforces the Data Protection Act 1998 independently of the Government.

I have noted the length of time taken to resolve the issue and I have written to the Commissioner asking when she will be in a position to resolve this matter and drawing her attention to the issues raised by my hon. Friend's questions. I understand she will reply directly to him.

The Commissioner publishes complaints statistics in her annual report to Parliament and a statement of her policy on the handling of assessments under section 42 of the 1998 Act is available on her website at www.dataprotection.gov.uk.

### Overstayers

**Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those applicants who applied for consideration under the regularisation scheme for overstayers had their cases *(a)* decided, *(b)* granted, *(c)* refused and *(d)* are still awaiting an initial assessment of eligibility; and if he will set a target date for the completion of consideration of these applications. [159997]

**Mrs. Roche:** In total 17,120 applications were received under the Overstayers Regularisation Scheme of the Immigration Appellate Authority 1999. Of the cases decided to date, 255 have resulted in grants of leave and three have been refused. There are 3,916 cases now under consideration and the remaining 12,946 cases are awaiting action. I am currently considering how best to invest our resources on tackling the Regularisation Scheme during this financial year.

### Correspondence

**Ms Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the reason was for the delay in transferring the letter from the hon. Member for Ilford, North of 24 July relating to the closure of Citizens Advice Bureaux in Redbridge from his Department to the DTI; and if he will make a statement. [160119]

**Mr. Straw:** I am sorry that there was such a serious delay in transferring my hon. Friend's letter of 24 July. Within two days of receipt of the letter my Private Office correspondence section identified that responsibility for the subject matter fell outside my Department. A number of attempts were made immediately and over the next few months to transfer the correspondence to the most appropriate Department. The Department of Trade and Industry accepted the letter on 8 February. I recognise fully that this is a quite unacceptable level of service and apologise to my hon. Friend and her constituents for this. My Department has now initiated measures to ensure that transfers of correspondence are effected within a reasonable period and in accordance with central guidance.

### Closed Circuit Television (Bolton)

**Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what effect closed circuit television cameras have had on the crime levels in Bolton. [159838]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Police operational experience and various research studies show that Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) has considerable crime reduction and detection potential, particularly when used as part of a wider strategy.

No formal independent evaluation of CCTV in Bolton has yet been undertaken. However, the Bolton Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership consider that CCTV has contributed to the 7 per cent. fall in recorded crime in Bolton last year.

The value of the Bolton town centre and car parks CCTV scheme in helping the police control and direct resources was demonstrated during a concerted effort to reduce crime in the town centre during Christmas 2000 shopping period. Reductions of 10 per cent. in street crime and 30 per cent. in vehicle crime were achieved in crime hot-spots compared with the previous Christmas.

During the past year, incidents of anti-social behaviour reported in the residential areas of Bolton covered by CCTV reduced by 75 per cent.

Under the current CCTV Initiative, coverage in Bolton is being enhanced. The Partnership is close to implementing two schemes providing coverage in residential areas and has been invited to prepare final proposals for two further residential schemes. Potential awards could reach nearly £420,000. The schemes will need to have been in place for at least 12 months before their impact can be fully evaluated. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships will also be evaluating schemes locally.

### Departmental Research

**Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the research undertaken by his Department by subject, indicating where the research was undertaken, by whom it was carried out, and the cost of each piece of research since 1996. [159793]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** The Home Office research department undertakes a wide range of research activities that support the development of information-led policy, including scientific and engineering research, market and opinion research and social research.

The Research Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) conducts social research supporting all seven Home Office aims.

The Science and Technology Unit sponsors scientific research in support of the police.

The Fire Research and Development Group (FRDG) undertake research in support of Home Office aim 7. The Fire and Emergency Planning Directorate has also conducted a range of social research.

The Emergency Planning Research Group (EPRG) carries out a wide mix of research, both intra-mural and extra-mural, in support of Home Office aim 7. The research findings are used to formulate evidence-based policy of promoting the co-ordination and development of effective national arrangements for integrated emergency management.

For the available information on market and opinion research, including that conducted by the Communication Directorate, I refer to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 25 May 2000, *Official Report*, column 623W.

The Assessment and Consultancy Unit (ACU) undertook research indirectly in support of Aims 1, 3, 4 and 7, via their research into selection and development issues affecting Police, Fire and Prison Services, also currently some research for the Cabinet Office.

In addition the Home Office has undertaken the following research:

(1) Home Office Briefings Research—awarded to Mori

(2) Fieldwork with asylum seekers to investigate their experience of the voucher scheme

(3) Research has been undertaken by various private companies on behalf of the Home Office Buildings and Estate Management Unit into components for use in police cells. The overall cost was in the region of £50,000 since 1996.

I have arranged for the following more detailed information on the Home Office research programme to be placed in the Library:

(1) A copy of the RDS annual work programmes for 1997–98 onwards, together with a list of research contracts let by the directorate. A list of RDS publications is available on the Home Office website and copies are also placed in the Library.

(2) The FRDG annual business plans and Review of Research for 1996–97 (publication No. 7/97); 1997/99 (Publication 2/99) and 2000/01 (Publication 6/2000) are available in the Library.

(3) Summary details of research conducted by the Fire and Emergency-planning department.

(4) A table summarising details of the EPRG research programme since 1996.

(5) An updated list of market opinion research conducted by the department since the reply I gave the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 25 May 2000, *Official Report*, column 623W.

(6) Details of the ACU research programme.

(7) A table summarising details of the police science and technology research programme since 1996.

Some of the information requested such as more detailed breakdown costs by project and where research was undertaken are not held centrally and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

### Airwave Communications System

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) of 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 589W, on the Airwave communications system, if he will make a statement on the progress being made on the reviews being conducted by the Health and Safety Executive, the Defence Evaluation Research Agency, the National Radiological Protection Board and the Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research Programme; and when he expects the results of each review to be published. [159976]

**Mr. Charles Clarke** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The Health and Safety Executive have conducted an independent assessment, commissioned by the Lancashire Police Federation, of the potential health risks associated with the Airwave service. The report concludes that, on the basis of available information and on calculations carried out, the new portable and mobile transmitters should not affect the health of persons using the equipment.

The Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA) have begun preparatory work for their investigation. DERA will report on progress every quarter. The final report should be available in early May 2002 after the main study has been concluded. The work allows further research to be carried out in light of the results from the main study. The report from this additional study, if it is required, should be available by August 2002.

The National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) has commissioned a review from their Advisory Group on Non-ionising radiation (AGNIR). The AGNIR are well advanced in the process of preparing material for their report. The AGNIR report will require clearance by the NRPB board before it is released. It is anticipated that the report will be available for the NRPB's board meeting in July if not sooner.

If, during the course of the DERA and NRPB studies, commissioned by the Home Office, any issue arises which suggests a risk to health, it will be made public without awaiting the publication of final reports. However, the Stewart Report said that:

"no obvious health risk has been suggested".

The Health Research Programme has been initiated by the Government in response to the Stewart Report on mobile phone health issues, and is focusing on emerging technologies. I anticipate that further research, in areas that are directly relevant to the technology used in Airwave, will be undertaken within the independent Mobile Telecommunications and Health Research Programme. If future research is undertaken, the results will be published as soon as possible.

### Asylum Appeals

**Miss Widdecombe:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the current time taken for asylum appeals is from being received by the Appeals Support Section to final determination; and if he will make a statement. [159922]

**Mrs. Roche:** We record the date of receipt into the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND), not the date received by the Appeals Support Section of IND, on our systems and therefore the data requested are not available. However, for the 12 months ending 31 March 2001, data from the Immigration Appellate Authority (IAA) for those cases where data are available indicate that the average time taken from receipt of an asylum appeal by IND, to the appeal being decided through both tiers of the authority, was approximately 28 weeks.

### Strip Searches (Prisons)

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many strip searches of *(a)* women, *(b)* men and *(c)* children have been conducted in the past 12 months by authorised personnel attached to the (i) Prison Service, (ii) the police, (iii) Customs and Excise and (iv) other bodies. [159552]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Information on the number of strip searches conducted by authorised personnel attached to the Prison Service, the police or any other body is not collected centrally by the Home Office.

Information relating to Customs and Excise is a matter for Ministers in Her Majesty's Treasury.

### National Asylum Support Service

**Mr. Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the annual budget was of the National Asylum Support Service in the last financial year; and how much of this was *(a)* allocated to accommodation and support and *(b)* paid to (i) local authorities and (ii) private accommodation providers. [159735]

**Mr. Charles Clarke:** Estimated expenditure on asylum accommodation and support, including unaccompanied asylum seeking minors in 2000–01 was £751 million (estimated final outturn). This was made up of:

Grant payment to local authorities for adult families and unaccompanied asylum seeking minors—£575 million

Support payments by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS)—£115 million

Payments to the Department of Social Security for supporting asylum seekers on benefit—£56 million

Payments to the Scottish Executive for support to adults and families who applied before April 2000—£5 million.

The support payments by NASS include a total of £54 million paid directly to accommodation providers under contract for the provision of accommodation and related services to dispersed asylum seekers. £46 million of this was paid to private sector providers and £8 million to local authority regional consortiums.

The administration budget for NASS was £16 million. In addition £22 million was allocated for payments to the voluntary sector for work carried out to support the new dispersal arrangements and for other work relating to asylum seekers and refugees.

*Note:*

All figures rounded to nearest £ million.

### Helplines

**Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by his Department and its agencies. [159571]

**Mr. Straw:** The main Home Office 24 hour switchboard is on 020 7273 4000. Unless the caller knows an extension or name, callers are then transferred to the Home Office Public Enquiry Service which operates weekdays on 020 7273 4599 between 9 am and 5 pm. The public can also call the Public Inquiry Service direct, but the number is not widely published.

Other numbers are:

Immigration and Nationality Department—0870 606 7766

Prison Service—020 7217 3000

United Kingdom Passport Agency—0870 521 0410.

### Judicial Proceedings

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the average overall cost to the Criminal Justice System in 2000–01 of each person *(a)* proceeded against, *(b)* found guilty or admitting guilt and *(c)* found not guilty. [158932]

**Mr. Charles Clarke** *[holding answer 26 April 2001]:* The figures for 2000–01 are expected to be available in the autumn. The most recently available figures are for 1999–2000. In that year, the expenditure on the Criminal Justice System was £12.1 million and 1.9 million offenders were proceeded against. The average cost per person proceeded against is £6,400.

The specific costs of cases where there was a finding of guilt, and cases where there was no finding of guilt are not known, and it is thus not possible to provide answers for *(b)* and *(c)*. Of the 1.9 million proceedings, 1.7 million ended in a finding of guilt and there was no finding of guilt in the remaining 0.2 million proceedings.

Work is proceeding on the development of an alternative measure of value for money in the Criminal Justice System.

## DEFENCE

### Defence Scientific Advisory Council

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the publications of the Defence Scientific Advisory Council over the past 10 years. [158051]

**Mr. Spellar:** The Defence Scientific Advisory Council is an advisory body and has published no papers over the last 10 years. During that time, however, two reports of council subordinate bodies have been placed in the Library of the House: the independent medical assessment of a sub-committee of the council relating to baton rounds mentioned in the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department to my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Mr. Fitzpatrick) on 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 68W, and a panel review of existing literature and research entitled "The Long Term Neurotoxicity of Anti-cholinesterases": DSAC 10/99 dated 28 June 1999, to which I referred in the answer I gave on 20 October 1999, to my hon. Friend the Member for Halton (Mr. Twigg), *Official Report*, columns 585–86.

### Crowd Control Technology

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date he received the Crowd Control Technologies report published by the Scientific and Technological Options Assessment Panel of the European Parliament Directorate General for Research; and what measures he has taken to implement the recommendation that an independent and objective social impact study be *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* published prior to authorisation of purchase orders for new crowd control technology. [158049]

**Mr. Spellar:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer which the Minister of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), gave him on 25 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 283W.

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list those units that are to be equipped with the L21A1 plastic baton round; what his estimate is

of the cost of re-equipping each; how many L21A1 baton rounds have been ordered in each force and at what cost; how many L104 anti-riot guns have been ordered and at what cost; how many XL18E3 optical sight mechanisms have been ordered for each force and at what cost; what his estimate is of retraining each unit to be equipped with new equipment; and how many personnel training and trainer hours will be expended on this exercise. [158050]

**Mr. Spellar:** Army units charged with supporting the police in Northern Ireland are to be equipped with the L21A1 baton round, as are the relevant training establishments. Other units may need to be issued with the new baton rounds should circumstances require it, subject to prior training. Sufficient numbers have been ordered to fulfil anticipated requirements. I am withholding details of equipment numbers in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. I am withholding information on costs on the grounds of commercial confidentiality in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The units that are to be equipped with the new baton round already undergo regular baton round training. Any extra cost and time associated specifically with the new round will be small, but cannot be separately identified without disproportionate cost.

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what impact tests were conducted by *(a)* the Defence Evaluation Research Agency at Porton Down and *(b)* the Defence Scientific Advisory Council on the L21A1 plastic baton round; how many (i) animals and (ii) human beings were involved in testing; and how many fatalities and what injuries were sustained as a result. [158048]

**Mr. Spellar:** For the medical evaluation of the L21A1 baton round, no physical impact tests were conducted by the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency or by the Defence Scientific Advisory Council on living animals or on human beings.

Computer models of the head, thorax and abdomen were used to compare the biomechanical response of the body following the impact of L21A1 and L5A7 baton rounds. In addition, physical impact tests were conducted on excised bovine scapulae to compare the skull fracture patterns of the two projectiles. The bovine scapula is a physical model of skull fracture and the scapulae were obtained from the meat trade.

**Mr. McNamara:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what models of plastic baton round have been tested that would meet the criteria for a penetrating kinetic energy round; and what his assessment is of the lethality potential of such weapons. [158047]

**Mr. Spellar:** L5A7 and L21A1 baton rounds are not designed to penetrate the body wall. We are not aware of any incidence of penetration of the torso body wall by polyurethane baton rounds that have been fired in Northern Ireland since the 1970s. No studies were undertaken on the probability of penetration of the torso body wall by these projectiles, prototypes of the L21A1, or commercially available kinetic energy based public order equipment.

## Heat Insulation

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what heat insulation standards for pipework are being required of new buildings at *(a)* GCHQ and *(b)* Ministry of Defence headquarters; and what plans he has to adopt a standard higher than BS5422. [158808]

**Dr. Moonie:** The agreed heat installation standards applicable to pipework as part of the redevelopment of the Ministry of Defence headquarters in Whitehall will be the relevant British standards prevailing at the time of installation, supported by Chartered Institute of Building Services Engineers guidelines. BS5422 and BS5970 are the relevant current standards. These standards will be adopted unless and until they are superseded or amended. GCHQ is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

## Porton Down

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down, has to conduct research to establish whether single doses of the Oripavine derivative TL2636 can cause long-term effects on the health of humans. [159801]

**Dr. Moonie:** The Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA at Porton Down currently has no plans to undertake any further research concerning the effects of exposure to single doses of the Oripavine derivative TL2636 on the health of humans.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if staff at the Medical Assessment Programme are entitled to request and receive classified and unclassified information from the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down about experiments which have taken place at the establishment; and if he will make a statement. [160064]

**Dr. Moonie:** Yes.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if former service personnel who took part in experiments at the Chemical Defence Establishment, Porton Down are entitled to a complete copy of the medical report assessing their health after they have attended the Medical Assessment Programme. [160063]

**Dr. Moonie:** For reasons of medical procedure, to ensure continuity with volunteers existing health care arrangements, all referrals to the Medical Assessment Programme must be made through a GP or other health professional (eg a consultant physician). As such the results of the Medical Assessment Programme consultation, with any recommendations for treatment, are reported back to the volunteer's general practitioner or referring consultant. However, a copy is provided to the individual, if requested.

**Mr. Öpik:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what investigations he has undertaken of reported losses of viruses from Porton Down in the past year. [159724]

**Dr. Moonie:** There have been no losses of viruses from the Chemical and Biological Defence Sector of DERA at Porton Down in the past year.

I believe that the hon. Member is referring to comments made in a report which appeared in the *Sunday Express* on 8 April alleging that a vial of foot and mouth virus had been stolen from Porton Down. No foot and mouth viruses have been stolen from CBD Porton Down, nor have samples of foot and mouth virus been held at CBD Porton Down in the past year.

### US Military Personnel (Compensation)

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 9 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 368, regarding the United States military Department's liaison officer in Washington, what assessment he has made of the need to gather information on United States' arrangements for paying compensation to veterans who participated in chemical warfare trials in the United States. [160062]

**Dr. Moonie:** None.

### Atlantic Patrol

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which ships this year are allocated to the *(a)* Atlantic Patrol Task (North) and *(b)* Atlantic Patrol Task (South); and when the ships will be on station. [159713]

**Mr. Spellar:** The ships allocated to the Atlantic Patrol Task (North) and Atlantic Patrol Task (South) during this year, and when the ships are scheduled to be on station is as follows:

*Atlantic Patrol Task (North)*

| *Ship* | *On station* |
|---|---|
| HMS Sheffield | 22 February 2001–24 July 2001 |
| HMS Coventry | 24 July 2001–16 November 2001 |

HMS Coventry is scheduled to hand over Atlantic Patrol Task (North) duty to HMS Argyll on 3 December 2001. HMS Argyll will then be held at 14 days notice to deploy to the centre of the area of operations to where she is scheduled to deploy in mid-February 2002.

*Atlantic Patrol Task (South)*

| *Ship* | *On station* |
|---|---|
| HMS Iron Duke | 25 September 2000–15 February 2001 |
| HMS Glasgow | 15 February 2001–30 July 2001 |
| HMS Edinburgh | 30 July 2001–31 October 2001 |
| HMS Montrose | 31 October 2001–11 March 2002 |

### International Festival of the Sea

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which veterans' organisations will be present at the International Festival of the Sea; and how much each organisation is being charged to display at the festival. [159715]

**Mr. Hoon:** The veterans associations and related maritime charities attending the International Festival of the Sea, and the charges raised, are given in the table.

| *Organisation* | *Stand type* | *Charges raised (£)* |
|---|---|---|
| King George V Fund for Sailors (KGFS)–the Festival's nominated charity | — | 0 |
| Royal Naval Association | Indoor | 1,247.85 |
| St. Dunstan's (for blind ex-servicemen and women) | Indoor | 835.43 |
| Royal Sailors Rest | Indoor | 623.93 |
| RN Enthusiasts Society | Outdoor | 352.50 |
| Mission to Seafarers | Indoor | 835.43 |
| Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) | Outdoor | 352.50 |
| British and International Sailors Association | Georgian Market | 211.50 |
| Naval Personnel and Family Service (RN organisation so no charge) | — | 0 |

The event is designed to be self-financing. All non-Service organisations, including charities, are offered the same rates based on a standard charge per $m^2$ of display space.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy ships will be present at the International Festival of the Sea. [159716]

**Mr. Hoon:** The third International Festival of the Sea will be held in Portsmouth Naval Base between 24 and 27 August 2001.

It is planned that, operational requirements permitting, the following Royal Navy ships will be present:

Illustrious, Endurance, Newcastle, York, Nottingham, Glasgow, Southampton, Exeter, Marlborough, Lancaster, Grafton, Richmond, Westminster, Blyth, Grimsby, Anglesey, Ledbury, Chiddingfold, Dasher, Puncher, Pursuer, Blazer and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Grey Rover.

### Royal Fleet Auxiliary

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what plans he has for the replacement of the Leaf class tankers currently in service with the Royal Fleet Auxiliary; [159718]

(2) what plans he has to order further auxiliary oilers for the Royal Fleet Auxiliary. [159711]

**Dr. Moonie:** We are currently considering options on how best to provide, in the medium to long term, afloat support for the future Royal Navy, including the capabilities currently provided by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary's Leaf class tankers, which are currently planned to leave service between 2008 and 2009.

BAe Systems Marine are building two Auxiliary Oilers (AOs); Wave Knight and Wave Ruler, for the Ministry of Defence, which we expect to enter service in 2002. These ships will provide the fast fleet tanker capability formerly supplied by RFAs Olna and Olwen. The company has suggested that two further AOs could contribute to meeting the future afloat support needs of the Royal Navy. Alongside the wider studies into afloat support, we are currently evaluating whether further AOs would be a cost-effective solution to our future capability needs.

### HMS Beaver

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proceeds were derived from the disposal of HMS Beaver. [159720]

**Dr. Moonie:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 4 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 199W. HMS Beaver has been sold to the commercial market as scrap. Receipts for the vessel were achieved by means of a sealed competitive tender and, given that other ships in this class may be offered to the commercial market, the actual price must remain "commercial-in-confidence" so as not to prejudice future activities.

### Gulf War (Meningitis Vaccine)

**Miss Geraldine Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on investigations into illness suffered by British troops who received the meningitis vaccine in preparation for service during the Gulf war; if the meningitis vaccine contained the Pertussis vaccine; and which company manufactured this vaccine. [159872]

**Dr. Moonie:** Up to around 5,000 Service personnel who deployed to the Gulf in 1990–91 may have received immunisation against meningococcal meningitis A and C. Initially, in August 1990, immunisation was recommended for all personnel who were to serve in the Gulf. However, by 15 September 1990, the immunisation was no longer recommended except for medical personnel and some other categories of personnel who may have been at risk.

Research sponsored by the Ministry of Defence has not specifically investigated a link between the meningitis vaccine and the subsequent ill health of Gulf veterans, and the Ministry of Defence is unaware of any reported association between the vaccine and subsequent ill health (with the exception of the known side effects). The meningitis vaccine did not contain the pertussis (whooping cough) vaccine.

The pertussis vaccine was used separately as part of the anti Biological Warfare immunisation programme as an adjuvant to accelerate the immunisation effect of the anthrax vaccine. There were two main suppliers of the meningitis vaccine. One supplier, Pasteur Merieux MSD, was the manufacturer of the product supplied. The other supplier was SmithKline Beecham; however we have yet to confirm the manufacturer. When we have done so, I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House.

### Beef Supplies

**Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the beef consumed by the armed forces since May 1997 has originated from UK sources; and if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the sourcing of all beef for the armed forces. [159828]

**Dr. Moonie:** Unfortunately, there are no data available prior to October 1997. However, from that date to April 2001, 60 per cent. of the beef consumed by UK based armed forces has been UK sourced.

Since October 1997 the task of buying food for the armed forces has been contracted to 3663 (formerly known as Booker Foodservice) and it is the Ministry of Defence's policy to require them to seek the best price in the open market. Our contractor is required specifically to give full consideration to British products, which we look to them to buy wherever they are competitive. We have given particular attention to meat procurement and over the last two years have worked closely with our contractor; the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; the Meat and Livestock Commission; and farmers' representatives to explore ways to increase the proportion of British meat we can buy competitively.

This has been a successful co-operation. In the case of beef we had, since the autumn of 1998, been supplying 100 per cent. British beef to our UK based service personnel, following the agreement we secured from the EC to release British intervention beef at competitive prices. However as was announced to the House on 24 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 555W, these stocks have now run out and market prices have dictated that a mix of British and imported beef will be required for future supplies. We are, however, working closely with those concerned to ensure that we can maximise the amount of British product that can be supplied competitively. In the case of beef they have identified opportunities to sources some 150 tonnes of prime British cuts which, when added to the 800 tonnes of British beef already secured, would mean that over 50 per cent. of the Ministry of Defence's requirement in the UK would be British.

### Fissile Plutonium

**Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the UK has exchanged fissile plutonium with the United States of America for highly enriched uranium since 1980. [158098]

**Mr. Hoon** *[holding answer 23 April 2001]:* The 1958 Mutual Defence Agreement authorises the transfer of fissile material between the UK and the US. Over the period in question there have been no formal exchanges of plutonium for highly enriched uranium between the UK and the United States of America.

### Transport of Hazardous Materials (Lancashire)

**Miss Geraldine Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what hazardous materials were transported through Lancaster on 13 December 2000 via the Halton Army camp; [159492]

(2) what hazardous material was transported through the village of Nether Kellet to Halton Army camp on 16 November 2000. [159493]

**Mr. Spellar** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* I am able to confirm that military vehicles containing radioactive material did travel through the district of Lancaster on 16 November 2000 and 13 December 2000 via Halton Army camp.

### Royal Navy Exercises

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which foreign navies have been approached to provide tanker support for Royal Navy exercises in the next 12 months. [159712]

**Mr. Spellar:** No foreign navies have been approached to provide tanker support for Royal Navy exercises in the next 12 months. However, some participating nations may provide tanker support for their own deploying groups in a given exercise.

### Naval Vessels

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Fearless will be returned to service. [159721]

**Mr. Spellar:** On current plans, maintenance and repair work on HMS Fearless is due to be completed this summer. She will then be available for operational tasking.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what items have been taken from HMS Intrepid and used to replace equipment on HMS Fearless. [159714]

**Mr. Spellar:** Since early 1998, numerous have been removed from HMS Intrepid and used to replace equipment on HMS Fearless. I will write to the hon. Member with a list of those items and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

HMS Intrepid is held at a low readiness state commensurate with force levels endorsed within the Strategic Defence Review. All the items that have been removed could be refurbished or replaced and she could, if necessary, be returned to operational service within the readiness profile agreed in the Strategic Defence Review process.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Invincible last put to sea; and when she is next scheduled to put to sea. [159717]

**Mr. Spellar:** HMS Invincible last put to sea on 26 February 2001, to take part in the winter deployment exercise off Norway. She returned to Portsmouth on 30 March 2001. She is due to sail for Rosyth at the end of July in preparation for her forthcoming refit.

**Mr. Quentin Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Ocean will be fully operational; and if he will make a statement. [159719]

**Mr. Spellar:** HMS Ocean is currently undergoing routine maintenance and repair work. Subject to completion of this work, successful sea trials, and allowing for the summer leave period, the vessel will be available for full operational tasking in late summer.

### Factor V Leiden Mutation

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what standard assessment is made of service personnel prior to enlistment to determine if they suffer from Factor V Leiden mutation. [159412]

**Dr. Moonie:** No standard assessment is made to determine whether potential recruits to the armed forces have Factor V Leiden mutation. Potential recruits are required to provide information about their medical history and anyone with a chronic blood disorder, such as Factor V Leiden mutation, would be rejected for service.

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the number of people serving in the armed forces who suffer from Factor V Leiden mutation. [159413]

**Dr. Moonie:** According to records held centrally by the Ministry of Defence, there have been five cases of Service personnel with blood coagulant disorders since 1997. This figure would include any cases of Service personnel with Factor V Leiden mutation, as this disorder is not identified separately in the Ministry of Defence's central records.

### Chinook ZD576

**Miss Geraldine Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the pilots flying the Chinook ZD576 were instructed to fly below the safety altitude for security reasons. [159871]

**Mr. Spellar:** No. There were no special instructions with regard to this task, which was planned as a routine flight.

## EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

### Grants (London Boroughs)

**Ms Buck:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list *(a)* each category of grant and *(b)* the amount of each grant paid by his Department to each London borough in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–1999, (iii) 1999–2000 and (iv) 2000–01; and what the projected figure is for 2001–02. [155428]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** I refer my hon. Friend to the letter sent on 16 February from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, setting out total funding for Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster local education authorities for the years 1996–97 to 2001–02.

A list of the Department's school education grants and funding allocations paid to each London borough for the last four years and projected grant figures for the current year have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

In the Budget on 7 March, national increases of £100 million for School Standards Grant and devolved New Deal for Schools Capital were announced. London boroughs will benefit from these increases, which are included in the figures placed in the House of Commons Library.

Real terms national recurrent funding per pupil will rise year on year by £200 in 2001–02 and will have risen by around £540 since 1997–98. There will be an average real terms increase in per-pupil funding of around £750 between 1997–98 and 2003–04.

### Education Funding Strategy Group

**Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will publish the membership of the education strategy group, together with their qualifications, grade and geographical area of employment (separately indicating the technical group); if he will list *(a)* the terms of reference of the group and *(b)* the schedules of meetings of the strategy and technical groups; if he will publish a verbatim account of those meetings; and if he will indicate when the conclusions and the Government's response will be published. [158901]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** The Education Funding Strategy Group has been set up to take forward work on the proposals for education funding set out in "Modernising Local Government Finance: A Green Paper" and is supported in that work by a technical sub-group. The groups include key stakeholders with an interest in local education authority and school funding and details of the membership of both groups are outlined in the tables. Members of both groups are not appointed on the basis of their grade or qualifications but have been nominated by the organisations they represent. Representatives have been selected for their knowledge of the wide range of circumstances local education authorities and schools face and local government members represent a balance of different authority types, regions and expertise. The Education Funding Strategy Group's papers are available on the DfEE's website (www.dfee.gov.uk/efsg/). Separate papers are not prepared for the sub-group, as its role is to consider papers before they are submitted to the Education Funding Strategy Group. The Government expect to publish their proposals on the future arrangements for education funding later this year.

*Education Funding Strategy Group*

| *Name* | *Organisation* |
|---|---|
| *Central Government representatives* | |
| Helen Williams (chair) | DfEE |
| Andrew Wye | DfEE |
| Jonathan Anstey | DfEE |
| Susanna Todd | DfEE |
| Audrey Brown | DfEE |
| Joe Crilly | DfEE |
| Peter Kane | HM Treasury |
| Nicholas Holgate | HM Treasury |
| Mark Lambirth | DETR |
| Bryony Houlden | DETR |
| Joe Beeley | DETR |
| Nick Ville | Audit Commission |
| David Singleton | Ofsted |
| *Local Government representatives* | |
| Neil Kinghan | Local Government Association |
| Neil Fletcher | Local Government Association |
| Mike Grealy | Local Government Association |
| Stephen Lord | Local Government Association |
| Mike Heiser | Local Government Association |
| Gale Waller | Local Government Association |
| Bob Kerslake | Local Government Association |
| Jon Pittam | Local Government Association |
| David Smith | Local Government Association |
| Alan Parker | Local Government Association |
| Liz Nicholson | Local Government Association |
| Chris Waterman | SEO/ACEO |
| Stephen Fitzgerald | Association of London Government |
| Hilary McCollum | Association of London Government |
| *Trade union representatives* | |
| David Hart | NAHT |
| Peter Downes | SHA |
| Ian Langtry | ATL |
| Joe Boone | NASUWT |
| John Bangs | NUT |
| Alan Manasseh | PAT |
| Christina McAnea | UNISON |
| John Fisher | TGWU |
| Mick Graham | GMB |
| George Phipson | AHFAS |

*Education Funding Strategy Group*

| *Name* | *Organisation* |
|---|---|
| *Representatives from schools' bodies* | |
| Mrs. Joan Binder | FAVASA |
| David Lankshear | CofE Board of Education |
| Michael Power | Catholic Education Service |
| Peter Rickard | National Bursars Association |
| Terry Pearson | National Governors Council |

*Technical sub-group to the Education Funding Strategy Group*

| *Name* | *Organisation* |
|---|---|
| Andrew Wye | DfEE |
| Jonathan Anstey | DfEE |
| Jenny Holmes | DfEE |
| Joe Crilly | DfEE |
| Joe Beeley | DETR |
| Anthony Hammil | HM Treasury |
| Stuart Taylor | HM Treasury |
| Keith Bartley | Ofsted |
| Nick Ville | Audit Commission |
| Jack Hatch | NAHT |
| Joe Boone | NASUWT |
| George Phipson | AHFAS |
| Peter Downes | SHA |
| Peter Rickard | National Bursars Association |
| John Bangs | NUT |
| Terry Pearson | National Governors Council |
| Steve Lord | LGA |
| Mike Heiser | LGA |
| Gale Waller | LGA |
| Tom Fairclough | LGA |
| Thomas Whiffen | LGA |
| David Gallie | LGA |
| Roy Smith | LGA |
| Stephen Fitzgerald | ALG |
| Jo Mennell | ALG |

## Local Education Authority Grants

**Mr. Coleman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much was received by local education authorities as *(a)* special and *(b)* specific grants in each financial year since 1997–98; and if he will make a statement on the distribution by LEAs. [159578]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** Listed are the Department's funding allocations for special and specific grants to local education authorities for each year since 1997–98.

Individual special and specific grants are distributed to local education authorities according to objective criteria, tailored to target geographical areas, or groups of schools, pupils, teachers or others, depending on the particular objectives of the grants and the relative need to spend to achieve those objectives.

Between 1992–93 and 1997–98, average recurrent funding per pupil fell by £120 in real terms from £2,830 to £2,710. Since then, it has risen by an average of £540 in real terms, to £3,250 this year. By 2003–04, it will have increased by around £750 in real terms since 1997–98.

*Funding to English LEAs*

*£ million*

| | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Specific Grants* | | | | |
| Standards Fund/GEST | 195.8 | 241.2 | 661.9 | 1,142.2 |
| Nursery Education Grant | 518.8 | 130.2 | 120.7 | 233.2 |
| Revenue funding for the reduction of class size | — | 22.3 | 79.6 | 141.5 |
| Education Action Zones | — | 9.6 | 24.0 | 61.5 |
| Capital | 76.1 | 303.0 | 417.4 | 1,143.9 |
| *Special Grants* | | | | |
| School Standards Grant | — | — | — | 293.4 |
| Teachers Green Paper Grants | — | — | — | 245.3 |
| School Budget Support Grant | — | — | — | 50.0 |

*Notes:*
1. Standards Fund/GEST figures are DfEE contribution only, and exclude Capital.
2. In April 1999 the Ethnical Minority Achievement Grant became part of the Standards Fund; before this it was a Home Office funded section 11 grant.
3. In 1997–98 approximately £500 million were taken from the Nursery sub-block of the SSA to fund the Nursery Voucher scheme. This has been treated as Grant rather than SSA funding. Funding for Nursery Vouchers was returned to local government from 1998–99.
4. Education Action Zone funding is paid to the Zone not directly to the LEA.
5. Figures for 2000–01 are not yet finalised and may be subject to change.

### Sure Start (Dartford)

**Dr. Stoate:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to introduce a Sure Start programme in Dartford to complement the recent allocation of money from the Children's Fund for new projects in Dartford to tackle social exclusion among children aged five to 13 years. [159915]

**Yvette Cooper:** Districts are invited to submit plans for Sure Start programmes because collectively they have high levels of need and disadvantage and give a good spread between different types of area around the country. The DETR index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) has been used to identify areas where there are high levels of need. By April 2004, there will be 500 Sure Start programmes in disadvantaged areas reaching a third of under-4s. Although so far Dartford has not been invited to submit plans for a Sure Start programme, it is possible that it will be included in a future wave of programmes.

### School Swimming

**Mr. Cotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what steps he has taken to promote and encourage the teaching of swimming in schools; [159932]

(2) what proportion of pupils in England undertake swimming lessons as part of the national curriculum. [159933]

**Jacqui Smith:** We do not hold specific figures on the proportion of pupils in England who take swimming lessons, as swimming is a compulsory part of the PE activities only at Key Stage 2 of the National Curriculum, unless pupils have met the full Key Stage 2 requirements during Key Stage 1. After Key Stage 2, it remains one of six physical activity areas. The Ofsted report on swimming at Key Stage 2, published in November 2000, showed that well over four out of five of the schools inspected provided adequate time for swimming. It also reported that four out of five children are able to swim 25 metres at the end of Key Stage 2. This was good news, but we acknowledge that we need to work with schools to make even more opportunities available for more children to be able to swim 25 metres by the time they reach secondary school.

Swimming and water safety are important life skills, and we are investing heavily in school sport, and swimming will benefit. The Government's commitment includes £580 million in England (out of a total of £750 million in the UK) from the New Opportunities Fund for sport in and around schools and up to £130 million to create multi-purpose sports and arts facilities in around 300 primary schools.

We have also established a Swimming Advisory Group, involving representatives of the swimming associations, Ofsted, QCA and DCMS, to discuss what more can be done to create even more opportunities for children to swim. We hope to announce proposals that will increase the numbers of children who can swim by the end of Key Stage 2, before the end of the year.

### Head Teacher Training

**Mr. Willis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many teachers commenced the National Qualifications for Headteachers course in *(a)* April 2000 and *(b)* January 2001, broken down by (i) Government Office region, (ii) gender and (iii) ethnic background in each recruitment cycle, from (A) primary, (B) secondary, including middle schools where appropriate, and (C) special schools; and how many in each of *(a)* and *(b)* (1) have completed the course, (2) are continuing with the qualification and (3) have withdrawn; [159916]

(2) if he will make a statement on the collection and collation of data on the ethnic background of those teachers who start the National Qualification for Headteachers course. [159917]

**Ms Estelle Morris:** The table sets out the number of candidates on the National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) who were recruited during the last two application rounds and began their training in the spring term of 2000 (cohort 7, old model NPQH) and the spring term of 2001 (cohort 1, new model NPQH). The figures

are broken down into the categories requested by NPQH region. The NPQH regions are similar to but do not precisely mirror Government Office boundaries.

The Government collect data on the ethnic background of NPQH applicants through the NPQH application form. Applicants are not bound to provide these data and, as a result, current analysis is not statistically meaningful.

The Government are concerned to ensure that all groups have an equal opportunity to prepare for headship and have improved the way that data are collected. They have asked the National College for School Leadership to develop strategies to ensure that currently under-represented groups increasingly apply for and progress through the NPQH.

*National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) Candidate statistics*

| | School phase/type | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Primary* | *Secondary* | *Special* | *Other* | *Total* |
| *Cohort 7 Old Model NPQH (Spring 2000)* | | | | | |
| *NPQH Candidates by region*[1] | | | | | |
| East Midlands | 59 | 38 | 3 | 6 | 106 |
| East | 37 | 28 | 2 | 4 | 71 |
| London | 62 | 39 | 5 | 17 | 123 |
| North | 38 | 29 | 1 | 2 | 70 |
| North West | 50 | 45 | 14 | 7 | 116 |
| South Central | 71 | 34 | 7 | 0 | 112 |
| South East | 56 | 41 | 2 | 5 | 104 |
| South West | 49 | 22 | 0 | 1 | 72 |
| West Midlands | 48 | 35 | 0 | 1 | 84 |
| Yorks and Humberside | 44 | 32 | 8 | 3 | 87 |
| Region unspecified | 28 | 15 | 2 | 6 | 51 |
| Total | 542 | 358 | 44 | 52 | 996 |
| *Gender* | | | | | |
| Male | 136 | 201 | 15 | 21 | 373 |
| Female | 406 | 157 | 29 | 31 | 623 |
| Total | 542 | 358 | 44 | 52 | 996 |
| *Candidate status* | | | | | |
| Completed NPQH | 70 | 85 | 7 | 11 | 173 |
| Currently studying | 407 | 224 | 33 | 31 | 715 |
| Withdrawn | 65 | 29 | 4 | 10 | 108 |
| Total | 542 | 358 | 44 | 52 | 996 |
| *Cohort 1 New Model NPQH (Spring 2001)* | | | | | |
| *NPQH Candidates by region*[1] | | | | | |
| East Midlands | 175 | 88 | 13 | — | 276 |
| East | 189 | 106 | 9 | — | 304 |
| London | 214 | 124 | 25 | — | 363 |
| North | 141 | 59 | 13 | — | 213 |
| North West | 200 | 111 | 20 | — | 331 |
| South Central | 206 | 116 | 14 | — | 337 |
| South East | 205 | 82 | 16 | — | 303 |
| South West | 150 | 70 | 8 | — | 228 |
| West Midlands | 150 | 94 | 15 | 2 | 261 |
| Yorks & Humberside | 161 | 79 | 12 | — | 252 |
| Total | 1,792 | 929 | 145 | 2 | 2,868 |
| *Gender* | | | | | |
| Male | 427 | 503 | 57 | 1 | 988 |
| Female | 1,365 | 426 | 88 | 1 | 1,880 |
| Total | 1,792 | 929 | 145 | 2 | 2,868 |
| *Candidate status*[2] | | | | | |
| Currently studying | 1,724 | 906 | 141 | 3 | 2,774 |
| Withdrawn | 67 | 24 | 3 | 0 | 94 |
| Total | 1,792 | 929 | 145 | 2 | 2,868 |

[1] The 10 NPQH Regions do not tally precisely with Government Office regions.
[2] No candidates have yet completed NPQH from cohort 1 as the minimum course length is six months.

### Children's Fund Local Network

**Gillian Merron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will announce the areas that have been selected to participate in the first wave of the Children's Fund Local Network. [160358]

**Mr. Boateng:** I am pleased to announce today the 17 areas that have been selected to receive funding from the first wave of the Children's Fund Local Network.

The Children's Fund was announced following the spending review 2000. The Fund is an important element

of the Government's wider strategy to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. The Local Network element of the Children's Fund is making £70 million available over three years to fund the work of local community and voluntary groups helping vulnerable children aged 0–19.

The 17 areas across England, which have been included in the first wave of the Local Network, include those with the highest levels of need and were chosen to ensure a spread of support across all regions in England, including some rural and coastal areas. By April 2004 all areas across England will have access to the Fund. Each local fund will be administered by an experienced local voluntary sector grant maker.

The Local Network will help children in poverty achieve their potential by investing directly in the work of local community and voluntary groups that provide local solutions. Grants will be made under four themes:

Aspirations and experiences—projects that give children experiences, or help them achieve goals that more privileged children may take for granted.

Economic disadvantage—projects that help families to improve their living standards and cope with difficulties that come from being on low incomes.

Isolation and access—projects that help children that are isolated or alone, or have trouble accessing services.

Children's voices—projects that give children and young people the chance to express their opinions and give advice on matters that concern them.

Local Network funding will be available in the following areas:

*North-East*

Tees Valley (Middlesbrough, Hartlepool, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees, Darlington)

Tyne and Wear (Newcastle upon Tyne, Gateshead, South Tyneside, North Tyneside, Sunderland)

*North-West*

Merseyside/Halton (Knowsley, Sefton, Liverpool, St. Helens, Wirral, Halton)

Greater Manchester (Manchester, Salford, Oldham, Rochdale, Bolton, Tameside, Trafford, Wigan, Bury, Stockport)

Lancashire (Lancashire, Blackpool and Blackburn)

*Yorkshire and Humberside*

South Yorkshire (Doncaster, Barnsley, Rotherham, Sheffield)

West Yorkshire (Bradford, Kirklees, Calderdale, Wakefield, Leeds)

Humberside (Kingston upon Hull, North-East Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire, East Riding)

*East Midlands*

Nottinghamshire (Nottingham and Nottinghamshire)

Leicestershire (Leicester and Leicestershire)

*West Midlands*

Birmingham/Solihull (Birmingham and Solihull)

The Black Country (Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Walsall and Dudley)

*East*

Norfolk

*South-West*

Cornwall (Cornwall with Isles of Scilly)

*South-East*

Kent (Medway, Kent)

East Sussex (East Sussex and Brighton and Hove)

*London*

All London boroughs.

## NORTHERN IRELAND

### Military Complaints Procedures

**Mr. Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he intends to lay before Parliament the eighth annual report of the Independent Assessor of Military Complaints Procedures in Northern Ireland. [160531]

**Dr. Reid:** I have today arranged for copies of Mr. Jim McDonald's annual report for 2000 to be placed in the Library of both Houses.

The report of the Independent Assessor continues to provide valuable reassurances to both the public and the Government that the army's complaints procedures stand scrutiny. I welcome Mr. McDonald's report and I will consider it further.

### European Committee for the Prevention of Torture

**Mr. Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will publish the Government's response to the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment's report on their visit to Northern Ireland in December 1999. [160532]

**Dr. Reid:** I have today placed a copy of our response, together with the Committee's report, in the Library of the House. The documents will also be available on my Department's website (www.nio.gov.uk) and that of the ECPT (www.cpt.coe.int).

I welcome the role of the Committee and its attention to Northern Ireland. I am pleased that it has recognised the many improvements that have been made in recent years. I take seriously the concerns raised by the Committee about issues that remain to be tackled and will give these close consideration.

## TREASURY

### Permanent Secretary (Official Visits)

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings his Permanent Secretary held with members and officials of the Irish Government during his visit to Dublin in February 2000. [159809]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The Permanent Secretary visited Dublin in February 2000 to participate in a conference. Irish Government officials attended the conference, but no meetings with members of the Irish Administration were held during the visit.

**Mr. Matthew Taylor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the visits outside Britain made by his Department's Permanent Secretary on official business since 1 July 2000, indicating the date and purpose of the visit in each case. [159808]

**Dawn Primarolo:** The information is given in the table.

*Visits outside Britain by the Permanent Secretary on official business since 1 July 2000*

| *Date* | *Purpose of visit* |
|---|---|
| *2000* | |
| 12 September 2000—Paris | To attend a meeting of Working Party 3 of the Economic Policy Committee of the OECD |
| 18–19 September 2000—Madrid | To attend a conference meet members of the Spanish Administration |
| 11 December 2000—Paris | To attend a meeting of Working Party 3 of the Economic Policy Committee of the OECD |
| *2001* | |
| 24–25 January 2001—Brussels | To meet UK and Commission officials |
| 13 March 2001—Paris | To attend a meeting of Working Party 3 of the Economic Policy Committee of the OECD |

### Asthma Deaths

**Mr. Crausby:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many deaths have been attributed to asthma in each of the last five years. [160148]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The information requested falls with the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Crausby, dated 3 May 2001:*

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question about how many deaths have been attributed to asthma in each of the last five years.(160148)

The following table shows the number of deaths in England and Wales, 1995–1999, where asthma was the underlying cause of death, classified according to the International Classification of Disease, ninth edition (ICD9).

| *Year* | *Number of asthma deaths*[1] |
|---|---|
| 1995 | 1,459 |
| 1996 | 1,349 |
| 1997 | 1,439 |
| 1998 | 1,366 |
| 1999 | 1,364 |

[1] ICD9 code 493

### National Investment and Loans Office

**Mr. Ian Stewart:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recommendations flow from the review of the management performance of the National Investment and Loans Office since it absorbed the Office of the Paymaster General in 1996, conducted by Treasury officials. [160585]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** Treasury officials conducted a review of NILO's operations, working closely with NILO's senior management and consulting NILO's customers and other interested stakeholders. The report concludes that NILO has performed well over the last five years, and recommends a number of actions to ensure that performance levels are sustained and improved in the future.

I have asked Treasury officials to work with NILO, and others where appropriate, to ensure that these recommendations are implemented in due course.

### Climate Change Levy

**Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is for a post-audit of the climate change levy. [159065]

**Mr. Timms:** The climate change levy has been operational for only one month, and it is necessary that it has longer to bed in before review of its operation. As with any tax, the Chancellor will keep the climate change levy under review as part of the normal Budget process.

### Government Funding

**Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the per capita allocation of funds was to *(a)* England, *(b)* Northern Ireland, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Wales for economic development, and what percentage of his Department's total expenditure this allocation represented, in each of the five years prior to July 1997; [160136]

(2) what the per capita allocation of funds was to *(a)* England, *(b)* Northern Ireland, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Wales for (i) pre-16 education, (ii) post-16 education and (iii) universities and further education; and what percentage of his Department's total expenditure each of these allocations represented in each of the five years prior to July 1999. [160138]

**Mr. Andrew Smith:** The allocation of funding in devolved areas is a matter for the devolved Administrations within their overall budgets set in the 2000 spending review. Information on expenditure per head by function and by county is set out in Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses published in April 2001.

### Debt Management Office

**Mr. Tyrie:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish the Debt Management Office's profit and loss account for each year since its inception; [159999]

(2) how much of each short term money asset has been held by the Debt Management Office, representing its short term money under management for each quarter since its creation; [160001]

(3) how much short term money has been under management by the Debt Management Office for each month since the Debt Management Office's creation; [159998]

(4) how much of each short term money market asset has been bought by the Debt Management Office from the net increase in short term assets in 2000–01 under management; and if he will publish the results in tabular form; [160000]

(5) what returns have been made on short term assets managed by the Debt Management Office for each quarter since its creation; and what bench marks have been used. [160002]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Chief Executive of the Debt Management Office. I have asked him to reply.

*Letter from Mike Williams to Mr. Andrew Tyrie, dated 3 May 2001:*

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury has asked me to reply to Parliamentary Questions numbers 15,998, 15,999, 16,000, 16,001 and 16,002.

The increase in the Government's net short term cash position, represented by the relevant net short-term assets held on the Debt Management Account (DMA) which is managed by the Debt Management Office (DMO), was £13.4 billion in the course of the 2000–01 financial year (including a £0.5 billion cash deposit at the Bank of England)[1]. The DMO did not acquire responsibility for managing the Exchequer cash position until 3 April 2000.

The amounts of specific classes of short-term assets that are bought by the DMO, are matters of commercial confidentiality between the DMO and its counterparties. For related reasons the DMO does not publish monthly totals of its short-term net cash position. However, paragraph 20 of the DMO's Exchequer Cash Management Operational Notice (dated 20 January 2000), as supplemented by the DMO's announcement of 12 September and 9 November 2000, list the range of financial instruments in which the DMO may transact. These are set out in the schedule attached.

All the DMO's market transactions flow through the DMA which came into operation in November 1999. The audited accounts for the DMA for the period to end March 2000 (including an income and expenditure account), will be published in due course.

[1] The details of the financing arithmetic outturn are available on the DMO web site www.dmo.gov.uk

*Schedule: Financial instruments in which the DMO may transact*

| | *Basis of dealing* |
|---|---|
| *Outright purchases and sales* | |
| Gilt purchases[1] | Tenders and bilateral |
| Gilt strip purchases[1] | Tenders and bilateral |
| HMT bills | Tenders and bilateral |
| Selected eligible bank bills[1] | Bilateral |
| Certificates of Deposit (CDs) | Bilateral |
| Selected commercial paper (CP) selected bank Bills and other short-term debt issued by high Quality issuers, including supranationals and Foreign Governments[2] | Bilateral |
| *Purchases from the market for future resale ('reverse repo') and Sale to the market for future repurchase ('repo')* | |
| *Instruments* | |
| Gilts (deliveries by value 'DBV' and General Collateral 'GC' including strips) | Tenders and bilateral |
| HMT bills | Tenders and bilateral |
| Non-Sterling HMT paper | Bilateral |
| Selected eligible bank bills | Bilateral |
| £ and other currency paper issued by high quality supranational and foreign government issuers | Bilateral |
| *Other* | |
| Unsecured cash borrowing and lending | Bilateral |

[1] Less than six months to maturity
[2] Less than 12 months

*Note:*
The DMO may also use short-term currency swaps, Forward Rate Agreements (FRAs) and interest rate futures to manage foreign currency and interest rate exposures. All foreign currency exposures will be hedged back into sterling.

## Economic Cycle

**Mr. Redwood:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he defines *(a)* boom and *(b)* bust in terms of GDP change quarter by quarter over a year. [159791]

**Miss Melanie Johnson:** I refer the right hon. Member to what the Prime Minister said to him in the Chamber on 25 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 301.

# FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

## Peter Tatchell

**Mr. Maude:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his reply of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 53W, on Mr. Tatchell, on what date the British Embassy in Brussels raised the matter with the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs. [160091]

**Mr. Wilson:** Our Consul General at our Embassy in Brussels raised the matter with the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 16 March 2001. My reply of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 53W, contained a typographical error—"Minister" should read "Ministry".

**Mr. Maude:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 2 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 53W, on Mr. Tatchell, if he will publish the representation made by the British Embassy in Brussels following the assault on Mr. Tatchell. [160090]

**Mr. Wilson:** Our Consul-General in Belgium made clear our concerns at a senior level in the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in a telephone call.

### Helplines

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by his Department and its agencies. [159506]

**Mr. Battle:** The Foreign and Commonwealth Office operates two permanent telephone helplines designed to assist the public. The purpose of one is to give advice to UK citizens planning to travel overseas (Tel. 020 7008 0232/3, Fax 020 7008 0155 or 0164), the other gives visa advice for people planning to travel to the UK (Tel. 020 7238 3838). The information obtainable from both of these telephone helplines is also available on internet websites.

There is also an "Emergency Unit" telephone helpline which is brought into use whenever there is a large unplanned increase in telephone inquiries from member of the public—for example, an earthquake or widespread civil disorder at a popular overseas holiday destination.

### EU Documents

**Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the progress of the negotiations on public access to EU documents. [160593]

**Mr. Vaz:** After a year of difficult negotiations, the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament have all agreed in principle to a draft Regulation on public access to EU documents.

The UK's objectives for these negotiations were to secure a Regulation which ensures:

greater openness (ie more EU documents being made available to the public;

proper protection for sensitive material;

a quick, user-friendly mechanism;

a consistent approach both by the institutions and in member states;

compatibility with the UK Freedom of Information Act 2000.

All these objectives have been met and we now have an arrangement which we believe will be a firm step forward in EU openness. The Government welcome this: we have long been an advocate of greater openness in the EU institutions. More accessible documents make for more accountable institutions.

### Nigeria

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received from Nigeria concerning the impact of Sharia law in northern states on non-Muslims; and if he will make a statement. [159410]

**Mr. Wilson:** We continue to monitor closely the situation in northern Nigeria. Officials from the High Commission travel regularly to the region.

Most Nigerian states' legislation introducing the Sharia penal code provides that it will not apply to non-Muslims unless they so choose. We understand this is generally respected. But we have seen some reports that churches have had difficulty in obtaining land to build on. We believe a very small number of non-Muslims may have been attacked by vigilante groups. We welcome the efforts of the Nigerian authorities to crack down on these groups.

**Mr. Gale:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Nigerian authorities over the increase in violence against Christians in *(a)* Gombe, *(b)* Yobe, *(c)* Sokoto, *(d)* Borno and *(e)* other states of Nigeria. [159411]

**Mr. Wilson:** The root causes of much of the conflict in northern Nigeria are long-standing differences between ethnic groups. These differences are over a range of issues, including control of territory and resources, and are not primarily religious.

We welcome the efforts of the Nigerian authorities (both at federal and at state level), and of community groups, to reduce tension.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Tourism

**Mr. Greenway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which European cities have been visited by Ministers to promote UK tourism during the past two months. [158900]

**Mr. Chris Smith:** Government Ministers and those in the devolved administrations are using every opportunity to promote the British Tourism industry overseas. Ministers in my Department have used recent visits to Valencia (Spain) and Portoroz (Slovenia) to get the message across that it is still perfectly safe to come to the United Kingdom and that there is plenty to see and do.

In addition, my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting visited the USA in March to reinforce this message and I, myself have just returned from a similar visit to Canada.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total cost was of employing special advisers in his Department from 1997 to date. [160044]

**Mr. Chris Smith** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, columns 607–08W.

## AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Derek Foster:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what progress has been made towards eradicating foot and mouth disease; and if he will make a statement. [160584]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** I am placing in the Libraries of the House today the latest graphs produced for the Chief Scientific Adviser's Group on the course of the disease. These demonstrate that in the seven day period ending Wednesday 2 May there was an average of approximately eight new confirmed cases each day compared with 16 in the seven day period ending 22 April and with a weekly average of 43 at the peak in late March. We can therefore be optimistic about the future course of the disease, although the Chief Scientific Adviser has warned that cases will continue to occur for some time yet.

It is clear that our policy to bear down on the outbreak swiftly and prevent spread of the disease through slaughtering of animals in infected premises within 24 hours of the case being reported, tracing dangerous contacts and tackling the disease on contiguous premises within 48 hours, has been effective. This has been crucial to the control of the epidemic.

**Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the cause of the foot and mouth disease outbreak. [160407]

**Mr. Nick Brown:** Investigations into the cause of the outbreak continue. I will inform the House of the outcome as soon as I can.

**Mr. Key:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will allow livestock markets to open as collection centres for slaughter stock. [156003]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 29 March 2001]:* We have consulted on the conditions under which collecting centres should be licensed and will issue guidance in the light of veterinary advice.

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what discussions have taken place with the Environment Agency at *(a)* national and *(b)* local level in respect of the merits of (i) burying and (ii) incineration of animal carcases arising from the slaughter of animals due to foot and mouth disease. [156374]

**Ms Quin:** The Ministry, National Assembly for Wales and the Environment Agency have agreed joint working arrangements and principles for disposal activities associated with foot and mouth disease. Ministry officials have held, and continue to hold, discussions with representatives of the Environment Agency and other Government Departments. These have included discussions on the merits of different options for the disposal of animal carcases.

At a local level the Ministry, (including the Divisional Veterinary Manager) Environment Agency, health authority, environmental health departments of local authorities and others are involved in assessing risk to human health and the environment and the options for disposal, taking account of the location, type and quantity of material for disposal.

Following a Risk Assessment, carried out by the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC), the Government decided to provide the option of burial for cattle born after 1 August 1996, as these younger cattle were born after animal feed controls were fully enforced and therefore pose the lowest risk of BSE infectivity of any cattle in the national herd. Older cattle will continue to be burnt or rendered.

The Institute of Animal Health at Pirbright has also been involved in advising MAFF on the disposal of carcases, and the assessment of the level of risk.

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his oral statement of 27 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 843, on foot and mouth disease, what reasons underlay the decision not to consider the use of napalm as a fuel for burning carcases. [156464]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 2 April 2001]:* There are two forms of napalm available, which both produce very toxic compounds when they burn. We therefore cannot use them because of the public and environmental health risks.

We recognise that burning at higher temperatures is more efficient and cleaner, and so there is a need to increase the temperature of pyres, particularly at the beginning of the burn while the water in carcases is being driven off. We have therefore commissioned urgent studies, in collaboration with MOD, on the possible use of gelled fuel mixtures to increase the temperature.

**Mr. Duncan:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what provision he has made for permitting persons to enter foot and mouth infected areas for the purpose of artificially inseminating dairy cows to avoid the drying-up of milking herds. [156912]

**Ms Quin** *[holding answer 5 April 2001]:* Inseminators are now permitted to visit a single premises on any one day for the purpose of artificial insemination, subject to strict hygiene conditions. A farm may not be visited for insemination more frequently than once a week and no semen may be taken off the farm.

Premises under Form A or Form D restrictions or within the 3 km zone around an infected premises, and those within 8 km of a premises subject to Form C restrictions are considered to be high-risk premises and, for disease control purposes, such visits are not permitted for these farms.

## Helplines

**Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what telephone helplines to assist the public are administered by his Department and its agencies. [159510]

**Ms Quin:** The Department provides the following helplines:

MAFF Helpline—A general helpline providing information and assistance across the range of MAFF's activities. The MAFF helpline number is 08459 33 55 77, and the service is available from 09.00 to 17.00 hours, Monday to Friday.

British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) Helpline—This provides information and advice on the administration of the Cattle Tracing System. The BCMS helpline number is 0845 050 1234, and the service is available from Monday to Friday 08.00 to 17.30 hours, and on Saturday from 09.00 to 13.00 hours.

Pet Travel Scheme (PETS) Helpline—This handles inquiries on the operation of PETS. The PETS helpline number is 0870 241 1710, and the service is available from Monday to Friday 08.30 to 17.00 hours.

MAFF have set up a helpline for callers wanting general advice on the recent outbreak of foot and mouth disease. The helpline number is 0845 050 4141, and the service is currently available 24 hours a day seven days a week.

### Animal Welfare

**Mrs. Brinton:** To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make it his policy to seek to persuade the EU Council of Ministers to introduce a trade-restrictive measure designed to promote animal welfare. [159058]

**Mr. Morley:** Trading practices must comply with conditions set out in World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements. The Government have succeeded in getting animal welfare on to the agenda of the current WTO agriculture negotiations and will continue to promote the issue both there and in the EU.

## ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

### East-West Rail Route

**Mr. Lidington:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he received from the Strategic Rail Authority its study of east-west rail connections through or under London; if he will make a statement about the Government's policy towards a new east-west route; and if he will place a copy of the study in the Library. [159688]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The Strategic Rail Authority sent the report on their extensive study into the issues relating to rail travel on an east-west axis across London to the Secretary of State on 20 December 2000.

Following additional appraisal work within the High-Level Group (the Minister for Transport, the Mayor and the Chairman, Strategic Rail Authority), which was set up to develop a co-ordinated approach to London rail projects, we have agreed next steps. Work will start immediately on project definition and design development of a central, cross-London rail link, the tunnel section of which could follow the alignment of the CrossRail scheme. The work will look at alternative service patterns and access to Heathrow. This will lead to a recommendation on the option to be taken forward. At the same time, work will start on a feasibility study of a south-west to north-east London rail link, the tunnel section of which could follow the alignment of the Chelsea-Hackney scheme.

This work will be taken forward jointly by the Strategic Rail Authority and Transport for London, under the guidance of the High-Level Group.

I am arranging for copies of the Strategic Rail Authority's report to be placed in the Library and published on the SRA website.

### London Underground

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many London Underground stations have been closed for a part of the day in each of *(a)* the last 10 years because of staff shortage and *(b)* the past 12 months. [157479]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* This is an operational issue for London Underground (LUL) who have provided me with the following information on station closures owing to staff shortages of all time periods over 15 minutes in duration for the last six years and for year 2000–01 until 3 March 2001.

| *Year* | *Number of closures* |
|---|---|
| 1995–96 | 123 |
| 1996–97 | 102 |
| 1997–98 | 106 |
| 1998–99 | [1] — |
| 1999–2000 | 114 |
| 2000–01 | 246 |

[1] Unavailable

*2000–01*

| *Period* | *Number of closures* |
|---|---|
| 1 | 5 |
| 2 | 10 |
| 3 | 11 |
| 4 | 7 |
| 5 | 20 |
| 6 | 38 |
| 7 | 20 |
| 8 | 17 |
| 9 | 18 |
| 10 | 56 |
| 11 | 20 |
| 12 | 24 |

*Note:*
LUL operate a 13 period year. The end of period 12 represents 3 March 2001. Information for period 13 has not been processed yet.

Information on years prior to 1995–96 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many accidents there have been on London Underground in each of *(a)* the last 10 years and *(b)* the past 12 months including in each instance the number of (i) fatalities, (ii) major injuries and (iii) minor injuries to passengers and staff; [157468]

(2) how many accidents have been caused on London Underground in each of *(a)* the last 10 years and *(b)* the past 12 months by train movements, including in each instance the number of (i) fatalities, (ii) major injuries and (iii) minor injuries to passengers and staff. [157469]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* London Underground (LUL) have provided the following information relating to all accidents. They inform me that to highlight those accidents which are the result of train movements could be done only at disproportionate cost.

London Underground publish information on passenger and employee fatalities and passenger major injuries in their Annual Reports each year. The following table summarises this information for the period requested, although LUL informs me that the figures may differ slightly from the Annual Reports as some revisions have been made to reflect information which was not available at the time of the Reports.

| | Passenger fatality | Employee fatality | Passenger major injury |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1990–91 | 8 | 5 | 161 |
| 1991–92 | 7 | 2 | 44 |
| 1992–93 | 5 | 0 | 55 |
| 1993–94 | 5 | 0 | 50 |
| 1994–95 | 6 | 1 | 57 |
| 1995–96 | 4 | 0 | 86 |
| 1996–97 | 7 | 0 | 95 |
| 1997–98 | 4 | 0 | 108 |
| 1998–99 | 1 | 1 | 123 |
| 1999–2000 | 6 | 0 | 106 |

The information contained in the following tables covers the additional categories relating to Employee and Passenger injuries. As London Underground's current databases do not extend back prior to 1994, they inform me that to provide information before this date would incur excessive costs.

| | Employee major injury | Employee minor injury | Passenger minor injury |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1994–95 | 30 | 2,063 | 2,047 |
| 1995–96 | 32 | 2,096 | 2,000 |
| 1996–97 | 23 | 1,985 | 2,344 |
| 1997–98 | 29 | 1,659 | 2,409 |
| 1998–99 | 25 | 1,653 | 2,468 |
| 1999–2000 | 33 | 1,602 | 2,503 |
| 2000–01' | 13 | 993 | 2,170 |

' Figures for 2000–01 are only up to end of Quarter 3 (6 January 2001) and are provisional

Finally the following table sets out the figures broken down monthly for year 2000.

*Year 2000*

| | Fatality | Major injury | Minor injury |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Passenger* | | | |
| January | 0 | 4 | 183 |
| February | 1 | 12 | 185 |
| March | 0 | 9 | 220 |
| April | 1 | 12 | 215 |
| May | 2 | 8 | 268 |
| June | 0 | 14 | 258 |
| July | 0 | 10 | 257 |
| August | 1 | 12 | 246 |
| September | 0 | 11 | 260 |
| October | 1 | 16 | 234 |
| November | 1 | 6 | 221 |
| December | 1 | 12 | 211 |
| *Employee* | | | |
| January | 0 | 3 | 117 |
| February | 0 | 4 | 99 |
| March | 0 | 3 | 125 |
| April | 0 | 0 | 104 |
| May | 0 | 3 | 105 |
| June | 0 | 6 | 132 |
| July | 0 | 2 | 105 |
| August | 0 | 0 | 130 |
| September | 0 | 0 | 121 |
| October | 0 | 2 | 100 |
| November | 0 | 0 | 90 |
| December | 0 | 0 | 106 |

**Mr. Jenkin:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many serious train incidents there were in the London Underground in each of *(a)* the past 10 years and *(b)* the past 12 months; [157482]

(2) how many train derailments there have been on the London Underground in each of *(a)* the last 10 years and *(b)* the past 12 months. [157472]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 9 April 2001]:* This is an operational issue for London Underground (LUL) who inform me that although they record incidents on the Underground system under a range of headings themselves they do not use the term "serious train incidents". The appropriate measure would be LUL's record of train derailments and train collisions.

| Year | Derailments on running line |
|---|---|
| 1996–97 | 4 |
| 1997–98 | 1 |
| 1998–99 | 1 |
| 1999–2000 | 3 |
| 2000–01 | 4 |

London Underground have provided me with the following information on train derailments on their running line, for recent years and in the last 12 months:

| 2000–01 | Derailments on running line |
|---|---|
| April | 0 |
| May | 1 |
| June | 0 |
| July | 0 |
| August | 1 |
| September | 1 |
| October | 0 |
| November | 0 |
| December | 1 |
| January | 0 |
| February | 0 |
| March | 0 |

Information on years prior to 1996–97 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

LUL inform me that there have been no train collisions on the network over the past 10 years.

## Waste Disposal

**Mr. Trickett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on his plans in respect of the *(a)* purpose and *(b)* timescale of issuing an order under section 16(1) of the Environmental Protection Act 1999; [158517]

(2) how many working days will elapse between the termination of the current public consultation exercise and the implementation of an order under section 16(1) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in relation to the use of waste disposal companies by waste disposal authorities. [158523]

**Mr. Meacher:** On 9 April my Department issued for consultation a draft of the Waste (Foot-and-Mouth) Disease (England) Regulations 2001. Following consideration of the responses, the Regulations were made and came into

force on 13 April. The main purpose of the Regulations is to enable the Secretary of State to issue directions under section 57(1) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 requiring the holders of waste management licences for specified landfill sites to accept and dispose of specified kinds of agricultural waste.

It is necessary to ensure that waste arising from the foot and mouth disease outbreak is disposed of effectively and in ways which protect the environment and human health. The Regulations will ensure that suitable landfill sites can be used where necessary to dispose of specified kinds of animal waste. However, the powers of direction under section 57(1) of the 1990 Act will be used only where the Government consider that their use in relation to each individual site is essential; and to date no such directions have been issued. Unless and until a decision to issue a direction is taken, it is not possible to say how many working days will have elapsed between the termination of the consultation exercise and the implementation of that direction.

### Vehicle Registration Plates

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance has been given to the police force with regard to the prosecution of drivers who display a flag, other than the EU flag, on vehicle registration plates. [159234]

**Mr. Hill** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* Enforcement of the new number plate is an operational matter for the individual police forces.

### Housing

**Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much central Government spent on *(a)* housing and *(b)* social housing in (i) actual terms and (ii) real terms (A) in each year since 1979 and (B) as projected to the end of the current funding review period. [159689]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth** *[holding answer 30 April 2001]:* The available information on the Department's allocations, or outturns, for its main programmes of housing capital investment and revenue expenditure since 1979–80 in England is set out in the table, with forecasts for 2002–03 and 2003–04. A revised local authority finance regime was introduced from 1990–91, and so the detail of prior years' figures is not directly comparable. Some of the resources allocated through the Single Regeneration Budget Challenge Fund and City Challenge are applied to housing, but this element is not distinguished in the allocations and is therefore not included.

The tables do not reflect indirect support for housing by central Government through, for example, mortgage interest tax relief and housing related personal benefits such as rent allowances and rate/council tax rebates.

All expenditure by the Housing Corporation, and through Housing Revenue Account subsidy, Estate Action and Estate Renewal Challenge Fund allocations is wholly attributable to social housing. The Department's ACG, CRI and other allocations are not prescribed and authorities are free to apply these resources in support of both social and private housing in accordance with their own strategies and priorities. Private Sector Renewal Support Grant is applied exclusively to private housing, as is the majority of Disabled Facilities Grant expenditure.

*Housing expenditure in England: Allocations 1979–80 to 1989–90*[1]

*£ million*

| | *1979–80* | *1980–81* | *1981–82* | *1982–83* | *1983–84* | *1984–85* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme (ADP)-Gross expenditure | [2]— | [2]— | 521 | 755 | 734 | 697 |
| LA Basic Block allocations (prior to 1990–91) | 2,544 | 2,186 | 1,771 | 1,847 | 1,769 | 1,821 |
| Estate Action | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— |
| Other allocations | 0 | 17 | 25 | 345 | 464 | 32 |
| Total Housing Revenue Account Subsidy | 1,274 | 1,423 | 908 | 536 | 280 | 2,139 |
| Housing Corporation Revenue allocations | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total (cash prices) | 3,819 | 3,626 | 3,224 | 3,484 | 3,247 | 4,688 |
| Total (real terms at 1999–2000 prices) | 10,756 | 8,641 | 7,017 | 7,090 | 6,320 | 8,674 |

*£ million*

| | *1985–86* | *1986–87* | *1987–88* | *1988–89* | *1989–90* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme (ADP)-Gross expenditure | 711 | 715 | 752 | 791 | 935 |
| LA Basic Block allocations (prior to 1990–91) | 1,572 | 1,392 | 1,262 | 1,119 | 874 |
| Estate Action | [3]— | 42 | 67 | 129 | 176 |
| Other allocations | 33 | 25 | 71 | 83 | 45 |
| Total Housing Revenue Account Subsidy | 2,349 | 2,566 | 2,576 | 2,628 | 2,879 |
| Housing Corporation Revenue allocations | 0 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 53 |
| Total (cash prices) | 4,666 | 4,740 | 4,728 | 4,751 | 4,963 |
| Total (real terms at 1999–2000 prices) | 8,196 | 8,075 | 7,648 | 7,198 | 7,014 |

*Housing expenditure in England: Allocations 1990–91 to 2000–01*[1]

*£ million*

| | *1990–91* | *1991–92* | *1992–93* | *1993–94* | *1994–95* | *1995–96* | *1996–97* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme (ADP)-Gross expenditure | 1,063 | 1,586 | 2,351 | 1,796 | 1,484 | 1,142 | 1,044 |
| LA Housing Annual Capital Guidelines (ACGs) | 1,296 | 1,343 | 1,290 | 1,378 | 1,038 | 994 | 943 |
| Estate Action | 175 | 264 | 347 | 357 | 373 | 239 | 203 |
| Other allocations (Energy Conservation, Insulation, Homelessness, Private Sector Initiative etc.) | 221 | 187 | 110 | 45 | 70 | 88 | 88 |
| Capital Receipts Initiative | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— |
| Private Sector Renewal Support Grant | 413 | 413 | 397 | 392 | 308 | 283 | 271 |
| Disabled Facilities Grant | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— |
| Estate Renewal Challenge Fund | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | 30 |
| Housing Action Trusts (capital and current spending) | [3]— | 10 | 27 | 78 | 92 | 93 | 90 |
| Total Housing Revenue Account Subsidy | 3,661 | 3,750 | 3,961 | 4,126 | 4,142 | 4,023 | 3,926 |
| Housing Corporation Revenue allocations inc. SCSHF | 66 | 104 | 136 | 146 | 200 | 199 | 217 |
| Starter Homes Initiative | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Arms Length Management Companies | — | — | — | — | — | — | — |
| Total (cash prices) | 6,894 | 7,657 | 8,618 | 8,318 | 7,706 | 7,061 | 6,811 |
| Total (real terms at 1999–2000 prices) | 9,037 | 9,456 | 10,307 | 9,691 | 8,853 | 7,885 | 7,369 |

*£ million*

| | *1997–98* | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *2001–02* | *2002–03* | *2003–04* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Housing Corporation Approved Development Programme (ADP)-Gross expenditure | 684 | 607 | 638 | 642 | 767 | 918 | 1,214 |
| LA Housing Annual Capital Guidelines (ACGs) | 628 | 544 | 609 | 2,019 | 882 | 793 | 842 |
| Estate Action | 155 | 99 | 65 | 69 | 39 | 11 | 5 |
| Other allocations (Energy Conservation, Insulation, Homelessness, Private Sector Initiative etc.) | 51 | 31 | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— |
| Capital Receipts Initiative | 174 | 569 | 570 | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— |
| Private Sector Renewal Support Grant | 192 | 166 | 165 | 0 | 21 | [3]— | [3]— |
| Disabled Facilities Grant | 56 | 59 | 65 | 72 | 85 | 88 | 89 |
| Estate Renewal Challenge Fund | 103 | 146 | 165 | 81 | [3]— | [3]— | [3]— |
| Housing Action Trusts (capital and current spending) | 88 | 90 | 83 | 86 | 98 | 123 | 72 |
| Total Housing Revenue Account Subsidy | 3,682 | 3,370 | 3,104 | 2,974 | 4,344 | 4,107 | 3,878 |
| Housing Corporation Revenue allocations inc. SCSHF | 208 | 149 | 154 | 143 | 158 | 189 | 200 |
| Starter Homes Initiative | — | — | — | — | 50 | 100 | 100 |
| Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund | — | — | — | — | 20 | 40 | 60 |
| Arms Length Management Companies | — | — | — | — | — | 100 | 200 |
| Total (cash prices) | 6,022 | 5,830 | 5,618 | 6,086 | 6,465 | 6,469 | 6,660 |
| Total (real terms at 1999–2000 prices) | 6,336 | 5,964 | 5,618 | 5,981 | 6,199 | 6,052 | 6,078 |

[1] All component figures are in cash prices
[2] Denotes figures not available
[3] Not applicable in this period

*Notes:*

*ADP Gross Expenditure*:

Excludes ADP funding of City Challenge, Rough Sleepers Initiative and ERCF. Data prior to 1981–82 is unavailable as corporation expenditure was not cash limited in this period. 1992–93 figures includes £591 million under Housing Market Package. 2000–01 figure is forecast.

*LA Housing Annual Capital Guidelines (ACGs)*:

From 2000–01 the ACG incorporates allocations for private sector renewal and the Capital Receipts Initiative which were previously made separately. The introduction of Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) from 2001–02 caused a switch of resources from LA Housing ACGs into Housing Revenue Account Subsidy. Figures for 2002–03 and 2003–04 exclude the component of housing ACGs covering 'Receipts taken into Account' (RTAs); this amounted to £199 million in 2001–02.

Estate Action—Figures up to 1994–95 represent supplementary credit approval (SCA) and continuation scheme allocations; thereafter, direct grant payment outturns within the Single Regeneration Budget. There is no revenue expenditure attributable to Estate Action.

*Capital Receipts Initiative*:

Initial allocations

*Private Sector Renewal Support Grant:*

Distributed via Specified Capital Grant Allowances 1990–91 to 1992–93; SCG-dependent SCAs 1993–94 to 1996–97.

*Disabled Facilities Grant*:

Initial allocations. DFG was included within SCG and SCG-dependent SCAs prior to 1997–98.

*Estate Renewal Challenge Fund*:

From 2001–02, ERCF baseline expenditure is included in ADP settlements.

*Housing Action Trusts*:

HATs figures include all revenue expenditure, except for 2002–03 and 2003–04. Figures for 2001–02 are allocations.

*Housing Revenue Account Subsidy:*
Includes the rent rebate subsidy element. Prior to 1990–91 rent rebates were part of the Department of Social Services programmes; outturn figures provided by DSS for the period 1984–85 to 1989–90 include those for Welsh authorities, but comparable data for earlier years are not available. A substantially revised HRA subsidy system was introduced from 1990, which includes MRA from 2001–02 (see note above).
*Housing Corporation Revenue Allocations:*
Information as published in the Housing Corporation's Annual Accounts; figures for 2001–02 onwards include revenue spend on the Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the allocations of capital housing expenditure for 2001–02 for the Slough unitary authority, broken down into *(a)* repairs to local authority property, *(b)* repairs to regulated social landlord property, *(c)* new local authority build and *(d)* new regulated social landlord property. [160249]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** On 7 December 2000, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions announced the Housing Improvement Programme (HIP) figures. The unitary authority of Slough's allocation figure for the HIP programme 2001–02 totalled £1,872,000. This is made up with the Annual Capital Guideline £1,722,000 and the Disabled Facilities Grant (a specified capital grant) of £150,000. The Major Repairs Allowance (MRA) 2001–02 for the unitary authority of Slough of £4,731,300 was announced on 7 December 2000. The MRA covers repairs to local authority property. Funding towards repairs to regulated social landlord property is minimal. There is no funding for the local authority to build new properties. The Housing Corporation has published the allocation statement for the unitary authority of Slough on 17 April 2001 for new registered social landlord property totalling £2,946,292. This is made up of £2,714,576 for Mixed Funded Rent and £231,716 for Mixed Funded Sale.

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people were *(a)* on the housing waiting list, *(b)* registered priority homeless and *(c)* accommodated in bed and breakfast accommodation under housing legislation in the unitary authority of Slough at the latest date for which figures are available. [160251]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** As at 1 April 2000 there were 1,931 people on the housing waiting list in the unitary authority of Slough, and there were 249 people registered as priority homeless. As at December 2000, there were 198 people in temporary accommodation of which four are in bed and breakfast accommodation in the unitary authority of Slough.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will place in the Library the local authority audits on the provision of and need for semi-independent housing with support for lone parents below the age of 18 years. [160204]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** Information on the provision of and demand for accommodation in their area which could be used for semi-independent housing with support for 16 and 17-year-old lone parents was collected from local authorities in last year's Housing Investment Programme exercise.

I am arranging for a copy of the information provided by authorities to be placed in the Library.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many new places in semi-independent housing have been provided for lone parents under the age of 18 years since *(a)* May 1997, *(b)* June 2000 and *(c)* over the most recent period for which data are available. [160218]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** Since April 1997, 388 new units of accommodation have been provided by Registered Social Landlords with funding from the Corporation's Annual Development Programme (ADP). In last year's ADP (April 2000—March 2001), funding for 128 new units of accommodation was approved. This year's ADP includes 205 new units of accommodation for lone parents under the age of 18 years. In addition under the Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund, funding has been approved for 134 new units of accommodation for teenage parents, as well as floating support for 275 existing units of accommodation. This does not include accommodation funded by charities, or other similar bodies.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many lone parents under the age of 18 years *(a)* have lone tenancy of a council property, *(b)* claim Housing Benefit on the basis that they live alone, *(c)* live in semi-independent housing, *(d)* live with other family members and *(e)* have other accommodation arrangements. [160219]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** The information in answer to *(a)*, *(d)* and *(e)* is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

*(b)* Approximately 1,000 lone parents aged under 18 are in receipt of Housing Benefit.

*(c)* 1,352 units of semi-independent accommodation are provided to lone parents under 18 years by Registered Social Landlords.

## Environmental Taskforce

**Mr. Llew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the percentage of those registered under the Environmental Taskforce who go on to secure permanent employment in the environment sector. [159728]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Of those people whose destinations following participation in the Environment Taskforce is known, 41 per cent. have gone on to secure permanent employment. Details of the specific employment sectors to which this figure relates are not currently available without disproportionate cost.

## Air Accidents

**Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for North Cornwall of 26 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 313W, whether

the Air Accidents Investigation Branch is investigating another incident of hazardous vapours from an engine lubricant seal leak into the cabin air in a BAe 146 aircraft on 18 April, flying between Jersey and Gatwick, and other similar incidents affecting this type of aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [159842]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The Air Accidents Investigation Branch has confirmed that it is conducting an investigation into the exact cause of the incident on 18 April 2001. The incident and the one on 5 November 2000 are the only incidents involving fumes on BAe 146 aircraft being investigated by the AAIB. The AAIB would not normally investigate incidents occurring outside the UK.

### Civil Aircraft (Life-saving Equipment)

**Mr. John M. Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his policy is on the carrying of life-saving equipment on civil aircraft carrying passengers, with particular reference to the availability of defibrillators on short-haul flights to treat coronary emergencies. [160133]

**Mr. Robert Ainsworth:** Minimum international requirements for the carriage of medical equipment on board aircraft are laid down in Joint Aviation Requirements. Decisions on the provision of equipment to deal with emergencies which go beyond these requirements are primarily a matter for airlines. I understand that many UK carriers already exceed existing requirements through the provision of items such as external automatic defibrillators, and are at the forefront of developing such initiatives as ground to air medical advice centres.

The Government are keen to ensure the widest possible use of best practice in this area, and is pursuing the matter through the recently established Aviation Health Working Group. This will include consideration of the current use of defibrillators and the benefits that they provide.

### Motorcycle Training Industry

**Mr. Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the motorcycle training industry [159056]

**Mr. Hill:** The motorcycle training industry has played a positive role in the Government's Advisory Group on Motorcycling through the Motorcycle Rider Training Association, and in regular meetings with the Driving Standards Agency. Their participation helped us to frame the reforms to rider training, testing and licensing which were implemented in February. They have also assisted the independent inter-agency task group set up to prevent work-related road accidents for those who ride powered two-wheelers as part of their job. We welcome their involvement and look forward to carrying on the productive working relationship in the future. In particular, we shall look to the industry for assistance as we develop the statutory register of all those engaged in professional motorcycle training, which was announced in our Road Safety Strategy.

### Council Funding Distribution

**Mr. Ron Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the per capita allocation of funds was to *(a)* England, *(b)* Northern Ireland, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Wales for (i) local government and (ii) housing, and what percentage of his Department's total expenditure this allocation represented, in each of the five years prior to July 1999. [160137]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The table shows Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions public expenditure on housing and local government for each year from 1994–95 to 1998–99 (i) as a percentage of the Department's total expenditure and (ii) on a per capita basis.

The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions allocates housing and local government funds only to England. The equivalent expenditure in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales is a devolved matter for the relevant devolved administration and was previously a matter for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Northern Ireland, for Scotland and for Wales.

*Allocation of housing and local government funds by Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions 1994–95 to 1998–99: England*[1]

| | *Housing* | *Local government* |
|---|---|---|
| *Outturn as percentage of Department's total expenditure:* | | |
| 1994–95 | 15.7 | 79.7 |
| 1995–96 | 15.1 | 83.0 |
| 1996–97 | 14.3 | 82.7 |
| 1997–98 | 13.0 | 83.0 |
| 1998–99 | 12.4 | 84.9 |
| *Outturn per capita: £/per person* | | |
| 1994–95 | 145.99 | 741.34 |
| 1995–96 | 135.10 | 743.13 |
| 1996–97 | 130.24 | 754.26 |
| 1997–98 | 117.46 | 750.10 |
| 1998–99 | 111.85 | 768.12 |

[1] There is a degree of overlap between total housing expenditure and the housing element within local government expenditure

### Bellwin Rules

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much funding was allocated to England and Wales under the Bellwin rules for each year since 1971. [160453]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Under arrangements currently in force in England sufficient funds are allocated to the Bellwin scheme to meet any eligible claims. In a separate answer I am giving details of payments made to local authorities in past years.

The Bellwin scheme in Wales is the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much money was paid out to councils in England and Wales under the Bellwin rules for each year since 1971. [160454]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** Payments made to local authorities in England since 1987 are as follows (to the nearest £100,000):

| *Year* | *£* |
|---|---|
| 1987–88 | 20,000,000 |
| 1988–89 | 6,200,000 |
| 1989–90 | 600,000 |
| 1990–91 | 4,900,000 |

| Year | £ |
|---|---|
| 1991–92 | 300,000 |
| 1992–93 | 0 |
| 1993–94 | 200,000 |
| 1994–95 | 600,000 |
| 1995–96 | 100,000 |
| 1996–97 | 200,000 |
| 1997–98 | 300,000 |
| 1998–99 | 400,000 |
| 1999–2000 | 300,000 |
| 2000–01 | 4,100,000 |

Records of payments made earlier than 1987 could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The National Assembly for Wales is responsible for Bellwin schemes in Wales.

**Mr. Llwyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how recent aid given to English counties for flooding and foot and mouth payments using the Bellwin rules was calculated; and if revenue and capital aspects were treated differently. [160456]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** A "Bellwin" scheme of emergency financial assistance may be activated to help a local authority with uninsurable clear-up costs following a disaster or emergency that involves destruction of, or danger to, life or property. Grant is normally paid at a rate of 85 per cent. of an authority's qualifying expenditure above a threshold. The threshold is the provision that a prudent authority might reasonably be expected to make for contingencies and emergencies (approximately 0.2 per cent. of its revenue budget).

For the flooding Bellwin scheme grant was paid at a rate of 100 per cent. above the threshold to take into account the exceptional nature of the emergency. The Bellwin scheme for Foot and Mouth Disease will pay grant at the normal rate of 85 per cent.

Bellwin grant is paid only in respect of current expenditure; capital expenditure is not eligible for grant.

**Angela Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will provide financial assistance to Essex Police Authority under the Bellwin scheme in respect of costs incurred following the Korean air crash in the county on 22 December 1999. [160583]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** I am satisfied that financial assistance under the Bellwin scheme is justified in the case of Essex Police Authority given the exceptional nature of the air crash and the clear up operation. A scheme will, therefore, be established under section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989. Grant will be paid to cover 85 per cent. of the eligible costs above a threshold, which the Authority has incurred in dealing with the air crash.

## Bus Partnership Schemes

**Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when guidance will be available on quality bus partnership schemes. [160478]

**Mr. Hill:** Good Practice Guidance on Quality Bus Partnerships is being issued today by the TAS Partnership, on behalf of the Department. The guidance, which has been prepared in consultation with bus industry and local government representatives, discusses the broad principles of partnership working, the factors to be taken into account in developing a scheme and the processes of consultation and review. It draws on case studies from among over 100 existing voluntary quality partnerships around the country. There will be scope to extend the guidance in due course to cover statutory QP schemes under the Transport Act 2000.

In fulfilment of undertakings given during the passage of the Transport Bill, the guidance includes a chapter devoted to competition issues, prepared in consultation with the Office of Fair Trading. This explains the application of competition law and seeks to offer reassurance on the scope for co-operation over such matters as joint branding and publicity, joint ticketing and voluntary agreements on minimum service frequencies.

The guidance will be available in electronic form through the Department's website (www.detr.gov.uk) or in hard copy on application to TAS Publications and Events, Ross Holme, West End, Long Preston, Skipton BD23 4QL. I am arranging for copies to be placed in the Library.

## Shipping Safety

**Mr. Ivan Henderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made in implementing measures to improve the safety of merchant shipping and safety at ports and harbours; and if he will make a statement. [160479]

**Mr. Hill:** The Queen's Speech on 6 December outlined the Government's intention to draft a Safety Bill. We shall use this opportunity to introduce three groups of measures to improve the safety of merchant shipping in the UK and safety at ports and harbours.

The first group would improve the way we deal with maritime safety incidents. The number of parties who are liable in the event of a marine pollution incident would be increased to improve access to compensation for claimants. We are also considering raising the limit of liability for compensation arising from the death of or injury to passengers on board foreign registered ships in UK waters from £37,000 to £250,000. The existing power of the Secretary of State to issue direction would be widened to equate power to secure the safety of a ship with those to prevent pollution. Fire authorities would be allowed to recover the cost of fighting fires at sea.

The second group would improve the enforcement of shipping safety law. The Secretary of State has a power to make orders to apply merchant shipping legislation to things used at sea which are not currently regarded as ships. This power will be extended to waters which are not sea. It will be made easier to prosecute non-UK vessels for breaches of safety legislation. The penalties for safety offences will be increased so that they are on a par with those for pollution offences and health and safety offences on land.

The third group make some improvements to the powers harbour authorities have to regulate marine safety so as to help them to implement the Port Marine Safety Code, which was developed after the grounding of the Sea Empress in Milford Haven in 1996. We are also including new procedures enabling a harbour authority to be

wound-up on safety grounds or to relinquish pilotage powers, both of which would save having to promote private legislation.

### Standards Board for England

**Mr. Burden:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will make further appointments to the Standards Board for England. [160480]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** I have today appointed Celia Cameron and Peter Chalke to the board.

Both are elected members of local authorities. Along with the seven appointments which have already been announced, they will provide the board with the range of skills and experience that they need to ensure the highest standards of conduct in local government.

### Air Quality

**Mr. Burgon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many local authorities in England have completed their reviews and assessments of air quality; and which authorities in England have so far failed to do so. [160598]

**Mr. Meacher:** In England, the statutory responsibility to carry out reviews and assessments of air quality applies to all London local authorities, all metropolitan and non-metropolitan district councils, and to all unitary county and unitary district councils. According to the records held by my Department, as of 2 May 2001 all of the London local authorities and some 89 per cent. of the remaining English local authorities had completed their reviews and assessments of air quality. A website providing further information on the progress made by individual authorities, and giving some indication of their findings, is available at www.aeat.co.uk/netcen/airqual/aqma.

As of 2 May 2001, the following 32 English authorities had not completed all stages of the review and assessment process. Each of these authorities has now committed itself to completing the process by a firm deadline in the near future, and my Department will continue to oversee this process closely.

*List of local authorities which have not submitted a final review and assessment of air quality to the DETR*

Barrow-in-Furness DC
Blyth Valley BC
Calderdale
Chorley
Durham city council
Forest Heath DC
Fylde BC
Hambleton DC
Harlow council
Havant BC
Kettering BC
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk BC
Lancaster city council
Mendip DC
Mid Suffolk DC
Northampton BC
North Lincolnshire
Norwich city council
Reigate and Banstead BC
Scarborough BC
Shepway DC
South Oxfordshire DC
South Somerset DC
Southend-on-Sea
Suffolk Coastal DC
Surrey Heath BC
Test Valley BC
Wellingborough BC
West Berkshire council
West Devon BC
Woking BC
Wyre Forest DC.

### Rights of Way

**Mr. Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the source of information for the public about rights of way which are open for public use. [160477]

**Ms Beverley Hughes:** The Countryside Agency maintains a website: http://www.countryside.gov.uk/footandmouth/ giving general information about the opening of rights of way in each local authority's area. The website includes links to local authorities' own websites, many of which include detailed information about open paths. The Local Government Association has published best practice guidance for local authorities which recommends that authorities should use their websites to keep not only the public, but also public and tourist information agencies, informed of developments. We announced details last week of a £3.8 million grant scheme to be administered by the Countryside Agency which will provide funding for measures to promote the reopening of rights of way, including publicity programmes and improvements to websites. We look to all local authorities to take the lead in opening up as many rights of way as possible, consistent with the Chief Veterinary Officer's guidance.

### Foot and Mouth

**Mr. Curry:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if expenditure incurred by local authorities to fund the hardship business rate relief programme as a direct consequence of foot and mouth disease will be eligible under the Bellwin scheme. [159820]

**Ms Beverley Hughes** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* On 24 April I announced the activation of the Bellwin scheme to provide emergency financial assistance to local authorities to help them meet some of the costs of responding to outbreaks of foot and mouth disease, *Official Report*, column 278W. This scheme is based on Section 155 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 which permits only the reimbursement of expenditure incurred by local authorities on, or in

connection with, the taking of immediate action to safeguard life or property, or to prevent suffering or severe inconvenience, in their area or among its inhabitants. Funding rate relief for small businesses does not, therefore, fall within the scope of this scheme.

On 22 March, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment announced an increase in the central government contribution to local authorities to fund rate relief from 75 per cent. to 95 per cent. for small businesses who are suffering hardship as a result of foot and mouth disease in 151 rural authorities in England. This will apply for an initial period of three months. Details of the arrangements were given in Special Grant Report No. 80 which was laid before the House of Commons and approved by Parliament on 2 April 2000.

In addition authorities covered by Special Grant Report No. 80 will benefit from a temporary reduction of 50 per cent. in contributions to the National Non Domestic Rate Pool between April and August.

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much money the regional development agencies had distributed to businesses under the foot and mouth relief scheme by 26 April. [159938]

**Mr. Meacher:** RDAs are supporting businesses affected by FMD in a variety of ways including marketing campaigns and other indirect support. Those who have decided to provide direct support are working through Business Links who are currently assessing individual business plans, with a view to making the first payments very shortly.

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what amount of rate relief has been given to businesses in rural areas under the foot and mouth relief scheme by 26 April; and if he will make a statement. [159937]

**Mr. Meacher:** Applications for hardship rate relief are dealt with by individual local authorities. The central Government contribution to the cost will be met through subsequent claims to my Department. No figures are yet available centrally for the amount of rate relief granted by local authorities to businesses by 26 April.

**Sir Peter Emery:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reason part of funding for hardship relief payments is being met by local authorities; and if he will take steps to ensure that such funding is borne by the Government. [159369]

**Mr. Meacher:** Local authorities are required to meet part of the cost of their decisions to grant rate relief to businesses suffering from hardship to reflect the benefit to the local community. Central Government normally fund 75 per cent. of the cost of granting such relief. We have increased central Government's contribution rate relief from 75 per cent. to 95 per cent. where relief is granted to small businesses who are suffering hardship as a result of foot and mouth disease. This increase applies to relief provided in these circumstances by 151 rural authorities in England, for an initial period of three months.

This remains a discretionary rate relief scheme and it is therefore right that local authorities have a stake in the decisions they make on the award of rate relief. I am keeping the scheme under review on the basis of evidence of how it is operating and waiting for across the board evidence on local authorities' position from the Local Government Association.

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what information the Environment Agency holds about safe burial sites for foot and mouth infected carcases; and if he will place this information in the Library. [157998]

**Mr. Meacher** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* The Environment Agency is working in close co-operation with MAFF to ensure the fulfilment of the environmental requirements of Article 3(2) of the Animal Waste Directive (90/667/EEC) on the burial of animal carcases. Under the Groundwater Regulations 1998, the Agency carries out an assessment of each proposed burial site and, subject to the risk, authorises the burial with the imposition of any necessary conditions to protect groundwater. The Agency keeps copies of all such authorisations, and information relating to its assessment of each application, on a public register. As this information is available locally for each burial site, we have no plans to place copies of it in the Library.

### Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme

**Mr. Green:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much money had been paid to businesses under the extensions of the small firms loan guarantee scheme announced by the Minister for the Environment on 26 March by 26 April. [159940]

**Ms Hewitt:** I have been asked to reply.

No loans had been notified to the Small Business Service (SBS) by 26 April, for businesses covered by the extension of the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme (SFLGS). All loan applications are made direct to one of the approved lenders who will undertake their commercial appraisal and consideration of commercial finance before the SFLGS becomes an option.

Since the details of the Scheme changes were announced on 6 April the SBS and the lenders have undertaken much work. The legal framework of the changes has had to be agreed with the lenders and the lenders have had to put in place, at branch level, the necessary administrative changes. Many inquiries have been received about the changes but it is likely to be a while before this interest translates into new loans.

## HEALTH

### Walsall and Sandwell Health Authorities Merger

**Mr. Bruce George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions his Department has had about a merger of the Walsall and Sandwell health authorities. [157334]

**Yvette Cooper:** The health authorities in Walsall and Sandwell have an established history of successful joint working, and will continue to build on this. On 25 April the Secretary of State for Health announced plans for far-reaching modernisation and reform of the National

Health Service. The announcement included a statement that by 2004 two-thirds of existing health authorities will disappear as they merge. However the future configuration of health authorities has yet to be determined.

### Departmental Policies (Tiverton and Honiton)

**Mr. Martyn Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Tiverton and Honiton constituency, the effects on Tiverton and Honiton of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [157807]

**Ms Stuart:** Detailed information on the impact of Department of Health policies nationally is set out in the Department of Health Annual reports. A copy of the most recent report "Department of Health—Government Expenditure Plans 2001–04 and main estimates 2001–02" is available in the Library and on the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/dhreport.

The impact of policies is not examined by constituency and statistics collected centrally by the Department are not collected on a constituency basis.

The Tiverton and Honiton constituency falls within the geographical area covered by North and East Devon health authority and Devon social services.

The increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2000–01 for North and East Devon health authority are set out in the table.

*Increases in allocations between 1996–97 and 2001–02*

| | *Increase* |
|---|---|
| £ million (cash) | 84.7 |
| £ million (real terms) | 50.6 |
| Percentage increase (cash) | 33.6 |
| Percentage increase (real terms) | 18.37 |

*Note:*
Increases for 1999–2000 onwards are for unified allocations which cover hospital and community health services. Those for previous years cover hospital and community health services only.

North and East Devon health authority has received funding for certain policies. This includes:

£1.352 million for accident and emergency modernisation in 2000–01; £157,000, £211,000, £273,000 and £186,000 for improving cancer services (breast, colorectal, lung and cancer outpatients) in 1997–98, 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 respectively; £3.186 million and £3.994 million to reduce waiting lists and times in 2000–01 and 2001–02 respectively; £1.333 million to expand critical care services in 2000–01; £804,000 to deal with winter pressures in 2000–01, £368,000 of this went to Devon social services; £1.422 million and £359,000 for developing intermediate care services in 2000–01 and 2001–02 respectively; £470,000 and £954,000 for heart disease services 2000–01 and 2001–02 respectively; £50,000 invested into dentistry in 2000–01.

Devon local authority's personal social services standard spending assessment (SSA) for 2001–02 compared with 1996–97 is set out in the table.

| | | *Percentage increase* | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | *£ million* | *Real* | *Cash* |
| 1996–97 | 138.497 | — | — |
| 2001–02 | 110.339 | –29.4 | –20.3 |

*Note:*
The SSA has decreased because of boundary changes resulting from local government re-organisation.

In addition to the SSAs referred, Devon local authority received additional funding in the form of a number of special and specific grants as set out in the table.

*£000*

| | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* | *2001–02* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Special Transitional Grant[1] | 4,890 | — | — | — |
| Partnership grant[2] | — | 3,407 | 2,917 | 4,140 |
| Prevention grant[2] | — | 280 | 420 | |
| Carers grant[3] | — | 289 | 662 | 923 |
| Children's grant[3] | — | 624 | 986 | 2,471 |
| Mental Health Core grant | 667 | 1,046 | 1,207 | [4]1,408 |
| Training Support Grant | 381 | 450 | 484 | [4]473 |

[1] The special transitional grant ended in 1998–99
[2] The partnership and prevention grants have been combined in 2001–02 and called the promoting independence grant
[3] The carers' and children's grants were introduced in 1999–2000
[4] Indicative allocation

### Universal Neonatal Hearing Screening

**Mr. Chope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what information his Department has given to *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* NHS trusts about plans to roll out the Universal Neonatal Hearing Screening pilot project; and what advice he has given about the time scale for preparing for the roll out; [158647]

(2) what the timetable is for the national implementation of the Universal Neonatal Hearing Screening project. [158648]

**Yvette Cooper:** In October 2000, the Department issued comprehensive information packs inviting health authorities to bid to join the Universal Neonatal Hearing Screening (UNHS) pilot. A national survey of the readiness of National Health Service trusts to deliver the service was also carried out. This is being used to inform decisions on the first phase of implementation.

Close communication has been maintained with all health authorities and NHS trusts taking part in the pilot. In addition, the Institute of Hearing Research has been commissioned to maintain an open access website giving details of the pilot methodology, progress on site and plans for the next stage.

The time scale for the national roll out will depend on the evaluative data from the pilot.

### Heathrow

**Mr. McDonnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the role is of the London borough of Hillingdon in relation to the Health Control Unit at Heathrow Airport; and what funding is provided to the London borough of Hillingdon for its pay and rations functions in relation the Health Control Unit. [158371]

**Yvette Cooper:** The health control unit at Heathrow Airport is responsible for (i) arranging medical examinations of entrants to the United Kingdom referred

to it by the Immigration Service and (ii) applying the Public Health (Aircraft) Regulations 1979 at the airport. The medical and radiography staff working in the unit are provided and managed by Hillingdon health authority. The London borough of Hillingdon provides and manages the other staff, and pays the cost of the unit's accommodation. It is reimbursed for its expenditure by the Department.

**Mr. McDonnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what audit has been undertaken of the funding provided to the London borough of Hillingdon for the management of the Health Control Unit at Heathrow Airport. [158367]

**Yvette Cooper:** My Department has no powers to carry out formal audits of expenditure by the London borough of Hillingdon, although officials scrutinise both the authority's estimates and claims for reimbursement and ask for an explanation of any changes from previous patterns of expenditure. Audit of Hillingdon's expenditure is a matter for its own internal auditors and for the Audit Commission.

**Mr. McDonnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of funding was provided by his Department for the Health Control Unit at Heathrow Airport in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01. [158372]

**Yvette Cooper:** The table shows the sums reimbursed by the Department in connection with expenditure on the health control unit by the London borough of Hillingdon. In addition, the Department paid for three new X-ray machines which were installed in the unit in 1999–2000 at a cost of £1.25 million.

| | *£000* |
|---|---|
| 1995–96 | 1,428 |
| 1996–97 | 1,356 |
| 1997–98 | 1,325 |
| 1998–99 | 1,488 |
| 1999–2000 | 1,547 |
| 2000–01 | 1,577 |

## Oral Tobacco Products

**Mr. Maclean:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to introduce legislation to ban the import of oral tobacco products; when he intends to introduce such legislation; and if he will make a statement. [158218]

**Yvette Cooper:** None. So long as oral tobacco from overseas sources does not fall within a banned category, complies with United Kingdom customs duty regulations and carries health warnings, their import in the UK is not illegal.

However, we wish to ensure that people have information about health risks. We are, therefore, seeking to develop greater awareness of the health risks associated with oral tobacco as part of our tobacco information strategy. We are working on a dedicated campaign, focused on high-risk ethnic minority populations, to address the health risks of smoking and the use of oral tobacco in order to decrease demand for these products. We have funded a training pack for Trading Standards Officers on oral tobacco.

## National Blood Authority

**Mr. Wood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the budget was for the National Blood Service for the year 2000–01; and by how much it was underspent. [158781]

**Mr. Denham:** The National Blood Authority's accounts for 2001–01 show a total income of £315,436 million against a total revenue expenditure of £311,456 million. Of the £4 million surplus of income over expenditure, £3.8 million is accounted for primarily by an increase in stocks of United States plasma purchased by the authority's bio products laboratory. Only £200,000 is unspent cash.

## Mental Health Services

**Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the £700 million for mental health services for the years 1999–2000 to 2001–02 was allocated for each district health authority in England for financial years *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02. [159158]

**Mr. Hutton:** Not all additional funding for mental health services in the years 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02 was allocated to health authorities. A substantial element was allocated to local authorities through the Mental Health Grant. The table shows the allocations to health authorities for 1999–2000 and 2000–01. Allocations have not yet been made to health authorities for 2001–02.

*£000*

| *Health authority* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|
| Avon | 200,945 | 696,030 |
| Barking and Havering | 100,055 | 189,000 |
| Barnet | 67,440 | 153,000 |
| Barnsley | 72,583 | 97,260 |
| Bedfordshire | 109,165 | 160,226 |
| Berkshire | 148,958 | 213,608 |
| Bexley and Greenwich | 137,128 | 184,108 |
| Birmingham | 116,399 | 800,584 |
| Bradford | 164,318 | 225,175 |
| Brent and Harrow | 75,770 | 129,506 |
| Bromley | 56,089 | 81,054 |
| Buckinghamshire | 113,520 | 167,017 |
| Bury and Rochdale | 94,180 | 176,700 |
| Calderdale and Kirklees | 122,567 | 189,272 |
| Cambridge and Huntingdon | 192,800 | 691,038 |
| Camden and Islington | 63,009 | 134,490 |
| Cornwall and Isles of Scilly | 125,290 | 165,400 |
| County Durham | 222,500 | 291,186 |
| Coventry | 130,085 | 169,117 |
| Croydon | 70,040 | 106,000 |
| Doncaster | 41,478 | 73,042 |
| Dorset | 80,463 | 136,602 |
| Dudley | 31,060 | 59,121 |
| Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow | 176,265 | 264,626 |
| East and North Hertfordshire | 63,078 | 102,118 |
| East Kent | 127,220 | 181,200 |
| East Lancashire | 111,287 | 274,323 |
| East London and The City | 79,220 | 389,490 |
| East Norfolk | 118,181 | 179,353 |
| East Riding | 121,030 | 176,150 |
| East Surrey | 59,530 | 189,667 |
| East Sussex, Brighton and Hove | 153,123 | 225,307 |

£000

| Health authority | 1999–2000 | 2000–01 |
|---|---|---|
| Enfield and Haringey | 108,321 | 168,681 |
| Gateshead and South Tyneside | 65,040 | 110,143 |
| Gloucestershire | 50,240 | 95,547 |
| Herefordshire | 47,040 | 60,101 |
| Hillingdon | 40,060 | 63,085 |
| Isle of Wight | 23,505 | 34,040 |
| Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster | 57,215 | 276,535 |
| Kingston and Richmond | 40,144 | 71,122 |
| Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham | 179,126 | 459,763 |
| Leeds | 155,667 | 241,740 |
| Leicestershire | 206,139 | 510,454 |
| Lincolnshire | 157,248 | 211,357 |
| Liverpool | 109,665 | 229,214 |
| Manchester | 109,595 | 248,170 |
| Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth | 151,393 | 505,675 |
| Morecambe Bay | 97,123 | 167,407 |
| Newcastle and North Tyneside | 54,521 | 460,578 |
| North and East Devon | 100,380 | 138,525 |
| North and Mid Hampshire | 146,119 | 434,284 |
| North Cheshire | 97,176 | 154,182 |
| North Cumbria | 65,025 | 93,127 |
| North Derbyshire | 52,203 | 83,333 |
| North Essex | 110,465 | 178,477 |
| North Nottinghamshire | 60,788 | 284,210 |
| North Staffordshire | 78,070 | 128,233 |
| North West Anglia | 160 | — |
| North West Lancashire | 84,098 | 211,612 |
| North Yorkshire | 80,664 | 500,937 |
| Northamptonshire | 127,402 | 177,452 |
| Northumberland | 32,200 | 61,220 |
| Nottingham | 113,147 | 113,272 |
| Oxfordshire | 92,895 | 343,000 |
| Portsmouth and South East Hampshire | 100,580 | 150,265 |
| Redbridge and Waltham Forest | 130,045 | 181,000 |
| Rotherham | 46,661 | 72,312 |
| Salford and Trafford | 81,241 | 178,235 |
| Sandwell | 98,545 | 136,173 |
| Sefton | 62,080 | 113,068 |
| Sheffield | 140,585 | 418,468 |
| Shropshire | 42,512 | 78,591 |
| Solihull | 20,490 | 38,079 |
| Somerset | 150,273 | 187,727 |
| South and West Devon | 50,639 | 104,564 |
| South Cheshire | 111,168 | 211,216 |
| South Derbyshire | 99,085 | 154,050 |
| South Essex | 237,014 | 298,425 |
| South Humber | 90,180 | 119,200 |
| South Lancashire | 94,115 | 162,547 |
| South Staffordshire | 139,115 | 185,271 |
| Southampton and South West Hampshire | 90,395 | 152,140 |
| St. Helen's and Knowsley | 103,090 | 254,098 |
| Stockport | 50,497 | 98,099 |
| Suffolk | 140,736 | 192,640 |
| Sunderland | 45,045 | 81,161 |
| Tees | 129,713 | 196,785 |
| Wakefield | 73,065 | 108,287 |
| Walsall | 85,982 | 114,793 |
| Warwickshire | 48,050 | 91,148 |
| West Hertfordshire | 65,035 | 109,080 |
| West Kent | 147,220 | 226,419 |
| West Pennine | 70,162 | 171,193 |
| West Surrey | 112,068 | 157,198 |
| West Sussex | 147,220 | 358,436 |
| Wigan and Bolton | 84,325 | 206,327 |
| Wiltshire | 65,175 | 112,515 |
| Wirral | 58,667 | 120,868 |
| Wolverhampton | 154,192 | 185,211 |
| Worcestershire | 113,085 | 154,154 |
| Total | 9,915,660 | 19,965,986 |

## Doctors (East Lancashire)

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many goiden hellos and golden handcuffs are being offered to doctors *(a)* practising and *(b)* encouraged to practice in (i) Pendle and (ii) the East Lancashire health authority area; and if he will make a statement. [159380]

**Mr. Denham:** East Lancashire health authority has received a number of expressions of interest in "golden hellos" and is awaiting further information about the scheme. The final details are subject to consultation with the British Medical Association and these will be circulated when confirmed.

## NHS Dentistry

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* England stopped doing NHS work during the last 12 months for which figures are available. [159378]

**Mr. Hutton:** Dentists may leave the general dental service (GDS) for a number of reasons including retirement and career breaks. Some departures are only temporary. During the year 2000, the figures for England will be inflated by the transfer of some dentists from the GDS to some personal dental service pilots.

The number of dentists leaving the GDS in the 12 months ending 31 December 2000 is shown in the table for Lancashire health authorities and England.

*Number of dentists who left the GDS during the year 2000*

| | Principals | Assistants | Vocational dental practitioners | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *(a) Lancashire health authorities* | | | | |
| South Lancashire | 9 | 1 | 2 | 12 |
| East Lancashire | 6 | 0 | 4 | 10 |
| North West Lancashire | 10 | 3 | 1 | 14 |
| Morecambe Bay | 9 | 1 | 1 | 11 |
| Total | 34 | 5 | 8 | 47 |
| *(b)* England | 859 | 179 | 149 | 1,187 |

## Nurses

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses there are in total in the UK per head of population working in the National Health Service, in private facilities and through registered nursing agencies. [159558]

**Mr. Denham:** The table shows the number (headcount) of nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff working in the National Health Service and the number of nursing staff working in private nursing homes, hospitals and clinics per 10,000 population in England.

Matters relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are for the devolved Administrations.

*NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): Nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and practice nurses by qualification and per 10,000 population in England as at 30 September 2000*

| | Headcount | Headcount per 10,000 population[1] |
|---|---|---|
| All staff | 460,010 | 92 |
| Qualified | 335,950 | 68 |
| *of which* | | |
| HCHS Nurses | 316,750 | 64 |
| Practice Nurses | 19,200 | 4 |
| Unqualified | 123,850 | 25 |
| Unknown | 210 | [2]— |

[1] England population = 49,752,900. Population figure is for 1999 which is the latest available information.
[2] Five or less and greater than zero.
*Note:*
Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
*Source:*
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census
Department of Health General Medical Service census
Office for National Statistics

*Number (headcount) of nursing staff working in private nursing homes, hospitals and clinics per 10,000 population in England as at 31 March—England, 1999–2000*

*Rate per 10,000 population*

| | Permanent staff | Temporary agency/bank staff |
|---|---|---|
| Qualified staff | 15.58 | 2.87 |
| Unqualified staff | 27.70 | 2.47 |

*Source:*
General mental nursing homes and private hospital and clinics form 1999–2000

*Number (whole-time equivalent) of nursing staff working in private nursing homes, hospitals and clinics per 10,000 population in England as at 31 March—England, 1999–2000*

*Rate per 10,000 population*

| | Permanent staff | Temporary agency/bank staff |
|---|---|---|
| Qualified staff | 12.14 | 1.17 |
| Unqualified staff | 22.16 | 1.16 |

*Source:*
General mental nursing homes and private hospital and clinics form 1999–2000

## Doctors

**Mr. Sayeed:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors there are per head of population working in the National Health Service and in private facilities. [159557]

**Mr. Denham:** The information about the number of National Health Service doctors is provided in the table. Information about doctors working in private facilities is not collected centrally.

*All NHS doctors—with general practitioners retainers per head of population in England—at 30 September 2000*

| | Number |
|---|---|
| All NHS doctors[1] | 97,440 |
| Population[2] | 49,992,925 |
| NHS doctors per head of population | 0.001948996 |
| NHS doctors per 100,000 population | 194.9 |

[1] Numbers are rounded to the nearest 10
[2] Population data are the 2000 projection, calculated using 1998 base projections
*Sources:*
Department of Health 2000 medical and dental work force census
Department of Health general and personal medical services statistics

## TB

**Dr. Tonge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that TB vaccine can be obtained from more than one manufacturer; and if he will make a statement. [159497]

**Yvette Cooper:** The BCG vaccines available today vary widely in many characteristics and therefore products from different manufacturers vary in their composition and side effect profile. The current United Kingdom supplier of BCG vaccine is the only manufacturer that has UK licensed product for our BCG programme at present. We are working hard to encourage other manufacturers able to meet our requirements to enter the UK market. Ultimately this will be a commercial decision taken by the manufacturers.

**Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many isolation wards for the treatment of tuberculosis opened in each region of the NHS in England and Wales in the past four years. [158606]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer sent 30 April 2001]:* Information on the number of isolation wards in hospitals is not collected centrally.

Different levels of isolation are required depending on the infectious (or suspected infectious) nature of a tuberculosis case. Each patient is considered on a case by case basis and therefore, the need for isolation facilities is made at local level.

The Department has published recommendations on isolation in two documents. One in June 1996—"Recommendations for the prevention and control of tuberculosis at local level"—and again in September 1998 in the document entitled "United Kingdom guidance on the prevention and control of transmission of HIV-related tuberculosis and Drug-resistant, including multiple drug-resistant tuberculosis".

## Care Homes

**Mr. Cotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* individual care homes and *(b)* care homes associations are taking legal action against (i) local authorities and (ii) the Government owing to the Government's fee structure for care homes. [159931]

**Mr. Hutton:** We are not aware of any such action being undertaken by individual care homes or care home associations.

We do not set or recommend the rates at which local authorities contract with independent residential care and nursing homes. This is a matter for local decision. We think it is important that councils are able to tailor contracts to specific local circumstances. We do, however, expect contractual arrangements to take account of the costs incurred by independent sector nursing and residential homes.

### Meningitis

**Mr. Drew:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the recent outbreaks of meningitis with particular reference to *(a)* source of the disease and *(b)* strategies being used to combat its spread. [159512]

**Yvette Cooper:** The Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) has received reports of 26 cases of group W135 meningococcal infection including nine deaths following this years pilgrimage to Mecca (Hajj). Some of those affected attended the Hajj, but two thirds are contacts of pilgrims in the community.

Following an outbreak of meningococcal W135 infection at last year's Hajj, on the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), the United Kingdom recommended that travellers to the Hajj this year be immunised with a quadrivalent meningococcal vaccine which covers this strain. This vaccine was launched by the manufacturers for general use in early January 2001. Information was sent to all immunisation co-ordinators on 26 January informing them of these immunisation requirements for pilgrims travelling to Saudi Arabia for Hajj. This information was also distributed to health professionals via a Chief Medical Officer letter.

The Department has worked with the Muslim Council of Britain to make this information widely available to the Muslim community. An A4 poster with information for the public has been distributed to Mosques and can be downloaded in Arabic, Bengali and Urdu versions from www.doh.gov.uk/traveladvice/hajj.htm.

The PHLS Meningococcal Forum considered the outbreak and decided that the best control measure for the outbreak was the prompt antibiotic treatment of suspected meningococcal disease by medical staff. On 12 April the Department wrote to all doctors reminding them of the signs and symptoms of meningococcal disease and alerting them to the possibility of cases in the Muslim community.

### Medicines Control Agency

**Mr. Tredinnick:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the Medicines Control Agency to submit written comments to the European Commission following discussions on the proposed Traditional Medicines Directive at the European Pharmaceutical Committee meeting on 5 April; and if he will arrange for those comments to be published. [159913]

**Yvette Cooper:** The United Kingdom comments on the second draft of the directive on traditional medicinal products were set out in a letter from the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) to the European Commission dated 30 April 2001. The response took account of points made by a range of herbal interest groups in their continuing dialogue with the MCA on this issue. Copies of the letter have been placed in the Library.

### Correspondence

**Mr. Malins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to letters from the hon. Member for Woking dated 8 January and 16 March, regarding Mr. J. Keddar, a constituent. [159843]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* A reply to the hon. Member's letter was sent on the 2 May 2001.

### Refrigerants

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health to what extent his Department's headquarters buildings use hydrofluorocarbons for *(a)* refrigeration and *(b)* air conditioning; what amounts of hydrofluorocarbons have been purchased in each year since 1995; and what plans he has to phase out the (i) purchase and (ii) use of hydrofluorocarbons. [160010]

**Yvette Cooper** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* One of the Department's London headquarters buildings uses hydrofluorocarbons as refrigerant in the air conditioning system. There has been no separate purchase of HFCs since 1995 (other than as an integral part of such plant). Our policy is to switch where possible to environmentally preferable substitutes where suitable alternatives exist.

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is regarding the purchase of *(a)* hydrocarbons and *(b)* other environmentally benign refrigerants to meet the refrigeration and other relevant energy needs of premises owned and leased by his Department; what guidance on this subject he has issued to NHS Trusts; and if he will make a statement. [160005]

**Yvette Cooper:** Our policy is to switch, where possible, from hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorobutane and sulphur hexafluoride to environmentally preferable substitutes and to ensure that we do not buy any products which contain chlorofluorocarbons, halons, carbon tetrachloride, 111trichloroethane or hydrochlorofluorocarbons where suitable alternatives exist.

Guidance on the use of chlorofluorocarbons and hydrochlorofluorocarbons has been issued previously to National Health Service trusts. This guidance is currently under review.

### Heart Transplant Centres

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the recommendations of his review of heart transplant centres. [160155]

**Mr. Denham:** Ministers have not received the findings of the study of the three transplant centres. An undertaking has been given that the proposals for the future of the National Cardiothoracic Transplant Service will be set out in a document for public discussion before a final decision on the site of the fourth centre is taken.

### Health Service Spending

**Mr. Cox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of growth in public spending in the present financial year on the provision of health services in England and Wales. [160268]

**Mr. Denham:** Net expenditure on the National Health Service in England is planned to reach £48.8 billion in 2001–02, representing a year on year increase of 9.3 per cent. (6.7 per cent. real terms).

Health expenditure for Wales is a matter for the devolved Assembly.

### Learning Disabilities (Shropshire)

**Mr. Paul Marsden:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Social Services Inspectorate expects to inspect Shropshire County Council Social Services' provision for people with learning disabilities; and if he will make a statement. [160362]

**Mr. Hutton:** The Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and audit commission joint review team reviewed Shropshire Social Services Directorate (SSD) earlier this year and their report is due for publication in June. The joint reviews are conducted by audit and the SSI and make a broad assessment about how SSDs deliver their services, and manage their resources. The joint review of Shropshire did consider the services with learning disabilities and the findings will become public on the publication of the report.

When the SSI inspects local council social services it examines their quality in more depth on significant issues than the Joint Review. Currently there are no plans in the SSI work programme to undertake a further examination of learning disabilities services in Shropshire.

### Infertility Treatment

**Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 583W, on surgical treatments, when he expects the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to produce guidance on the management of infertility to improve services and reduce the postcode lottery in this area of health care; and if he will make a statement. [160162]

**Yvette Cooper:** We expect that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) will produce guidance on the management of infertility by December 2002. Through this work, NICE will assist us in our determination to ensure that, in the future, couples get fairer and faster access to clinically cost-effective and appropriate infertility treatments.

## TRADE AND INDUSTRY

### Arms Brokering

12. **Mr. Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the proposals on arms brokering in the draft Export Control and Non-Proliferation Bill will apply to the activities of UK citizens operating wholly abroad. [159072]

**Mr. Byers:** The draft Bill contains a new general power to control trafficking and brokering carried out by persons in the UK or by UK persons abroad. The Government will use this power to control trafficking and brokering activities carried out by persons in the UK and by UK persons abroad, which involve the supply of arms to embargoed destinations, the supply of torture equipment or the supply of long-range missiles.

The Government have also proposed to introduce a general licensing requirement on trafficking and brokering in weapons, ammunition and other key military and para-military equipment, to any destination. We are now consulting on the possibility of applying this licensing requirement to the activities of UK persons carried out wholly abroad. A decision on this issue will be made in the light of the results of the consultation which closes on 24 May.

**Ms Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Government's proposals on arms brokering, set out in conjunction with the draft Export Control and Non-proliferation Bill, will apply to activities carried out by UK passport holders operating wholly abroad. [159707]

**Dr. Howells** *[holding answer 2 May 2001]:* The draft Export Control and Non-Proliferation Bill published on 29 March contains a new general power to control trafficking and brokering carried out by persons in the UK or by UK persons abroad. As explained in the introduction to the draft Bill, the Government will use this power to control trafficking and brokering activities carried out by persons in the UK, or by UK persons abroad, which involve the supply of arms to embargoed destinations, the supply of equipment designed primarily for torture or the supply of long-range missiles.

The Government have also proposed, following their review of the proposals contained in the 1998 White Paper on Strategic Export Controls, to introduce a general licensing requirement on trafficking and brokering in weapons, ammunition and other key military and para-military equipment, to any destination. The consultation document published with the draft Bill invites views on the possibility of applying this licensing requirement to the activities of UK persons carried out wholly abroad. A decision on this issue will be made in the light of the results of the consultation which closes on 24 May.

### Wind Energy

14. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to promote energy from offshore wind. [159074]

18. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to encourage the development of electricity from offshore windfarms. [159080]

**Mr. Hain:** I refer my hon. Friends to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) on 3 May 2001, *Official Report*, column 967.

### Foot and Mouth

15. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received regarding the impact of the foot and mouth outbreak on rural businesses. [159075]

**Ms Hewitt:** My Ministerial colleagues and I have to date received 320 pieces of correspondence about the foot and mouth outbreak, nearly all of them relating to the impact on rural businesses. Apart from that correspondence, I have had no specific representations from business but the issue has been raised with me in the context of other meetings.

I recently addressed members of the Federation of Small Businesses at their conference in Plymouth and met affected businesses there.

In addition, David Irwin, the Chief Executive of the Small Business Service, recently met a number of small businesses in Cumbria affected by the outbreak.

26. **Mr. Cotter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the role played by the Small Business Service during the current foot and mouth outbreak. [159089]

**Ms Hewitt:** The Small Business Service is playing an active role—directly—and via the Business Link network, in supporting small businesses during the crisis. SBS has set up a Rural Helpline and recently produced an information leaflet to ensure that small businesses are fully aware of the package of help available. Over 1.5 million leaflets are being distributed via, for example banks and rural post offices.

SBS has also made provision for Tourist and retail business suffering financial problems due to the effects of the disease. Such businesses are now eligible to apply for loans of up to £250,000 as a result of the SBS' extension to their Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme.

### Gas Prices

16. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on recent trends in gas prices. [159076]

**Mr. Hain:** The wholesale price of gas has followed the upward trend set in the spring of 2000 and is now trading at around 10p per therm more than a year ago.

This has had a direct effect on prices to all classes of consumer. Centrica, the main domestic supplier, increased their retail price of gas by 4.7 per cent. on 1 April and other domestic suppliers have also raised prices. Industrial and commercial prices have risen on average by around 50 per cent. in the year to 1 March 2001. However they are still substantially lower than in other EU member states.

### National Working Council Directive

17. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the proposed National Working Council directive. [159078]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** Neither the Government nor the European Commission are proposing to bring forward a National Working Council directive.

### High-tech Businesses (Milton Keynes)

19. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action his Department is taking to create the environment for growing high-tech businesses in Milton Keynes. [159082]

**Ms Hewitt:** We are doing a great deal. The Department supports high-tech businesses through a range of initiatives and programmes.

### Universal Bank

20. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on progress with the universal bank. [159083]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** Discussions with the banks on Universal Banking Services are at an advanced stage. I hope that they will be resolved shortly.

### UK/Romania Aerospace Co-operation

21. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the aerospace industry regarding developing industrial co-operation with Romania. [159084]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** During the recent visit to the UK of President Iliescu of Romania, my hon. Friend the Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs attended a luncheon to encourage the development of closer co-operation between the UK and Romanian aerospace industries. At this event the Society of British Aerospace Companies (SBAC) and the Association of Romanian Aerospace Companies (OPIAR) signed a Memorandum Of Understanding to reinforce the commitment to promoting and developing the relationship between our respective industries.

My Department is keen to further develop our existing industrial relationship with Romania and will continue to fully support progress in this area.

### Takeover Panel

22. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investigations the takeover panel is undertaking. [159085]

**Dr. Howells:** This is a matter for the Takeover Panel.

### Sub-post Offices

23. **Mr. Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the Post Office regarding financing security improvements at sub-post offices. [159086]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** Security and security improvements for the post office network are an operational matter for the Post Office. I understand from the Post Office that, in addition to the general programme of maintenance and improvement of existing security measures, they operate a risk based capital investment security programme under which £24 million has been invested over the last four years. I am also informed by the Post Office that they have earmarked over £30 million for investment in security measures over the next four years, based on a risk model which will deploy a wider range of security measures over the network.

### House-sitters (Minimum Wage)

24. **Mr. St. Aubyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his policy on the application of the minimum wage to house-sitters. [159087]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** The minimum wage covers workers and if a house-sitter meets the definition of a worker then he or she is covered. There is flexibility in the regulations to cater for the unusual arrangements involved in house-sitting and my officials are meeting the agencies to discuss this. A case involving house-sitters is

due to be heard by an employment tribunal later this month. It is not appropriate, therefore, for the Government to comment further.

### Mortgages

25. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will ask the Office of Fair Trading to take steps to abolish the Rule of 78 for redemption of all existing mortgages. [159088]

**Dr. Howells:** Under the Consumer Credit (Rebate on Early Settlement) Regulations 1983, lenders can use the Rule of 78 to calculate early redemption terms for some types of loan. The Government agree that these regulations do not always give a fair and equitable outcome for consumers, particularly in respect of high-value, long-term loans such as mortgages.

We plan to bring forward proposals to replace the current settlement formula with one that will give a fairer outcome. We also want to improve the information consumers get about redemption terms, so they can take this into account when they decide which loan is the best deal.

### Business Regulation

27. **Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies he has commissioned into the regulatory costs of *(a)* British business, *(b)* US business and *(c)* business in other EU member states. [159090]

**Ms Hewitt:** We carefully assess the impact of all new regulatory proposals on British business. Since August 1998, all legislation likely to have an impact on business has been subject to a Regulatory Impact Assessment. RIAs are published and are available from the Libraries of the House.

We have not commissioned studies on the regulatory costs in other countries. However international organisations and companies do regularly carry out comparative surveys.

### Electricity

28. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment his Department has made of the United Kingdom's ability to meet its electricity needs in each of the next five years. [159091]

**Mr. Hain:** At present, generating capacity available to the UK exceeds peak demand by around 25 per cent. This margin is widely considered to be more than adequate to meet its electricity needs.

The generating margin in future will continue to be determined by supply and demand conditions in the wholesale electricity market, as generators make commercial decisions to open new plant or close existing plant.

It is estimated that plant currently under construction, together with projects that have already received all the necessary consents, would be sufficient to meet both rising demand and some retirement of existing capacity and still maintain a margin of around 20 per cent. by 2005.

### Balance of Trade

29. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on trends in the balance of trade over the last 12 months. [159092]

**Mr. Caborn:** The balance of trade was in deficit in the three months to February 2001 by £4.9 billion, compared to £4.3 billion for the same period a year earlier. Over the same period, exports rose by 11.9 per cent.

### Bank Holidays

30. **Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to increase the number of bank holidays. [159093]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** The Government have no current plans to increase the number of bank holidays. Any requests for the creation of additional bank holidays need to be measured against the disadvantages, notably the cost and disruption to industry that is inevitably involved.

### Cammell Laird

31. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the future of Cammell Laird. [159094]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** I recognise that the present uncertain situation must be very worrying for the employees of Cammell Laird and their families, as well as for the company's suppliers and others. I am hopeful that the Receiver will be able to find a buyer for the business or yards so as to preserve as much employment as possible. The Government are in close touch with the Receiver to assist him in finding a buyer.

### Minimum Wage

**Mr. Nigel Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people are benefiting from the national minimum wage in *(a)* the Edinburgh area and *(b)* the UK. [159057]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** When the national minimum wage was introduced in April 1999, some 140,000 jobs in Scotland were paying below the minimum rate. The corresponding figure for the United Kingdom was 1.5 million. There are no equivalent data available for individual towns and cities. The LPC has found that the substantial majority of those entitled to the minimum wage are now getting it.

### Mobility Aids

**Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the protection offered to *(a)* disabled and *(b)* elderly people purchasing and leasing mobility aids. [159073]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** Elderly and disabled people are protected by current consumer protection legislation in the same way as other consumers.

The Government remain committed to a strategy offering consumers, and particularly vulnerable groups, the protection they need to ensure they receive fair treatment and the information necessary to help them make informed choices.

### British Timken

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to protect apprentices and trainees affected by British Timken's proposed factory closure in Northampton. [159815]

**Mr. Alan Johnson** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* I will ask the Response Group to ensure that it covers this issue as part of its work.

**Mr. Boswell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to investigate the impact of the closure of British Timken's factory in Northampton. [159817]

**Mr. Alan Johnson** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The Government will do all we can to help those affected by the closure of the British Timken factory in Northampton. A Response Group has been set up to co-ordinate support activity. This Group will be chaired by the East Midlands Development Agency, working in partnership with the Government Office for the East Midlands, the Employment Service, the company and others.

**Mr. Tony Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking in respect of the closure of the British Timken roller bearing plant in Duston, Northampton. [160452]

**Ms Keeble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking in response to the announcement by British Timken of the closure of its Northampton plant. [160359]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** The Government will do all we can to help those affected by the closure of the British Timken factory in Northampton. A Response Group has been set up to co-ordinate support activity. This Group will be chaired by the East Midlands Development Agency, working in partnership with the Government Office East Midlands, the Employment Service, the company and other local partners.

### Mobile Phone Licences

**Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions he has had with high-tech companies involved in the mobile phone industry on the issue of auctions for licences. [159172]

**Ms Hewitt:** My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has had no recent discussions with high-tech companies involved in the mobile phone industry on the issue of spectrum licences for mobile communications that have been awarded by auction. There have been a number of discussions over a matter of months between the Radiocommunications Agency and various telecommunications companies, about auctions for spectrum licences for broadband and public fixed wireless access.

### Post Office Closures

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post office closures there were in the north-west in the years from 1997 to date. [160094]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** I understand from the Post Office that the information is not held in the form requested.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total cost was of employing special advisers in his Department from 1997 to date. [160043]

**Mr. Byers** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 1 May 2001, *Official Report*, columns 607–08W.

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many special advisers worked in his Department from 1997 to date. [160023]

**Mr. Byers** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Since 3 May 1997, no more than two paid special advisers have been in post at any one time, except for a three month period between May and July 1998 when a third special adviser was appointed to assist the then President of the Board of Trade. In addition, Lord Hollick acted as unpaid special adviser from May 1997 to October 1998.

### Manufacturing

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people were employed in manufacturing industry in the north-west in each of the years from 1997 to date. [160082]

**Mr. Alan Johnson:** Estimates of employee jobs in manufacturing are based on the results of employer surveys. Figures for the years the hon. Gentleman has requested are:

| *Year* | |
|---|---|
| 1997 | 534,000 |
| 1998 | 532,000 |
| 1999 | 520,000 |
| 2000 | 505,000 |

### Dounreay

**Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many radioactive particles have been *(a)* detected and *(b)* retrieved within (i) a 10 kilometre radius and (ii) a two kilometre radius of Dounreay, broken down in each case by those on (1) the seabed and (2) the foreshore. [160209]

**Mr. Hain:** Surveys have located 360 particles on the seabed up to a radius of 2 km from the Dounreay site, and 268 have been removed. A further three particles have been detected beyond that distance, up to a maximum of 2.3 km radius, and were all removed.

On the foreshore, 221 particles have been detected to date, of which 15 were found on the neighbouring Sandside beach. Only those recovered from Sandside beach were more than 2 km radius from Dounreay. All the particles found on the foreshore and Sandside beach have been retrieved. Full details of the discovery of radioactive particles found on Sandside beach are available from UKAEA's website www.ukaea.org.uk.

**Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information he has received about the route of radioactive particles from Dounreay to the Caithness shore; and if he will make a statement. [160211]

**Mr. Hain:** I understand that UKAEA has undertaken a comprehensive programme of research, at a cost of £1 million per year since 1997, into the routes by which particles may have reached the wider environment. The results have been reported to my officials and to the independent Dounreay Particle Advisory Group. Progress reports are available publicly from UKAEA and I will arrange for them to be made available to the Library of the House. This research has concluded that there is very strong circumstantial evidence that particles were discharged through the now redundant old low level liquid effluent system and other site drains in the 1960s and perhaps into the 1970s. There is no evidence of particles leaving the site after this time.

**Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has received of the number of radioactive particles thought still to be on the seabed within *(a)* a 10-kilometre radius and *(b)* a two-kilometre radius of Dounreay. [160210]

**Mr. Hain:** I have received no estimate of the number of particles thought to be on the seabed within the vicinity of Dounreay. The programme of offshore surveys and research UKAEA has under way is designed to help address this question. This programme has been under way since 1997, and is expected to conclude in 2002. It is not possible to estimate the number of particles on the seabed until the survey programme is complete. I have asked UKAEA to ensure that the results are made publicly available as soon as possible thereafter as part of the public consultation exercise.

**Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce programmes to effect the speedier detection and complete removal of radioactive particles on the foreshore and seabed within a 10-kilometre radius of Dounreay; and if he will make a statement. [160212]

**Mr. Hain:** The independent regulator, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA), specifies a schedule of local beaches to be monitored, the frequency of surveying and the criteria for the detection of particles. In the case of Sandside Bay the schedule reflects a request in 1998 from the then Secretary of State for Scotland that there is sufficient monitoring to ensure that any particles finding their way to the beach are promptly detected and removed. In March 2001 SEPA published the interim report of the independent Dounreay Particles Advisory Group (DPAG). It concluded that for all practical purposes the criteria set by SEPA in terms of detection limits are being met by the current monitoring programme. Surveys of the seabed continue and the results will be brought to DPAG in due course. Further details of DPAG's work are available on the SEPA website www.sepa.org.uk.

**Mr. Maclennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has received of the time-scale for rendering the Caithness shore free from irradiated particles from Dounreay; and if he will make a statement. [160213]

**Mr. Hain:** UKAEA's published programme of future work includes a public consultation on the options for dealing with particles. This is expected to take place during 2003 and will set timescales for a future action plan. In the meantime a monitoring programme agreed with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency is being carried out, and any particles detected are promptly removed. The public are made aware of particle finds. Full information on particles found on Sandside Beach is available on UKAEA's website www.ukaea.org.uk.

### Packaging and Production Waste

**Mr. Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from the labelling industry as to what constitutes packaging waste and production waste. [159081]

**Ms Hewitt:** The Department regularly receives representations from industry on the issue of the Producer Responsibility Obligations (Packaging Waste) Regulations 1997 (as amended) for which my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment has the responsibility. However, I am not aware of any representations from this particular sector on the definition of packaging waste contained within the Regulations.

### Regulatory and Welfare Costs

**Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the impact of increased regulatory and welfare costs on the profitability of United Kingdom businesses since May 1997. [159238]

**Ms Hewitt:** Assessment of the impact of all regulations affecting business introduced since May 1997 is available from the Libraries of the House. For the period from May 1997 to August 1998, compliance cost assessments contain this information. From August 1998, Regulatory Impact Assessments have been completed in respect of each regulation or legislation likely to have an impact on business.

### House Insurance

**Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will take action to prevent the linkage of house insurance with mortgage grants. [160143]

**Dr. Howells:** Compulsory tying-in of mortgages with insurance was one of the practices criticised at DTI's mortgage summit in 1999. Since then, the number of lenders who require their customers to buy tied insurance has decreased and we estimate that less than 5 per cent. of current mortgage products feature such tie-ins. Consumers should now find it much easier to find a mortgage deal that does not prevent them from shopping around for insurance.

### Corus

**Mr. MacShane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will make an announcement on the measures the Government will take to support those individuals and communities affected by the restructuring and redundancies planned by Corus. [160592]

**Mr. Byers:** Corus has today confirmed its intention to proceed with the job cuts it announced earlier this year. The Government's priority must now be to help the individuals and communities affected. I am therefore announcing a package of measures to assist those who face losing their jobs and plans to promote economic regeneration and job creation in the areas affected. A

similar announcement is being made in the National Assembly of Wales. In total the two packages amount to around £135 million.

To help individuals to deal with the immediate financial difficulties created by redundancy, the Government intend to introduce a scheme to provide aid for workers affected by restructuring in the steel industry. The Government intend to apply to the Commission for funding available under Article 56 of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) Treaty. Article 56 provides for social aid to assist workers who have lost their jobs as a result of restructuring in companies which produce products covered by the ECSC Treaty. We intend to provide a lump sum payment of around £2,500 to eligible individuals, of which the UK Government will contribute half. Those eligible will be workers involved in the production of products covered by the ECSC Treaty. We will also make similar provisions for steelworkers covered by the special framework of the Treaty of Rome for whom Article 56 makes no provision. The scheme will apply from 1 January 2000 and it is anticipated that 12,000 workers in England, Scotland and Wales will benefit from this at a total cost of about £32 million. The ECSC Treaty expires in July 2002 and the scheme will apply to eligible workers up to that date.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is announcing the extension of the new Job Transition Service to all sites affected by the Corus redundancies. The Government will spend over £5 million in England and Wales to ensure that everyone who is affected by these redundancies has access to an equal level of support in getting a new job.

The Employment Service has already opened jobshops at Redcar, Scunthorpe and in South Yorkshire. In Wales there are jobshops in Llanwern, Ebbw Vale, Bryngwyn and Shotton. ES are liaising with Corus to assess whether additional jobshops or other facilities are needed as a result of this announcement.

The new Job Transition Service (JTS), which is already being piloted in South Yorkshire as a result of last summer's announcements by Corus, will now be extended to all the affected sites across the UK. The service offers a new approach to assisting those affected by redundancy to find new jobs.

Through the JTS, audits of the local economies will be carried out where major redundancies are taking place, and the Employment Service will work with local employers who are looking for new staff to identify their recruitment needs and analyse their skill requirements. Companies such as Nissan in the north-east have already been identified as potentially offering opportunities for Corus workers.

At the same time, the JTS will provide anybody affected either directly or indirectly by these redundancies with personal advice on careers, financial matters and general skills development. More specifically, it will direct people to suitable vacancies, identify the skills they need to develop, and discuss their training needs. Training will be funded, and—where appropriate—customised programmes will be developed.

In order to help develop this new service and ensure it is tailored fully to the needs of individuals, the DfEE and the Employment Service are working in partnership with the unions and with Corus itself on a similar package of support and training developed by the unions to be provided before workers leave the company. A joint bid to the European Social Fund for £2.5 million for England will be made in the next few weeks, with a similar bid being made in Wales.

An Employment Credit for the over-50s going back to work will also be available to individuals affected.

The Government are committed to helping the communities affected, and so we are backing projects crucial for economic regeneration, to ensure the long-term prosperity of all these areas.

In the north-east, Dr. John Bridge, the chairman of ONE North East, the Regional Development Agency in the area, has been asked to establish a small group drawn from the key regional partners, including the existing Tees Valley Partnership, to build on the work undertaken by the task group established in response to the previous round of Corus job cuts. The group will pave the way for the establishment of an Urban Regeneration Company involving the five local authorities in the Tees Valley, to take this work forward over the longer term.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is also announcing a package of measures to help regenerate the Tees Valley. This includes: a £20 million public sector project in Stockton to develop a Durham University campus and business park and to make environmental improvements; and support for the next stage of Middlehaven, a regeneration project in the Middlesbrough Docks. The Government will also fund feasibility studies into a new Tees crossing and a light rapid transport (LRT) scheme in the Tees Valley and is encouraging local authorities on Teesside to work up plans to improve transport infrastructure in the East Middlesbrough transport corridor. This is in addition to the £5 million scheme to improve access to Teesside airport which was announced on 28 March. Finally, as announced on Monday 30 April, we will be given the West Central Hartlepool New Deal for Communities scheme £53.79 million over the next 10 years.

The Government are working with the Tees Valley Partnership, local industries and further education bodies to consider new research and development facilities. In addition, British Trade International has been asked to work with John Bridge to identify potential sites for inward investors. The Department of Trade and Industry will also be providing £500,000 for the establishment of broadband and digital communications networks in the area.

The redundancies will also affect Scunthorpe and its surrounding area. Following discussions with the local council and the Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber, Scunthorpe will become a Tier 3 area for the purposes of the Enterprise Grant Scheme. To do this, we are redrawing the Assisted Areas map to make this support available. It will enable grants to be provided to small- and medium-sized companies moving into the area or increasing their investment there. We are also increasing the budget available for Enterprise Grants in the area by £0.5 million. This will act as a major incentive to the establishment and growth of small- and medium-sized companies in and around Scunthorpe.

I am also asking the North Lincolnshire Steel Task Force, which was set up following the previous round of Corus closures, to advise on additional measures which could be taken in the area. These will take forward the actions set out in the Metal Related Industries Impact study, funded by DTI, and is looking both at Scunthorpe and South Yorkshire. The first report of the study is already with the Task Force, and we are asking them to identify immediate action points from the report and to assess what more needs to be done as a result of this round of cuts.

As in Tees Valley, we are announcing up to £500,000 funding to be allocated to the RDA to help with the establishment of broadband infrastructure and related education and training in the area. This will encourage the establishment and growth of nw companies and the evolution of existing ones.

The South Yorkshire Jobs Steel Task Force will also extend the programme of regeneration in Sheffield and Rotherham to ensure that the projects recently announced for new inward investment provide employment opportunities for those affected by the steel redundancies. The Task Force is also developing a longer term action plan based on a recent impact study on metals related industries in South Yorkshire. This identified the scope for developing growth in these industries over the next five years.

This morning in the National Assembly of Wales, a package of measures was also announced. The First Minister made the following statement to the Welsh Assembly:

"Mr. Presiding Officer, following the final meeting with the steel trade unions earlier this morning, there is now little doubt that Corus is going to press ahead with the job losses announced on 1 February. Since then, the Trade Unions and Corus have been in discussion to see if less drastic restructuring options where possible. The unions put forward constructive alternative proposals for each plant but these have been turned down by the Company.

We have worked almost on a daily basis with the unions to press the Company to come to its senses and to think long term. I want to take this opportunity to commend the unions on their unstinting efforts to find a solution to this human tragedy. They come out of this with enormous credit.

Sadly, this whole episode highlights the short-term thinking of Corus management and their disregard of the communities that will be devastated by their job cuts and closures.

Attention must now focus on offering practical support to the individuals and communities involved. Today I am announcing a £66 million programme of action designed to help the individuals and communities most affected.

In a few moments time details of a regeneration package on a comparable scale for steel workers and their communities in England—will be given in the House of Commons by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. The Secretary of State has worked closely with us on this whole issue and will then be briefing Welsh MP's from steel areas as my Ministers and I will be doing. The Parliamentary Under Secretary of Wales will be covering the UK Government employment and other packages.

The top priority must be to help people deal with the immediate financial problems caused by redundancy. The UK Government will therefore introduce a scheme under Article 56 of the European Coal and Steel Community Treaty to provide aid for those worker affected under this round of job cuts and those in previous rounds back to 1 January 2000.

This is a modern version of ISERBS scheme with which steel AMs and unions will be familiar from twenty years ago and involves a number of elements including lump sums for each worker of £2,500. This has been a complex negotiation involving the unions and ourselves as well as the Secretary of State for Wale, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Chancellor. The estimated figure for that part of the scheme which applies to Wales is £16 million. It is subject to technical approval from Europe and that approval would include refunding of almost half the gross cost.

Allied to this, we understand that the unions and Corus will be jointly applying for ESF funds to support a training package for workers facing redundancy. The overall cost of this package is likely to be around £5.7 million in Wales and Corus have agreed to make a significant financial contribution to this.

£7 million of the £66 million programme for Wales, is for employment and training measures funded by the Assembly. This will pay for extra employment and training provision for workers made redundant by Corus and its contractors plus their families and those in the supply chain.

Many of those who will lose their jobs have considerable skills and talents which will allow them to find good, new jobs without too much difficulty. Others will need top quality advice and guidance and first class training if they are to move on successfully to new employers.

We have agreed with the UK Government that the UK-wide Employment Service will increase its job information work in Wales and offer a wide range of services tailored to the requirements of Corus workers. This service will include vigorous marketing to employers and to sectors such as aerospace, electronics and automotive—which are particularly strong in Wales. In areas such as Deeside, special efforts will be made to work closely with major employers such as Airbus to match Corus workers to new job opportunities arising. We have also had approaches form other employers, including those in the gas and construction industries.

The Employment Service has set up on-site Job Shops at each of the Corus plants affected. Here people can make use of the whole range of employment services. Benefits Agency staff will also be on hand to offer advice.

We are also giving an extra £250,000 to Careers Companies so that they can offer specialist support for those who need it.

£5.75 million additional money is being allocated to ELWa to provide training tailored to the precise requirements of the individuals concerned. This strand of the programme of action will include:

Immediate access to training in place of the normal qualifying period of 6 months unemployment.

Help for those who are in a position to train while under notice of redundancy.

Short up-skilling courses linked to the current demand.

Customised training to help people move from the steel industry to jobs in other sectors.

Incentives for some employers to recruit Corus workers.

Training to help with business start-ups; and

Special help to remove barriers to work such as travelling, the cost of child care and such like.

We are also looking at how existing programmes such as Modern Apprenticeships and the Modern Skills Diploma for Adults could play their part. We are talking to the Wales TUC and the Steel Trade Unions to see how help could be provided through the Wales Union Learning Fund and other measures. Up to £1 million will be made available for these measures.

In carrying out its work, the Employment Service will do all it can to balance the needs of those who are already out of work with those of people who are likely to become unemployed in the near future.

I also welcome the positive response by the Secretary of State for Education and Employment to our representations to extend the Heads of the Valleys and Caerphilly Employment Zone to cover Torfaen. This will make additional help available for long term unemployed adults in an area close to the Corus plants affected.

The regeneration measures in our programme for action have been developed following detailed discussions with the local councils most closely involved and the WDA. We will invest £43 million in these measures over a period of years.

These measures, including the training and development package, will be funded from the Assembly's own resources. The same situation applies across the UK. This is not ideal but today our priority must be the future of the steel workers affected. There will be other opportunities to debate the broader issues that this highlights.

The programme announced does constitute real, additional resourcing and must not be confused with spending committed to other programmes. The Finance Minister will be looking again at the total package in the budget round later this year, in particular the allocation for 2003–04.

European Structural Funds will also have a role to play in helping those cast aside by Corus and in the regeneration of their communities. For example, we are helping to create a Credit Union for Blaenau Gwent with support from ERDF money. In doing so, we will not be re-directing funding at the expense of any other part of the Objective 1 area. Similar considerations apply to other Assembly programmes such as Communities First—though some priorities may be re-ordered.

The first element of the regeneration programme will be a £2 million business support package to help suppliers who will be badly hit by the Corus closures to find alternative customers. This will also be used to help workers who are considering setting up their own businesses.

The WDA will also be making a special effort to highlight the inward investment opportunities presented by the early availability of a high quality workforce in the areas most affected by the Corus job losses.

If we take in turn the 3 areas of Wales affected; Deeside in North Wales; the communities taking the brunt of the losses in South West Wales at Gorseinon and Port Talbot; and finally that part of South East Wales most affected by the rundown of the plants at Ebbw Vale and Llanwern—Gwent more or less:

First the position at Deeside where the job losses at Shotton will be a bitter blow to the area. Fortunately, owing to the buoyancy of the local economy, Corus workers will find a wide range of alternative job opportunities open to them compared to their colleagues in the other parts of Wales, with Ebbw Vale at the other end of the scale.

The focus on Deeside will be on training and employment and business support. It makes sense to concentrate on enabling the maximum number of people to take advantage of the 1,700 new jobs created by Airbus at Broughton with the financial backing of £19.5 million from the Assembly. Those 1,700 jobs are already understood to be supplemented by a further 200 jobs from the recent UPS order for A300 Airbus planes. Furthermore another 150 civilian aerospace jobs have been announced at DARA Sealand. If more needs to be done, then the case for doing so will be given priority when we review the spending plans for 2002–03 onwards.

At Gorseinon, the local economy has suffered a double blow with the recent announcement of the closure of the Valeo plant. Also, Port Talbot has had its share of the pain with planned redundancies. We are therefore providing some £4 million extra funding for the WDA's South West Division to tackle the regeneration needs of the area. This is in addition to the higher level of investment already planned by the Agency in projects such as the Baglan Energy Park. There are immediate priorities that we shall discuss with the WDA and the local authority.

Turning to the major job losses in prospect at Ebbw Vale and Llanwern amounting to 2,300 direct Corus job losses plus 1,000 or so contractors. This area of South East Wales—Blaenau Gwent in particular—will need significant help. We will therefore invest nearly £32 million of the £50 million available for the programme of action in this area. The lion's share of this is earmarked for tackling the huge problems created by the complete closure of the Ebbw Vale works.

We will work with our partners to ensure that we get the very best return from it in terms of new, quality jobs and stronger, more diversified local economies. Improvements to North South transport links between Ebbw Vale and the M4 corridor are bound to figure large in any planning for the future. In addition, we need to see what can be done to improve the quality of life in the towns and communities most affected by the job losses.

It would be a huge mistake to invest simply in a series of unconnected projects. We must get the strategic framework right. I have therefore decided that we should agree the accelerated development of a comprehensive economic, transport and special framework for that part of South East Wales most affected by the closures and job losses.

I want the Assembly to work with its partners to complete this exercise by the late autumn. The framework will need to make clear what improvements are required in the area's economic and transport infrastructure. It will therefore help us to prioritise the projects so as to achieve maximum impact. Later today, the Deputy First Minister will be discussing the details of this exercise with the Executive Group of the All Wales Steel Task Force.

We will also be consulting on the most appropriate structure to assist with this regeneration. Newport county borough council, for example, has suggested the creation of an Urban Regeneration Company. This would not be another quango. It would be a partnership in which the local authority would play a leading role. A URC would be well placed to take advantage of the wide-ranging package of incentives for regeneration announced in the Chancellor's recent budget. However, we will look to see whether other structures could allow us to capitalise on incentives of this kind, in Newport and elsewhere.

We have asked the Council, together with other agencies, to come back to us as soon as possible on their preferred structure for the redevelopment of the areas most affected by the job losses at Llanwern. Some £200,000 will be made available immediately in start-up costs should there be support for URC. I do not exclude the possibility of a similar solution in other areas, but the URC does appear particularly appropriate to the circumstances of Newport.

£5 million will remain unallocated within the package to allow us to move ahead with priority proposals which emerge from the consultation process.

As regards the future use of redundant land and buildings, the company has committed itself not only to co-operate on drawing up redevelopment plans but also to meeting its obligations on site remediation and its environmental obligations so as to maximise the potential for land regeneration and therefore the benefit to local communities.

The Assembly administration is working on the clear principle that the public sector should not pick up the tab for the cost of on site reclamation.

Potentially, the various Corus sites offer enormous economic opportunities for the areas involved. Unlocking these opportunities will take a huge amount of work, time and resources. Short-term job creation will need to take place off-site—on new or existing sits in the steel closure areas.

Corus has created the problems we are dealing with today. It must also be part of the solution. I am therefore pleased that the Company will use UK Steel Enterprise, its wholly owned job creation and regeneration subsidiary—the successor to British Steel Enterprise, to assist with the creation of new opportunities for its displaced employees.

A Team Wales approach is needed in which the private sector is also bound to play a major role. We will therefore project manage the programme in the following way:

The existing All Wales Steel Task Force—which I and the Deputy First Minister chair—will provide the policy leadership,

drawing on the advice of the partner organisations involved, including local government, the unions, the agencies and—indeed—Corus itself.

The Deputy First Minister will Chair the Executive Group of the Task Force. This will meet regularly with senior officers from the various organisations involved to manage and co-ordinate the programme across Wales. This Group will meet later today.

Existing local arrangements will be built on to manage the process locally. We have enough groups and task forces already without adding to them. But the WDA has agreed to appoint Graham Moore—a senior director—to work with the administration and its partners to help manage this process across Wales and ensure we get the best return from the resources announced today.

Mr. Presiding Officer, we have worked tirelessly with the unions and our partners in Wales and in Whitehall to convince the Company that it should scrap the job cuts, or if not scrap them, then at the very least defer, suspend or reduce them. These arguments have fallen on deaf ears. Our earlier commitment to do everything in our power to deal effectively with the consequences of the job losses for the individuals and communities involved now comes into play. This programme demonstrates that we have the will to honour it.

By working with our partners across Wales I am totally confident that the communities involved will ultimately come out of this is a better position than they are now on the basis of new skills, new jobs and a better quality of life. We will report progress on the programme at regular intervals to the Assembly and the relevant committees".

In all the areas affected, the Government will work with the Regional Development Agencies, British Trade International, the Small Business Service and local partners to support business start-ups and small firm growth and to attract inward investment.

## CABINET OFFICE

### Devolution

**Mr. Watts:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what further guidance has been offered to Government Departments on issues relating to devolution. [160485]

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** I am today placing in the Library a copy of Devolution Guidance Note 8 offering advice to Government departments on Post-Devolution Legislation affecting Northern Ireland. This guidance note will also be made available on the Cabinet Office Internet site at: http://www.cabinet—office.gov.uk/constitution/devolution/guidance/ dgn. index. htm

### Government Car and Despatch Agency

**Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what performance targets she has set for the Government Car and Despatch Agency for 2001–02. [160484]

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** I have set the Government Car and Despatch Agency the following key performance targets for the year.

*Financial:*

To break even on an accruals basis.

*Efficiency:*

To increase income per pound of direct labour cost by 2 per cent.

*Quality of Service:*

To improve customer satisfaction by 2 per cent;

To reduce customer dissatisfaction.

*Environmental:*

To convert to environmentally friendly fuels 75 per cent. of the cars purchased in the year and capable of such conversion.

### Official Information

**Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what work is being undertaken to enable citizens and businesses to quickly find official information on the internet and elsewhere. [160487]

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** This Government are fully aware of the need of citizens and businesses quickly to find official information on the internet, and elsewhere. It should be possible to find information without knowing any technical terms, and without knowing which Department or agency is responsible for it.

The new e-Government Metadata Framework outlines our policy on metadata. It explains how we will use an internationally recognised standard, the Dublin Core, as the basis for our own system of tagging all information resources. This will make them easier to find and easier to manage, and make life easier for our citizens.

The Metadata Framework is a natural addition to the e-Government Interoperability Framework, which I launched on 11 October last year. As with the Interoperability Framework, adherence to the Metadata Framework is mandated across the public sector.

### Central Office of Information

**Mr. Reed:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what performance targets she has set the Central Office of Information for 2001–02. [160486]

**Mr. Ian McCartney:** I have set the Central Office of Information the following targets for the year.

*Financial*

1. To achieve break even on an accruals basis.

*Efficiency*

2. To achieve a unit cost reduction of 2 per cent.

*Quality of Service*

3. To obtain the following results form customer satisfaction feedback:

(a) an overall customer satisfaction score of at least 8.25 (out of 10);

(b) at least 96 per cent. of returns to score six or more;

(c) a 3 per cent. increase in the response rate on the result for 2000–01.

### Departmental Publications

**Tony Wright:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will take steps to ensure that all unnumbered papers and command papers are made available in an information paper series in a common format and to proper archival standards and sizes. [158211]

**Marjorie Mowlam:** Fresh guidance has recently been issued to departments about the arrangements for publication of Command Papers and Agency and other Public Bodies Annual Reports, which it is hoped will lead to a reduction in the number of papers presented to the House not in the numbered Command series. The majority

of papers which are not published in either the existing House of Commons Papers or Command series are copies of departmental minutes and other documents which are presented in response to the requirement on the Government to advise the House of financial commitments they have made or which they may have to make. There are currently no plans to include these documents in a separate information series.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Stakeholder Pensions

**Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if self-employed persons on low incomes are eligible for stakeholder pensions; and if he will make a statement. [158897]

**Mr. Rooker:** Yes. Stakeholder pensions are aimed primarily at employed and self-employed people on moderate and higher earnings who do not have access to an occupational pension scheme. But there is nothing to prevent people from lower income groups contributing to a stakeholder pension, depending on their particular circumstances.

### New Deal 50 Plus

**Mr. Efford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if employment credit is assessed as income for the purpose of calculating Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for a person setting up their own business under the New Deal 50 plus programme; and if he will make a statement; [158457]

(2) what circumstances employment credit is not treated as income for the purpose of calculating Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for people on the New Deal 50 plus. [158456]

**Angela Eagle:** The New Deal 50 plus provides advice and assistance to help older people become self-supporting either through securing a job or becoming self-employed. In its first year of national operation, New Deal 50 plus helped over 33,000 people move from benefits into work, nearly 4,000 of whom became self-employed.

The New Deal 50 plus Employment Credit is an in-work income supplement designed to help people make the transition from benefits into work. So far as self-employed people are concerned, this credit cannot be offset against losses or liabilities.

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are income related benefits and as such, all forms of income, including earnings and the New Deal 50 plus Employment Credit are considered when calculating entitlement. When the Employment Credit ceases, entitlement to these benefits may be reviewed.

People generally will be better off by moving into work or becoming self-employed and receiving the Employment Credit. In some cases, the Employment Credit will increase an individual's income to a level which means they no longer need Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit.

The Employment Credit is treated as income in calculating entitlement to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit under all circumstances.

### Incapacity Benefit

**Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security in relation to applications for Incapacity Benefit from residents of Milton Keynes, how many *(a)* new applications and *(b)* renewals were made for Incapacity Benefit; how many applicants were required to take a medical examination; and how many of those medical examinations were undertaken at (i) Luton, (ii) Aylesbury, (iii) Euston and (iv) the person's home in each year since 1997. [158208]

**Mr. Bayley:** The information is in the tables.

*Incapacity Benefit claims received in the Milton Keynes Benefits Agency office area*

| | *Thousand* |
|---|---|
| January to December 1997 | 2,943 |
| January to December 1998 | 2,627 |
| January to December 1999 | 2,521 |
| January to December 2000 | 2,489 |

*Notes:*

1. New claims data are from a 100 per cent. count. A new claim may not result in an award of benefit, for example where a claim is withdrawn.
2. There are no renewal claims as Incapacity Benefit awards are indefinite. Some claims may link back to earlier periods of entitlement but it is not possible to identify these separately.

Initial entitlement to Incapacity Benefit requires the claimant to provide medical evidence of their incapacity (normally a general practitioner's certificate). Subsequently, incapacity is assessed under the Personal Capability Assessment but not all claimants are required to attend a medical examination.

*Number of Incapacity Benefit claimants from Milton Keynes who were assessed at Medical Examination Centres (MECS)*

| | *Aylesbury MEC* | *Euston MEC* | *Luton MEC* |
|---|---|---|---|
| October 1998 to December 1998 | 304 | 0 | 7 |
| January 1999 to December 1999 | 817 | 88 | 222 |
| January 2000 to December 2000 | 817 | 2 | 37 |

*Notes:*

1. Figures are from data supplied by Medical Services and include first and subsequent referrals. Information for individual MECs is not available prior to October 1998.
2. Figures relate to Incapacity Benefit claimants living in the area covered by Milton Keynes Benefits Agency office.
3. Information on the number of examinations carried out at claimants' homes is not available.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 25 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 269W, how many Incapacity Benefit claims were terminated because the claimant *(a)* died, *(b)* reached pensionable age, *(c)* started employment and *(d)* left the caseload for another reason. [160231]

**Mr. Bayley:** The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

*Incapacity Benefit terminations*

| *April 1998 to March 1999* | *Number of terminations* |
|---|---|
| Death of claimant | 36,000 |
| Award of retirement pension | 172,000 |
| Other reason | 591,000 |

*Notes:*
1. Figures are taken from a 1 per cent. sample of claimants.
2. We do not routinely ask people why they have stopped claiming Incapacity Benefit.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the average claim period of an Incapacity Benefit claimant is. [160203]

**Mr. Bayley:** I refer the hon. Gentleman to the written answer I gave on 25 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 269W.

## Funeral Costs

**Mr. Waterson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to revise the rules to help with funeral costs. [158837]

**Angela Eagle:** Help with funeral costs is available to those on the lowest incomes through the Social Fund. We recently announced that with effect from 7 October 2001 we are amending the Social Fund Funeral Payment regulations to ensure that claimants' relatives who are in receipt of help under the National Asylum Support Service are treated in the same way as those receiving qualifying benefits.

In addition, the capital of those people who qualify for a Social Fund Funeral Payment for a death occurring on or after 7 October 2001 will no longer be taken into account. This changes the current provision whereby those who qualify have their award reduced by the amount of capital they have over £500 (£1,000 if the claimant or partner is aged 60 or over).

## Far East Prisoners of War

**Mrs. Lait:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many former Japanese internees have been refused compensation payments on the grounds of nationality; and in how many cases inquiries are on-going; [158839]

(2) how many former Japanese internees who were regarded as British before 1981 who held British UK-based passports until their deaths have been refused compensation on the grounds of non-British nationality. [158840]

**Mr. Bayley:** The administration of the ex-gratia scheme for former captives of the Japanese is a matter for the acting Chief Executive of the War Pensions Agency, Alan Burnham. He will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Alan Burnham to Mrs. Lait, dated 3 May 2001:*

I am writing in response to your recent Parliamentary Questions concerning ex-gratia payments to former civilian internees of the Japanese during the Second World War.

Up to 17.4.01 a total of 25,414 applications have been received for the ex-gratia payment and payments have been made to a total of 19,373 applicants. 484 applicants have been advised that their application has been rejected as they do not meet the entitlement conditions.

Our records indicate that to date no applications have been rejected on grounds of non-British nationality. There are approximately 3600 cases where we are having to undertake further enquiries to confirm eligibility. The issues to be resolved in these cases vary and may include confirming details of internment, determining nationality or establishing bank details to facilitate payment.

**Mr. Hurst:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many prisoners held captive by the Japanese during world war two are eligible for the Government's compensation payment; how many have been awarded payment; and at what cost. [159364]

**Mr. Bayley:** The administration of the ex-gratia compensation scheme for former captives of the Japanese is a matter for the acting Chief Executive of the War Pensions Agency, Alan Burnham. He will write to my hon. Friend.

*Letter from Alan Burnham to Mr. Alan Hurst, dated 3 May 2001:*

I am writing in response to your Parliamentary Question concerning ex-gratia payments payable to former prisoners of war of the Japanese.

We know the total number of UK service personnel who were captured in the Far East during the Second World War but there is no precise way to determine how many survive today. Accordingly it is difficult to provide a precise estimate of the numbers of people eligible for a payment.

As at 30 April 2001 a total of 19,717 ex-gratia payments had been made at a total cost of £197,170,000. Of these, 7635 were made to former prisoners of war, 10671 to the surviving spouses of former prisoners of war, 989 to former civilian internees and 422 to the surviving spouses of former civilian internees.

Please do not hesitate to contact me again if you require any further information.

## Home Visits

**Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost of home visits in each year since 1996. [159422]

**Angela Eagle** *[holding answer 27 April 2001]:* The information that is available is in the table.

| | *Cost (£)* |
|---|---|
| 1998–99 | 5,796,222 |
| 1999–2000 | 53,364,807 |
| 2000–01 | 50,819,559 |

[1] Costs are for full years except 2000–01, which is up to February 2001

## Benefit Fraud

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what evidence he has collated on the impact of the Targeting Fraud advertising campaign on the number of people reported for benefit fraud; and if he will make a statement. [159698]

**Mr. Rooker** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* After years of neglect, we have put in place an effective strategy for tackling benefit fraud. As part of this, the Targeting Fraud advertising campaign is intended to change public attitudes in the longer-term by positively reinforcing honest behaviour, creating a climate of intolerance to

benefit fraud and undermining its social acceptability. It is not intended specifically to increase the number of people reported for benefit fraud.

An evaluation of the national Targeting Fraud campaign is being conducted and will be published in due course. A report on the pilot stage of the campaign showed that it was successful in changing public attitudes towards benefit fraud.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to use the information collected through the current census to help reduce the incidence of benefit fraud. [159702]

**Mr. Rooker** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* None. Confidentiality of the census is key to its success. The census produces only statistics and people can be assured that no information is released which allows identification of individuals or households.

### Attendance Allowance

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many complaints have been made about the administration of Attendance Allowance in each month since January 1997. [159703]

**Mr. Bayley:** The administration of Attendance Allowance is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

*Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. David Willetts, dated 1 May 2001:*

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many complaints have been made about the administration of Attendance Allowance in each month since January 1997.

Information is not available prior to April 1998. From April 1998, the number of complaints made about Attendance Allowance by letter, telephone or in person is in the table.

| | *1998–99* | *1999–2000* | *2000–01* |
|---|---|---|---|
| April | 47 | 96 | 327 |
| May | 54 | 146 | 362 |
| June | 70 | 159 | 398 |
| July | 71 | 175 | 420 |
| August | 104 | 209 | 342 |
| September | 105 | 185 | 280 |
| October | 90 | 199 | 278 |
| November | 59 | 188 | 251 |
| December | 51 | 117 | 178 |
| January | 90 | 301 | 220 |
| February | 109 | 294 | 188 |
| March | 99 | 437 | 260 |

Whilst the above figures may include complaints about the administration of the Attendance Allowance, it should be noted that they also include general expressions of disagreement with the amount of benefit awarded. Disputes of this nature must be pursued through the decision making and appeals process.

You will be aware from my reply of 10 April 2001 to your previous Parliamentary Question about Disability Living Allowance complaints that they were subject to a steady increase arising from a temporary backlog of work following the introduction of new decision making and appeals procedures. Attendance Allowance claims and subsequent complaints were similarly adversely affected but, as with Disability Living Allowance, the backlog of work has now been cleared and the overall level of complaints has reduced since August 2000.

I hope this is helpful.

### Refrigerants

**Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what his Department's policy is regarding the purchase of *(a)* hydrocarbons and *(b)* other environmentally benign refrigerants to meet the refrigeration and other relevant energy needs of buildings and premises owned and leased by his Department; what guidance he has issued on this subject to regional and local departmental offices; and if he will make a statement; [160015]

(2) to what extent his Department's headquarters buildings use hydrofluorocarbons for *(a)* refrigeration and *(b)* air conditioning; what amounts of hydrofluorocarbons have been purchased in each year since 1995; and what plans he has to phase out the (i) purchase and (ii) use of hydrofluorocarbons; [160013]

(3) which London headquarters building or premises owned and leased by his Department use *(a)* chlorofluorocarbons and *(b)* hydrochlorofluorocarbons for refrigeration and other relevant energy needs; if he will publish details of such use and the reasons for it; and what guidance he has issued on this subject to regional and local DSS offices. [160021]

**Mr. Bayley** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* The Department's Improvement Programme for Greening Operations requires the Department and its Estates Partners to specify against products with a high global warming potential.

We and our Estates Partners are committed to replacing any such system at the end of its useful life, or before, in accordance with the necessary protocols relevant at the time, and the general phasing out of all ozone depleting substances. Replacement systems will use the new, more environmentally friendly products.

It is not possible to provide details for the amounts of hydrofluorocarbons purchased by, or on behalf of the Department since 1995.

### Special Advisers

**Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many special advisers worked in his Department from 1997 to date; [160025]

(2) what the total cost was of employing special advisers in his Department from 1997 to date. [160041]

**Mr. Rooker** *[holding answer 1 May 2001]:* Since May 1997 no more than two special advisers have been in post at any one time.

For the total cost of employing special advisers I refer the hon. Member to the written answer from my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office, 1 May 2001, *Official Report,* column 607W.

### Minimum Income Guarantee

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much will be spent on the Minimum Income Guarantee in each of the financial years between 2000–01 and 2003–04. [160156]

**Mr. Rooker:** Expenditure on the Minimum Income Guarantee, in Great Britain, is estimated at £4 billion in 2000–01 rising to £4.5 billion in 2001–02, £4.6 billion in 2002–03 and £4.8 billion in 2003–04.

Notes:

1. These figures are based on the estimated outturn expenditure for 2000–01 and forecast expenditure plans for 2001–02, 2002–03 and 2003–04.

2. Figures are rounded to the nearest £0.1 billion.

### Pensions

**Mr. Field:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 23 April 2001, *Official Report*, column 152W, on occupational pensions, how many individuals' pensions are required to be paid to at least the value of the guaranteed minimum pension in respect of service between 1978 and 1997 disaggregated by those who are *(a)* of working age and *(b)* above working age. [160164]

**Mr. Rooker:** Information is not available in the format requested. The latest survey of occupational pension schemes produced by the Government Actuary's Department does, however, indicate that in 1995 there were around 8.3 million active members of those schemes that are required to pay pensions at least to the value of the Guaranteed Minimum Pension.

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the Government will publish the reports from the Pension Provision Group on pension provision for the self-employed and the impact on pensions of changes in the labour market. [160223]

**Mr. Rooker:** The Pension Provision Group are currently reviewing both reports in the light of the Government's Pension Credit proposals. It is anticipated that both reports will be ready for publication later in the year.

### Lone Parents

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many lone parents on Income Support have a youngest child aged *(a)* between five and eight, *(b)* between nine and 12 and *(c)* between 13 and 15 years; [160236]

(2) when personal adviser meetings for lone parents whose youngest child is below the age of five years will be introduced; [160233]

(3) how many personal advisers for the New Deal for Lone Parents there have been in each month since the scheme began; and how many additional advisers have been employed to deal with the start of compulsory interviews; [160235]

(4) what sanctions will be imposed upon lone parents who fail to attend the compulsory personal adviser meetings. [160234]

**Mr. Bayley:** The full national New Deal for Lone Parents programme has been in operation since October 1998, after being piloted from July 1997. By the end of February 2001, 86,161 lone parents have obtained jobs through the programme and a further 24,104 have entered education and training. From April 2001 further support is being provided for lone parents taking up training or part-time jobs, including help with child care costs.

To ensure that as many lone parents as possible are aware of the help and support available to help them move into work, compulsory personal adviser meetings have been introduced from 30 April for lone parents claiming Income Support whose youngest child is of school age. Personal adviser meetings will be extended to lone parents with a youngest child of below five years old in some areas from October 2001 and then nationally from April 2002.

Personal adviser meetings are a condition of claiming Income Support. If a lone parent fails, without good cause, to participate in a personal adviser meeting when making a claim to Income Support, then the claim will not be processed. If a lone parent making a claim has received payment of Income Support because the meeting was deferred, but then fails to participate without good cause, Income Support will be withdrawn. If a lone parent is already receiving Income Support and fails without good cause to participate in the meeting, their Income Support will be reduced by 20 per cent. of the amount applicable for a single person aged not less than 25 years old. We do not expect to have to apply these sanctions very often. Personal Advisers will make several attempts to ensure that lone parents fully understand how important these meetings are before taking any action that will affect benefits.

Personal advisers are an essential element of the New Deal for Lone Parents service. Figures are not kept in the format requested but, since the national launch of the New Deal for Lone Parents, resources have been allocated for around 800 full-time staff. To support the delivery of personal adviser meetings, resources will be allocated for a further 450 staff by the end of 2001–02.

Personal Adviser meetings will be gradually rolled out to lone parents currently claiming Income Support over the next few years. The latest Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry (November 2000) estimates that there are 77,800 lone parents with a youngest child of 13 to 15 years old claiming Income Support. There are a further 150,500 lone parents claiming Income Support with a youngest child of nine to 12 years old and 214,100 with a youngest child of five to eight years old[1].

Since May 1997 the number of lone parents dependent on Income Support has fallen by over 100,000. The choices we are offering lone parents are building on this success and helping more of them move from benefit dependence into work.

[1] The estimates are based on a sample of cases, and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred. Lone Parents are defined as single claimants who have dependants but do not receive the disability or pensioner premium.

### Football Championships (Benefit Loss)

**Mr. Willetts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many of the cases of people travelling to the Euro 2000 Football Championships investigated by the Benefits Agency have led to loss of benefits. [160238]

**Mr. Rooker:** Fifty-two cases were investigated by the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service following referrals from the Belgian Authorities. As a result of these investigations, four claims have been withdrawn and two overpayments identified.

## LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

### Legal Aid

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much of the allocated civil aid budget for personal injury cases has been spent on expanding the legal advice and representation budget for other areas of civil legal aid since the coming into force of the Access to Justice Act 1999. [R] [157436]

**Mr. Lock** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Under the Legal Aid Act 1988 and the Access to Justice Act 1999, expenditure is essentially demand led. With the exception of the new, controlled budget for general civil legal help, funds are not specifically allocated to particular areas of law. However, it has been possible to increase the amount available for advice and assistance since implementation of the Access to Justice Act; in 2000–01 the amount spent on civil advice and assistance (now legal help) totalled £233 million, an increase of £28 million on the previous year. This increase would not have been possible if most personal injury cases remained within the scope of public funding.

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much civil legal aid was allocated for personal injury cases in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 1998–99. [R] [157435]

**Mr. Lock** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* No funds from the civil legal aid budget were specifically allocated for personal injury cases. However, in terms of expenditure, the latest year for which information is available is 1997–98 (changes to the Legal Services Commission's computer systems mean that information is not yet available for 1998–99 onwards). In that year, the cost of these cases was £307.7 million (gross) of which £242.1 million was recovered by way of contributions received or costs and damages received on behalf of the assisted persons. In addition it is estimated that the cost to the Legal Services Commission of administering these cases was £2.9 million.

**Mr. Stinchcombe:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much was spent on *(a)* criminal and *(b)* civil legal aid in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000 and (iii) 2000–01; and what the projected figure is for 2001–02. [R] [157429]

**Mr. Lock** *[holding answer 10 April 2001]:* Gross expenditure, together with the total amounts recovered by way of contributions from assisted persons and from costs and damages received, were, or are expected to be, as set out in the table:

*£ million*

| | *Gross* | | *Recovered* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *Criminal* | *Civil* | *Criminal* | *Civil* |
| 1998–99 | 784 | 1,275 | 5 | 430 |
| 1999–2000 | 783 | 1,190 | 9 | 414 |
| 2000–01[1] | 878 | 1,218 | 7 | 424 |
| 2001–02[2] | 974 | 1,034 | 7 | 371 |

[1] Estimated
[2] Forecast

These figures differ from the amounts voted by Parliament which are net of amounts recovered.

### Magistrates (Ethnic Minorities)

**Mr. Hendrick:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps the Lord Chancellor is taking to encourage people from ethnic minority communities to become magistrates. [160591]

**Jane Kennedy:** Schemes to allow people from the ethnic communities to shadow magistrates in order to encourage a wider understanding of their role will be established in June with Operation Black Vote. My noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor has asked officials to begin work to establish the schemes and to look at ways his local Advisory Committees can make better contacts with particular community groups to encourage applications. Operation Black Vote will begin the task of recruiting people to take part in the shadowing schemes during May. There will initially be seven pilot areas, two in London and one each in Birmingham, Bradford, Bristol, Cardiff and Oldham.

## PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

### People's Peerages

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Council how many applicants for a people's peerage are being recommended for appointment; and if she will make a statement. [159381]

**Mrs. Beckett:** Fifteen.

**Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Council, pursuant to her answer of 16 March 2001, *Official Report*, column 764W, on people's peerages, what estimate she has made of the cost of providing the answer sought. [159421]

**Mrs. Beckett:** That it was likely to be in excess of the guidelines figure beyond which an answer stands to be refused. My hon. Friend will also recall from the second part of the answer that to release the information requested would have been in breach of the Appointments Commission's undertakings to treat all personal information in individual applications in strict confidence.